EXPERT PHOTOGRAPHY

What Makes a Good Photograph? Quotes From Famous Photographers

Quotes from famous photographers regarding what makes a good photograph litter the internet. We get to see the rules, ideas and concepts the photographers we hold in high regard follow. Just remember. Patience and practise, with some talent too, create the winning recipe.

What Makes a Good Photograph?

Competitions care more about the content of an image. Not whether it follows photography rules. Just look at some of this year's winners.

The subject matter is either something we are not used to (think Salgado's work of the mine). Or it's a moment in time captured through special techniques. The world's ten most iconic images look at subjects of historical value. From war to civilisations' achievements. Some people say that an image with a sharp focus, a correct balance of light and that follows compositional rules is a good image. It can be.

Without interest, it also sounds beyond boring. And you're using generic guidelines like everyone else. This means your image gets lost in the tide. Sharp focus isn't necessary to win awards, competitions and Pulitzer prizes. Stories created by using emotional or interesting content stand out. And for this to happen, there needs to be a relationship between you and the scene or subject.

The idea comes down to personal attribution. I know what I like, and what I think is a good photograph. You will have a completely different idea. I may look at the technical skills and the fleeting connection. But you may look at composition and flow.

There is no formula for what makes a good image. Different people like different images. Who the image is for and what it portrays can be the tipping point. A portrait of a person that shows them as they are can be a good photograph, even if it's not what the subject may want to see.

10 Quotes From Famous Photographers

Let's turn to the experts now, and see what they have to say.

10. Robert Capa

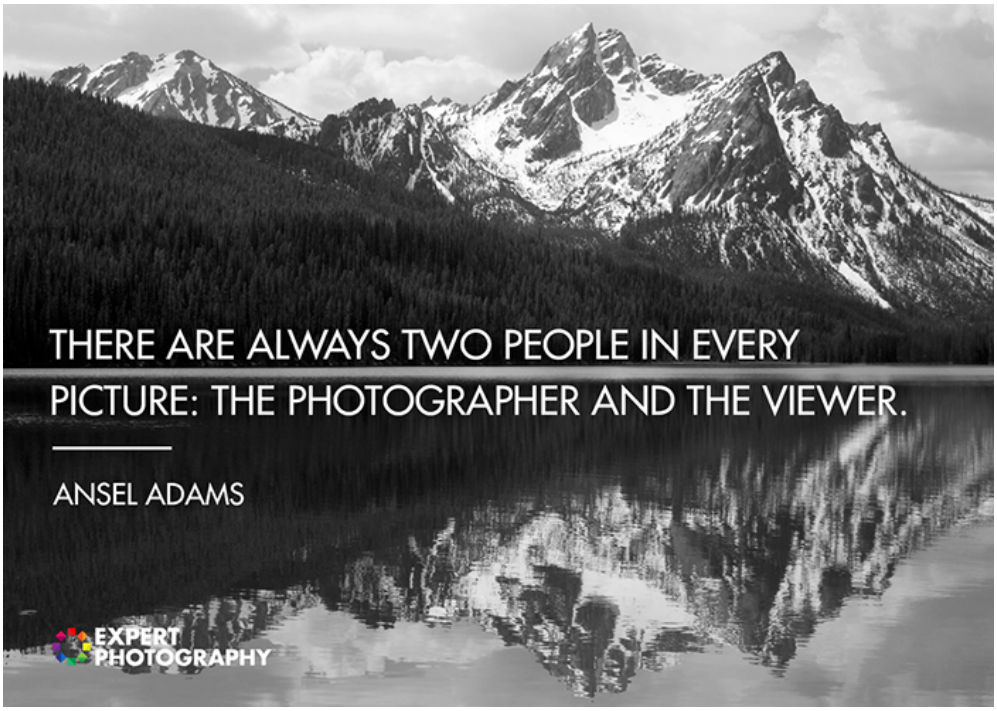
> "If your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough" – Robert Capa

Capa is arguably the world's most famous photojournalist. His quote screams that you are too far away. You need to get closer, both physically and mentally.
Create a connection with your subject, even if it is confrontational.

9. Ansel Adams

> "There are always two people in every picture: the photographer and the viewer" – Ansel Adams

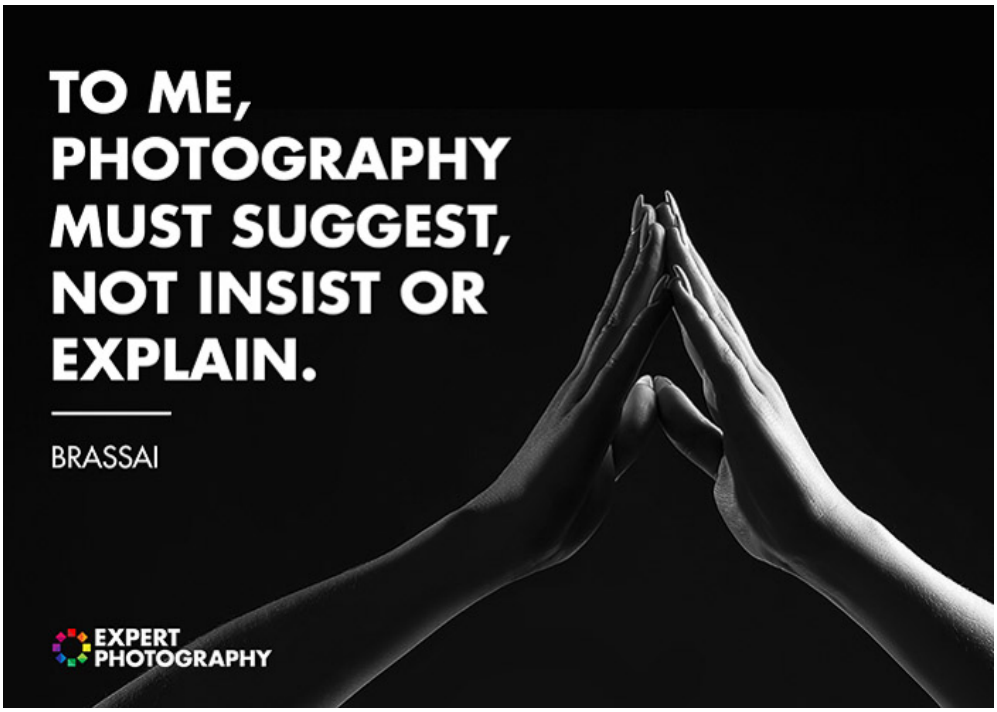
Adams was the photographer behind the epic black and white landscapes of America's national parks. His quote is about what he sees and captures. And about the interpretation from the viewer who glances at the final image.



8. Brassaï

> "*To me, photography must suggest, not insist or explain*" – Brassaï

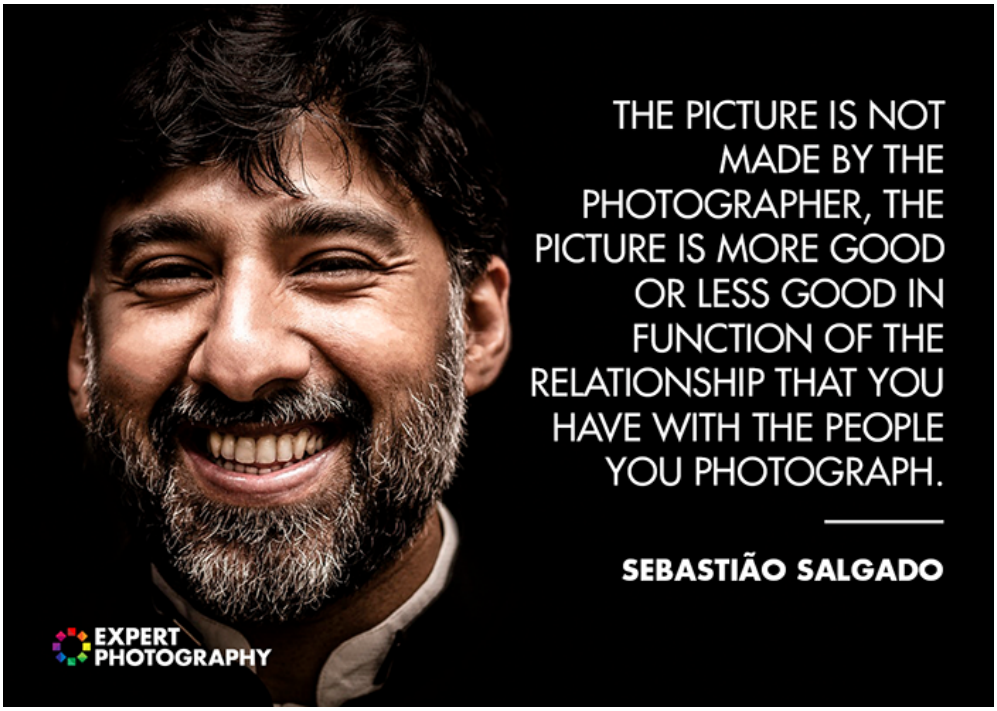
Brassaï is the Hungarian/French street photographer we all know and love. Here, he explains that we can't give out an exact explanation of the image, just the impression.
Viewers bring their own vision when understanding your image.



7. Sebastião Salgado

> "*The picture is not made by the photographer, the picture is more good or less good in function of the relationship that you have with the people you photograph*" —— Sebastião Salgado

Salgado, a Brazilian documentary photographer, emphasises relationships.
It's the relationship between the photographer and the subject that makes an image. Not composition or other factors.



6. Henri Cartier-Bresson

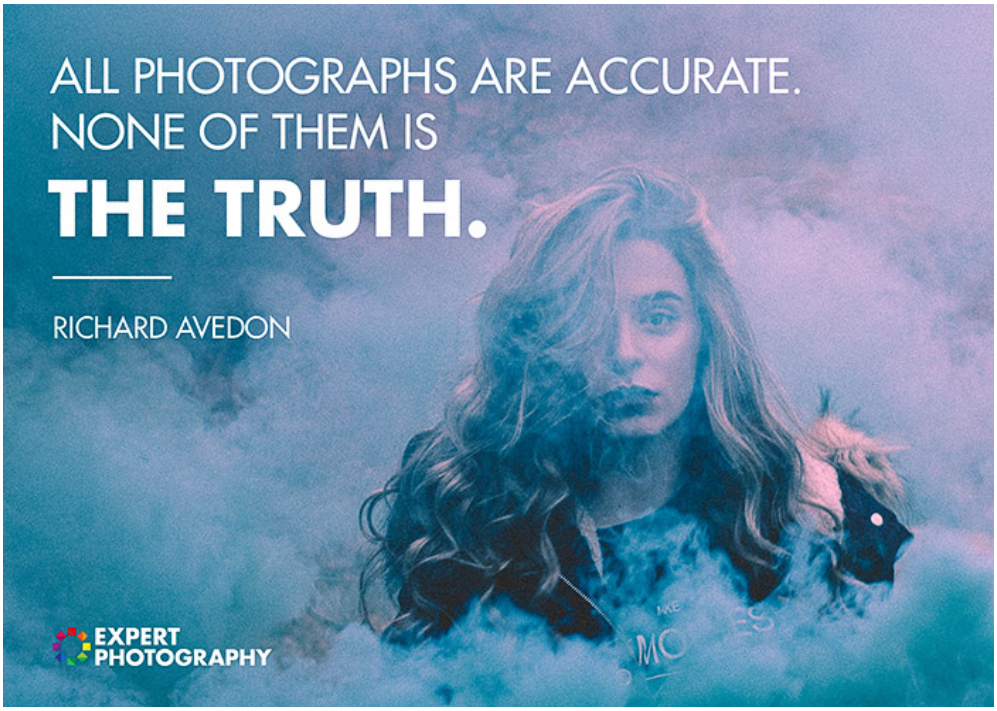
> "*Your first 10,000 photographs are your worst*" —— Henri Cartier-Bresson

Henri gives us a moment of truth. He states that we need to pass this specific number to start creating something good.
The number is figurative, but still, hard work, time and practise make a good photo.

5. Richard Avedon

> "*All photographs are accurate. None of them is the truth*" – Richard Avedon

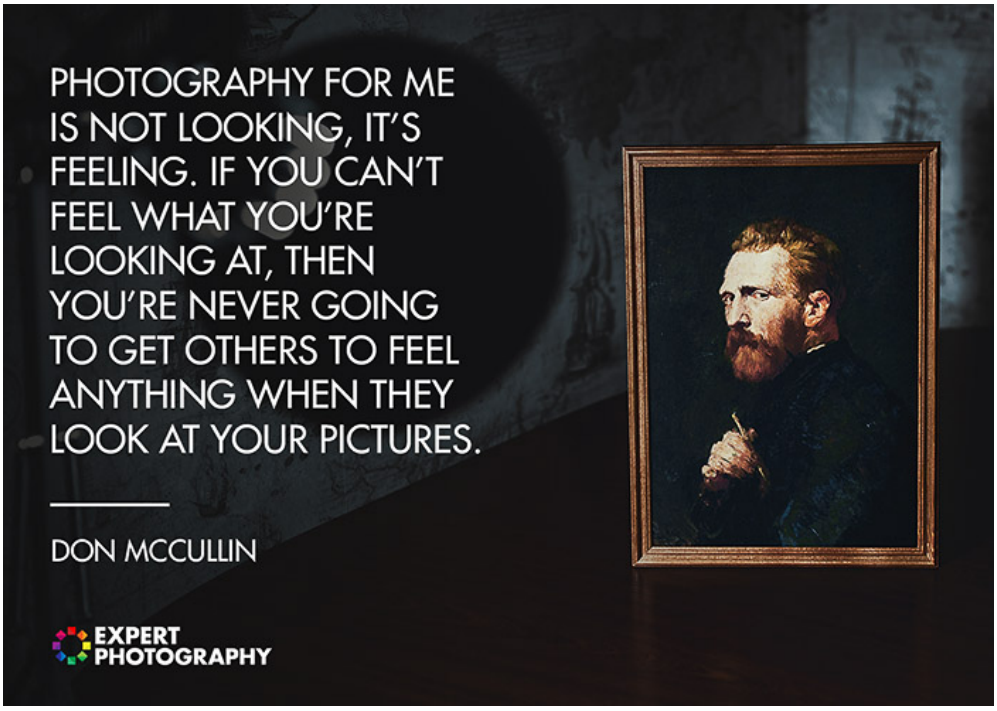
No image tells the truth. The complete truth, anyway. Think about it. An image taken by you fits your own interpretation, at any given time, from any given angle.
It shows a slice of truth to you, whereas the viewers will see it differently. Knowing this can help you capture a scene in a different light, showing you a slew of possibilities.



4. Don McCullin

> "*Photography for me is not looking, it's feeling. If you can't feel what you're looking at, then you're never going to get others to feel anything when they look at your pictures*" – Don McCullin

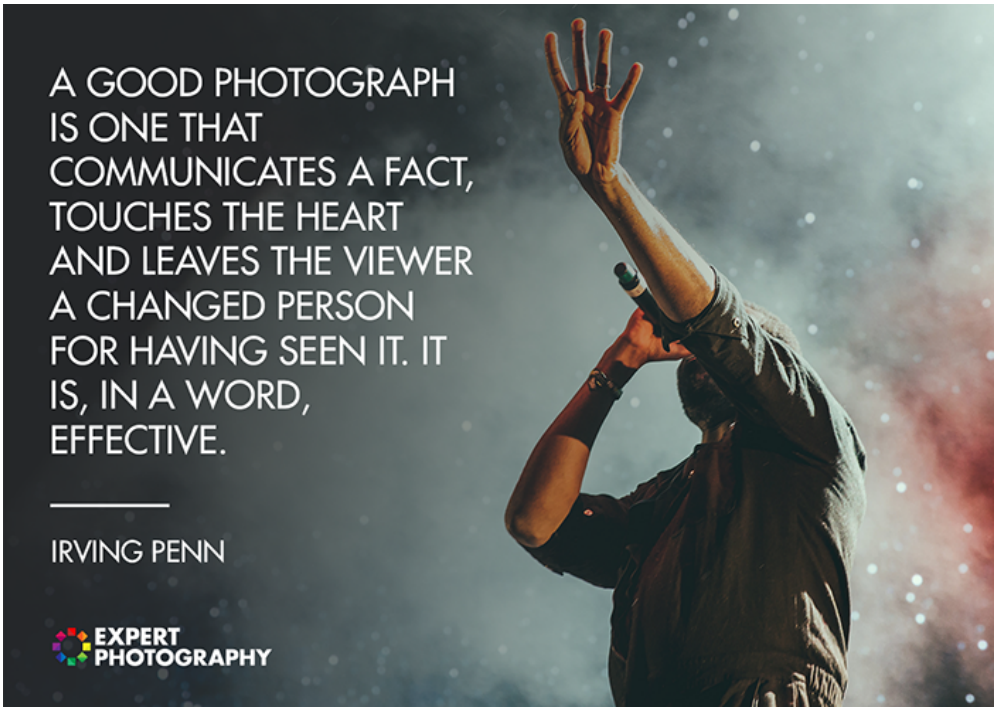
If you don't feel anything, you can't expect others to. By using feeling, you create images that come from a deeper idea of yourself.
You put more of yourself in the image, which makes it important and stronger. It also helps with the storytelling, an important aspect of good photography.



3. Irving Penn

> "*A good photograph is one that communicates a fact, touches the heart and leaves the viewer a changed person for having seen it. It is, in a word, effective*" – Irving Penn

Capturing images that communicate to the viewers will be considered a good photograph. The viewer might be able to relate through personal experience.
It could even challenge their perspective. Either way, the image sticks in their head. Good doesn't mean perfect, happy or even nice.

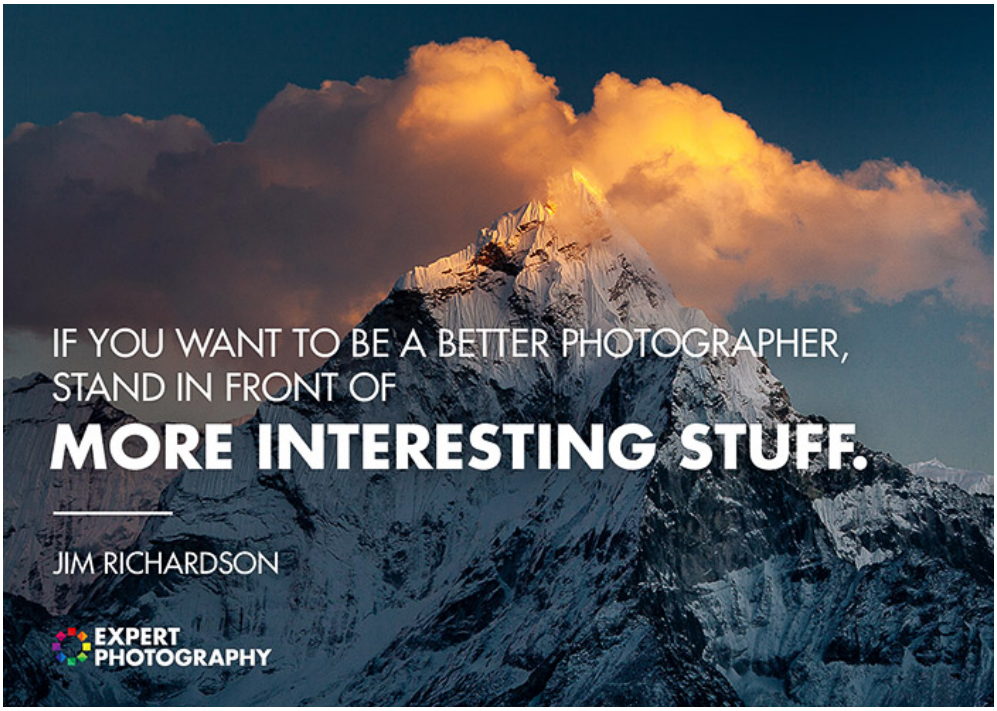


2. Alfred Eisenstaedt

"*It is more important to click with people than to click the shutter*" – Alfred Eisenstaedt

The people in front of your camera are more important than the actual image. The relationship you have is what creates the posture, the expression – the portrait.
Just firing off shutter releases says nothing, and you'll get nothing from it.

1. Jim Richardson

"*If you want to be a better photographer, stand in front of more interesting stuff*" – Jim Richardson

The most basic and truthful quote comes from Jim Richardson. He is saying your scene or setting control your image. On a basic level, it is a simple truth.
And it puts the power of creating a good photograph in your hands. After all, you are the one who decides what counts as interesting.