


How to Photograph Fireworks

VALERIE BEGLEY

I do not have a lot of experience photographing fireworks. Actually I have never photographed fireworks with a digital camera. You may have heard me mention that I volunteered to be mentor to force me to learn new things. The best way to learn something it to teach it.

- 
- ▶ History WEBN fireworks
 - ▶ Esthetics of a shot
 - ▶ Technical considerations
 - ▶ Luck - preparation meets opportunity

I lived in Cincinnati Ohio for 20 years and worked for Procter & Gamble Photographics dept.

My experience photographing fireworks mainly come from the Labor day fireworks in Cincinnati OH.

I grabbed some images off the internet and I will talk about the esthetics of a shot and then technical considerations.

Then once you arm yourself with preparation and you find an opportunity you might be "lucky"

Riverfest - Cincinnati

- ▶ WEBN Labor Day Fireworks
- ▶ Started in 1977
- ▶ Photo contest each year

I live in Cincinnati for 20 years. They are famous for the WEBN rock radio station Labor Day fireworks. The first one was in 1977 and as of last year they are still going on.

The big things for photographers was the photo contest for best picture.

First winner:
1977 – Bob Buring



Last August WEBN, celebrating its tenth anniversary with a fireworks display at the Riverfront, held a photography contest and awarded first prize to this photo.

BOB BURING

CINCINNATI OCTOBER 1977 41

The Rock radio station WEBN has hosted a big fireworks display on Labor day on the Ohio river since 1977.

What do companies do to get free advertising images? They hold a photo contest. This was the first contest winner in 1977 by Bob Buring.

1977 – we are talking about film days – way before digital cameras.

2010
Ken Stigler

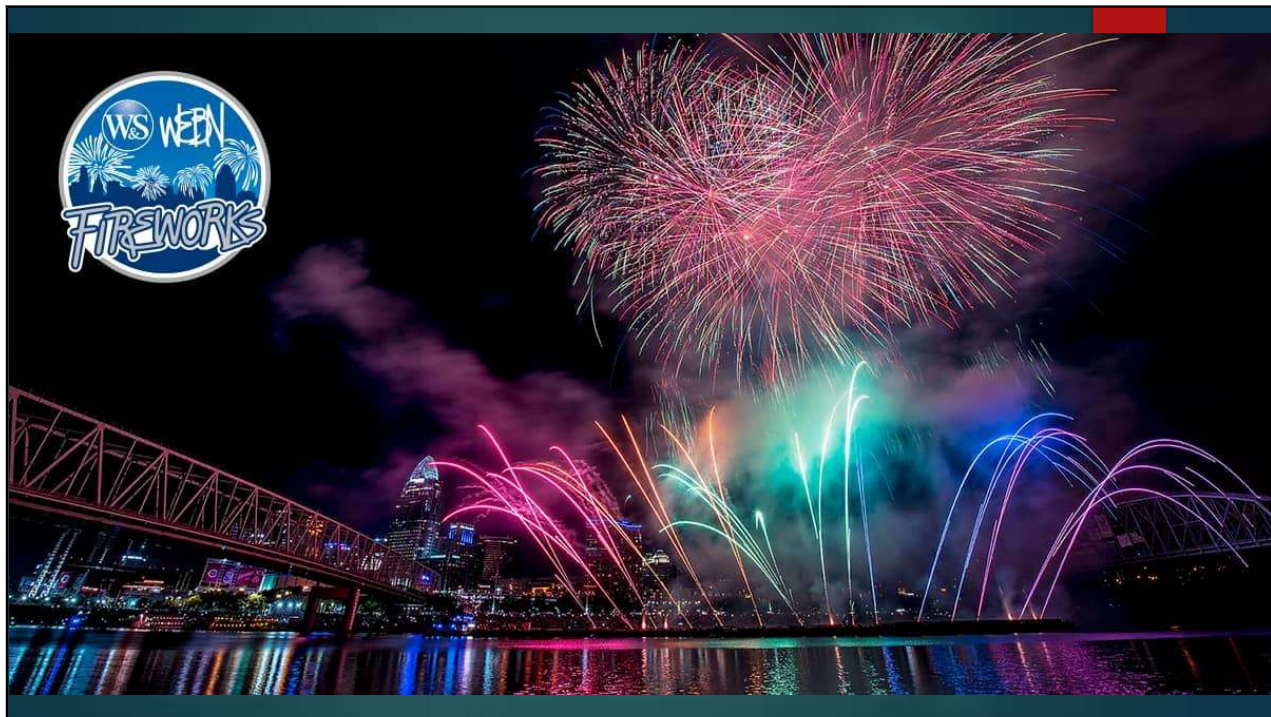


I found this one from 2010 by Ken Stigler. Very Nice

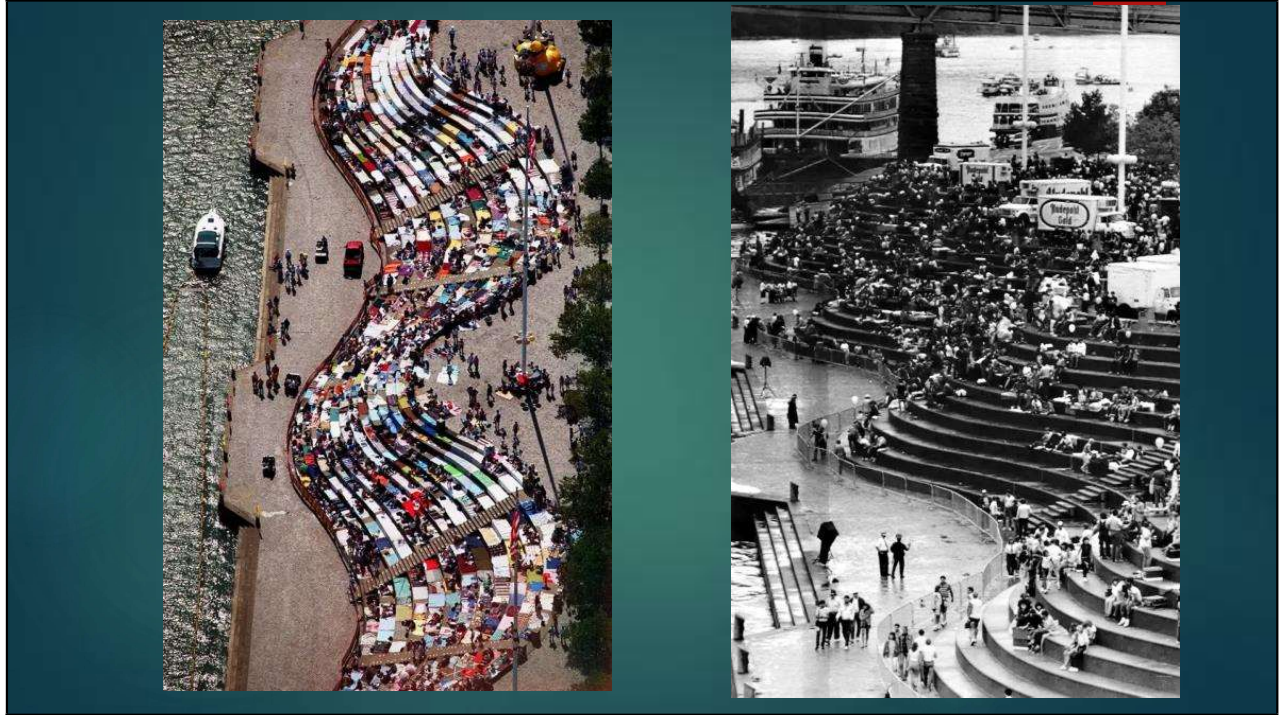
2013
Amanda Rossman



2013 I don't think this was a contest winner but I wanted to show that you don't have to be right under the fireworks to get a good shot.



This is very good. Notice the smoke in this image – very little. We will talk about that more later.

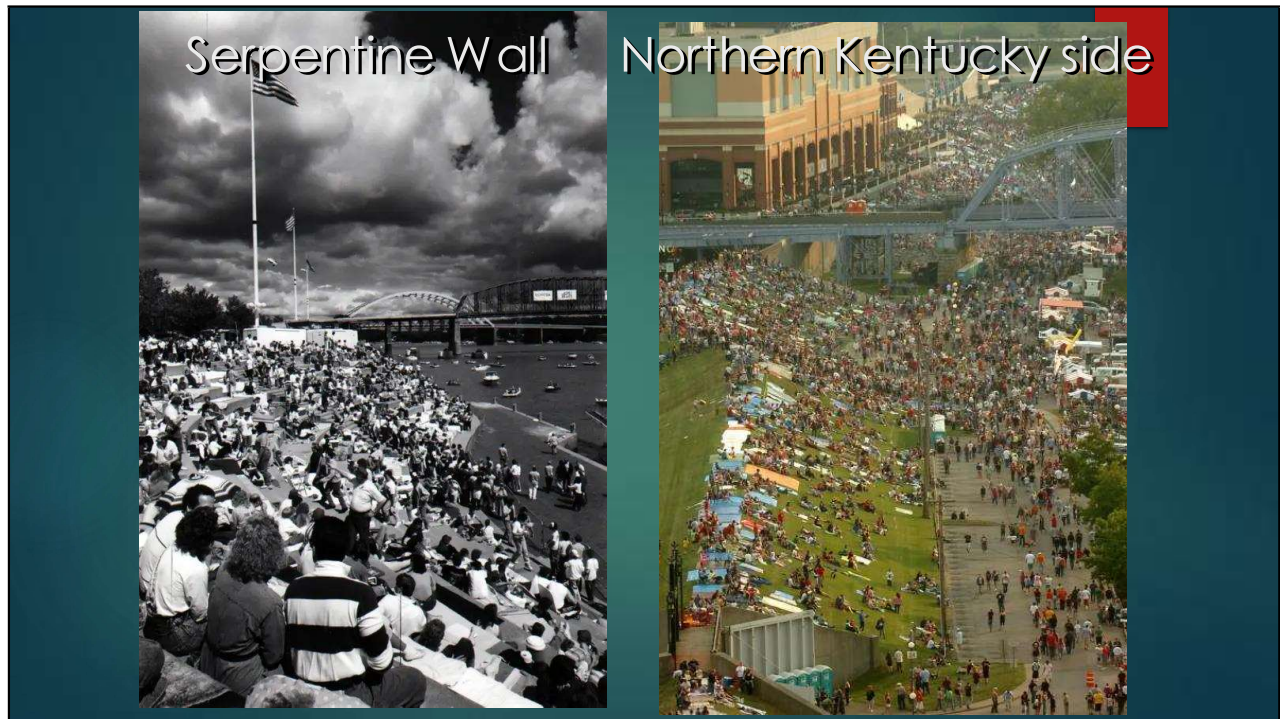


And there is the scene. It is estimated that 300,000 - 500,000 people attend this event.

This is the serpentine wall on the Cincinnati side of the river.



Attendees com early to save their spots on the wall



On the left are attendees on the serpentine wall waiting and on the right is the Covington Kentucky side. The best photos are actually taken on the KY side so you have the Cincinnati skyline in the shot.



The party is called riverfest and here is a shot I found from Riverfest 1982



Here is another shot from Riverfest 1982. Of all the images in this presentation, this is the only one that is mine.

Notice that little cutie on the right. Yes, that is me on the serpentine wall waiting for the fireworks.

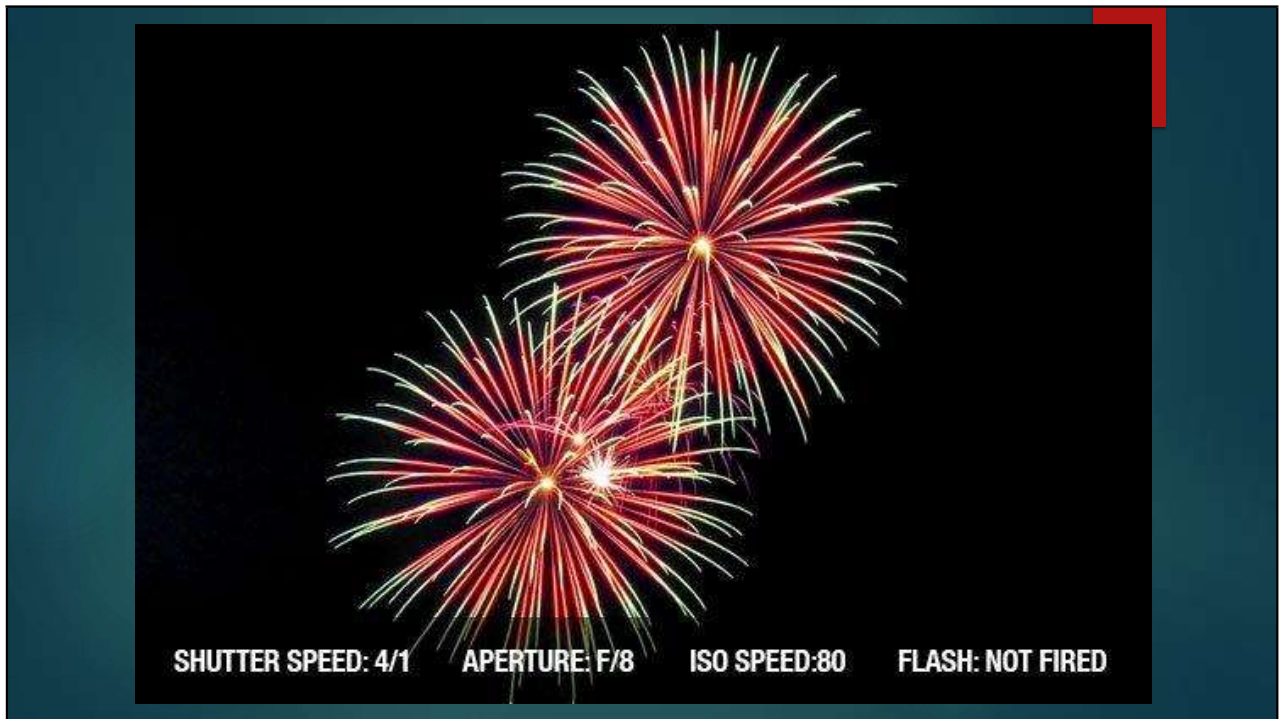
1982 My first WEBN fireworks, was actually my first date with my first husband.

Types of shots

▶ Just fireworks

One thing to consider when you are going to photograph an event is what type of shot you want to get. Maybe you only want the fireworks themselves









Types of shots

- ▶ Just fireworks – save shots to create composites

What can you do with photos of just fireworks? I would make a composite



This is nicely done.



I grabbed this off the internet so it is low resolution, but I liked this shot. I like the foreground and the city down below, but it is a nice composite



This is colorful and eye-catching, but not at all realistic.

Types of shots

- ▶ Just fireworks – save shots to create composites
- ▶ Fireworks with something in the foreground

One thing I always wanted to do was get a nice fireworks with the people in the foreground. I never got around to it.





This is cute composite, I like that it has the people in the foreground.



Put the City in the foreground. If it is a large firework display and you are familiar with the area, find an interesting vantage point.



Looks like another composite. This picture tells a story.
At the end of the presentation I have some better shots of effective use of foreground

Types of shots

- ▶ Just fireworks – save shots to create composites
- ▶ Fireworks with something in the foreground
- ▶ Fireworks and the scene

Are the fireworks going to be displayed somewhere with an interesting scene that you want to include?



This was taken from the KY side so the city is in the background. his would have been taken early in the show, very little smoke



Take as many shots as you can early. This fireworks display goes on for 20-30 minutes and there is so much smoke by the end it interferes with the visibility of the fireworks.



This image is overexposed and a good shot of all the smoke. These fireworks are done by the famous Rozzi family. The show goes on for about 30 minutes and is choreographed to music. By the end of the night there is smoke everywhere. Your best bet for a good clean image of the fireworks is early in the show. When I worked at P&G one of our photographers won the WEBN photo contest. I think it was in 1982. In the days of film. He won with a shot of one of the first fireworks shot that night. It was clean with virtually no smoke in the sky.



I am not sure if this is the Cincinnati fireworks. The city is darkened down to emphasize the fireworks. It is a great shot.



This looks like it might have been a cell phone photo. It is an interesting shot because it includes the city and I like the ghostly people in the foreground. and the fireworks look good also.

If this was cleaned up in photoshop it could be even better.



This looks like a professional shot. Nice composition, exposure and sharp.





This is not my photo but, it was taken from the area I was at The one year I photographed the fireworks, it must have been around 1983. I got away from the crowds on the riverfront and went to Newport Catholic HS in northern KY. It was still crowded on the lawn, but not as bad as the riverfront. 1983, we are talking about film days folks! I got a nice shot of the city and I got a nice shot of the fireworks. But not one together. What does Valerie do? Did I mention the first job I had in the Photo\Graphic dept was in the color print lab. Compositing did not start with digital photography. Back in the color print lab I make a composite image and entered it in the WEBN fireworks contest. No I didn't win, but it was a decent image. With all the moves I have made I no longer have any copies of it.

Leesburg Daily Commercial



Has anyone been to the fireworks display in Leesburg?
Here are some photos I took from the Leesburg Daily Commercial web page.
I have never been, but I guess this is at Lake Harris.



Nice image of the fireworks and an effective use of foreground.



Now look at this, I love it! Notice the difference between this and the bad fake composites. This is so much better!



Bad fake composite



Creative angles and foregrounds



Here is another effective use of the foreground to tell a story.



Nice exposure, fireworks and foreground.

How to get the shot

▶ Find a good location

If you are photographing fireworks at a location that you have been before you have a better idea of where you want to be to get a good shot. The reason I showed you the previous images was to give you an idea of what to look for.

How to get the shot

- ▶ Find a good location
- ▶ Use a tripod

To get a sharp image you must use a tripod. You will be taking long exposures and you can't hand hold and get a sharp image.

How to get the shot

- ▶ Find a good location
- ▶ Use a tripod
- ▶ Put camera in manual mode,

You can't let the camera make the exposure decision for you. You will have to take control and put your camera in manual mode.

You will need take several test images to determine what exposure works best for you. That is why we will practice today to make sure you can quickly determine your camera settings once you are on location.

Tip bring a flashlight or use your cell phone light to see camera controls

How to get the shot

- ▶ Find a good location
- ▶ Use a tripod
- ▶ Put camera in manual mode,
- ▶ Compose your shot

You might not be able to determine your composition until the show starts. If you haven't seen the fireworks at this location you won't necessarily know how high and what direction the fireworks will be.

Once you know, and you get shots you want from one location, if you have time, move around and get creative angles like the Leesburg photos I showed.

How to get the shot

- ▶ Find a good location
- ▶ Use a tripod
- ▶ Put camera in manual mode,
- ▶ Compose your shot
- ▶ Put mirror in lock-up position

If you have a DSLR you should use your mirror lock-up. This will prevent camera shake during the exposure.

How to get the shot

- ▶ Find a good location
- ▶ Use a tripod
- ▶ Put camera in manual mode,
- ▶ Compose your shot
- ▶ Put mirror in lock-up position
- ▶ Exposure

Exposure will take some experimentation.

If you remember all my lessons on the exposure triangle you can determine what is important.

You already know you will be taking a long exposure. My guess it to start at 4 or 5 sec. Start you ISO around 200 knowing you will likely be raising it higher. Then how much depth of field do you want. That depends on the focal length of your lens and what in the scene you want in focus. Take some test shots before the fireworks start to get the ambient exposure where you want it. Then after the first firework you may need to make adjustments so the fireworks are not too bright or dark.

How to get the shot

- ▶ Use a cable release or set the self-timer (2 sec).
- ▶ shutter speed on B if you have a cable release

Also to avoid camera shake, use a cable release or a self timer. Mine will go as low as two sec.

Better yet is to put your shutter speed on B and use a cable release. On B (for Bulb), the shutter will stay open for as long as you hold the shutter release cable. This way you can watch the firework and leave the shutter open for the exact time you feel is the peak duration of the shot.

Otherwise you can experiment with different shutter speed times to find the best result. This is a hit or miss situation.

How to get the shot

- ▶ Use a cable release or set the self-timer (2 sec).
 - ▶ shutter speed on B if you have a cable release
- ▶ Turn off Long exposure noise reduction
 - ▶ This causes you camera to take longer

I have never photographed fireworks with a digital camera so I never would have thought of this.

Long exposure noise reduction caused you camera to take longer to process the image as it writes to your card.

Turn it off to be able to shoot faster and get more images.

Remember when I said to get as many images as you can at the start of the fireworks show? You don't want to be slowed down by the camera processor.

Most of us have good noise reduction in our software.

In fact at the next meeting I will be talking about what is new in photoshop. It has improved noise reduction choices in camera raw.

How to get the shot

- ▶ Manual focus on infinity

Manually set your focus on infinity. The fireworks will be far enough away that this will work.

How to get the shot

- ▶ Manual focus on infinity
- ▶ Starting point ISO 250, 4 or 5 sec, f/5.6

Best guess at a starting exposure

Stay if you want to practice with
your camera settings

