

# **Mind U: Wabi Sabi Photography Perfectly Imperfect**

**Post Mindcamp  
2018 Notes**

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- This presentation deck is for anyone who either attended the MindU on Wabi Sabi Photography as well as anyone interested in Wabi Sabi Photography.
- The contents are:
  - Summary of how you might photograph in a Wabi Sabi Way
  - What is Wabi Sabi?
  - Seeing and Photography in a Wabi Sabi Way, more elaboration
  - A Couple of Exercises
  - Resources
  - Appendix
  - My contact information if you have questions

**Enjoy!**  
**Mary Ellyn Vicksta**

# Summing Up, How might you photograph with a Wabi Sabi Mindset?

- **Look** for an object or a scene that strikes you as representing WABI SABI
- Before photographing, **quiet your mind**.
  - Close your eyes and focus on your breathing.
- Open your eyes and **gently observe** the world around you in the “present” moment
- When you feel like you’ve **reached an understanding** of the object or scene, then start to photograph. **Accept** the potential images of WABI SABI in that moment.

**What is Wabi Sabi?**

# What is Wabi Sabi?

- A Japanese concept that revolves around the perfection of imperfection, graceful humility, and the power of acceptance

**“Wabi Sabi is the beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. The antithesis of our classical western notion of beauty as something perfect, enduring, and monumental.”**

*–Mike Sturm*

# What is Wabi?

- Is a term that means something like “peace or quiet fulfillment with intentional simplicity”
- It used to describe monks of the 14th century in Japan. Simple robes, often worn and a bit tattered.
- Renowned for simplicity and tranquility
- Associated with minimalism and humility
- People are Wabi when they exemplify a deep understanding of and comfort with who they are and don't crave or long to be anything else.

# What is Sabi?

- Sabi connotes the graceful and quiet dignity of something or someone persisting through time.
- Must be earned over time
- Rooted in the Buddhist teaching about impermanence and acceptance of time and existence
- Mostly referred to objects
- Examples: Green oxidation on Statue of Liberty, dark seasoning on a cast-iron skillet

# What is Wabi Sabi?

- Bringing Wabi Sabi into your life....takes a mind quiet enough to appreciate muted beauty, courage not to fear bareness, willingness to accept things as they are—without ornamentation. It depends on the ability to slow down, to shift the balance from doing to being, to appreciating rather than perfecting.

# What is Wabi Sabi?

- Appreciating the imperfections of everyday life
- Focus and appreciate “What Is”
- Consider this approach to Wabi Sabi:
  - Quiet your mind
  - Understand
  - Accept
  - Appreciate

**“Wabi Sabi depends on the ability to slow down,  
To shift the balance from doing to being,  
To appreciating rather than perfecting....  
Our universal longing  
For wisdom,  
For genuineness,  
For shared history manifest in these things”**

*–Mike Sturm*

**Seeing and Photographing in a  
Wabi Sabi Way,  
More Elaboration**

# Seeing a Wabi Sabi World

**Look for the imperfections that are all around us:**

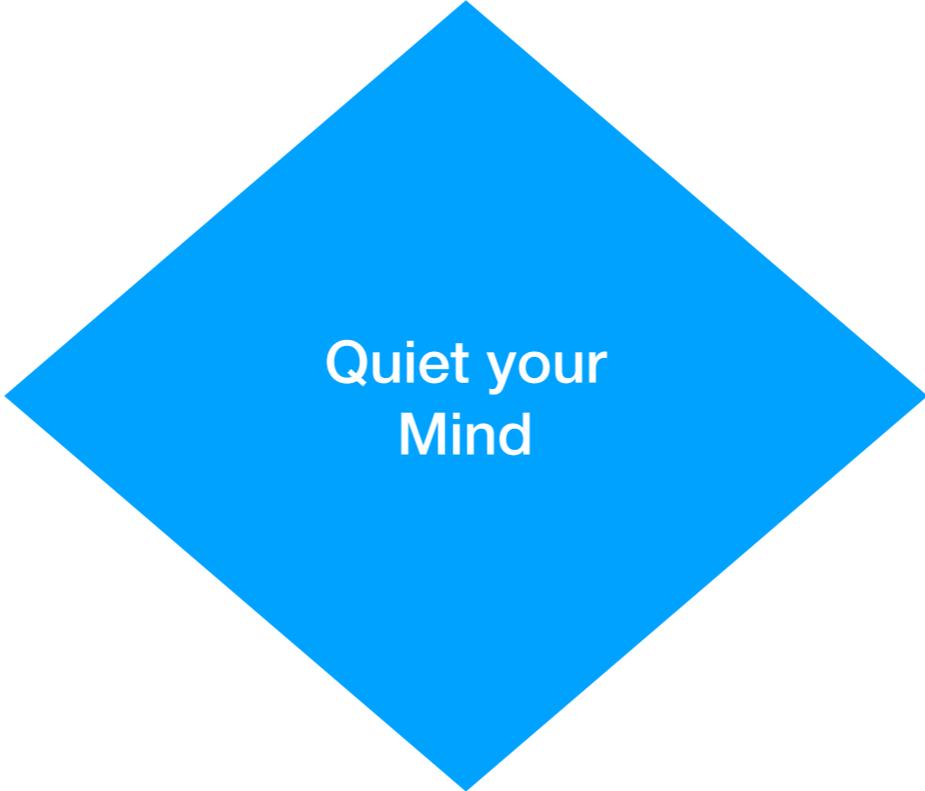
**Stains on an old kitchen pot.**

**Rust on a weathered gate.**

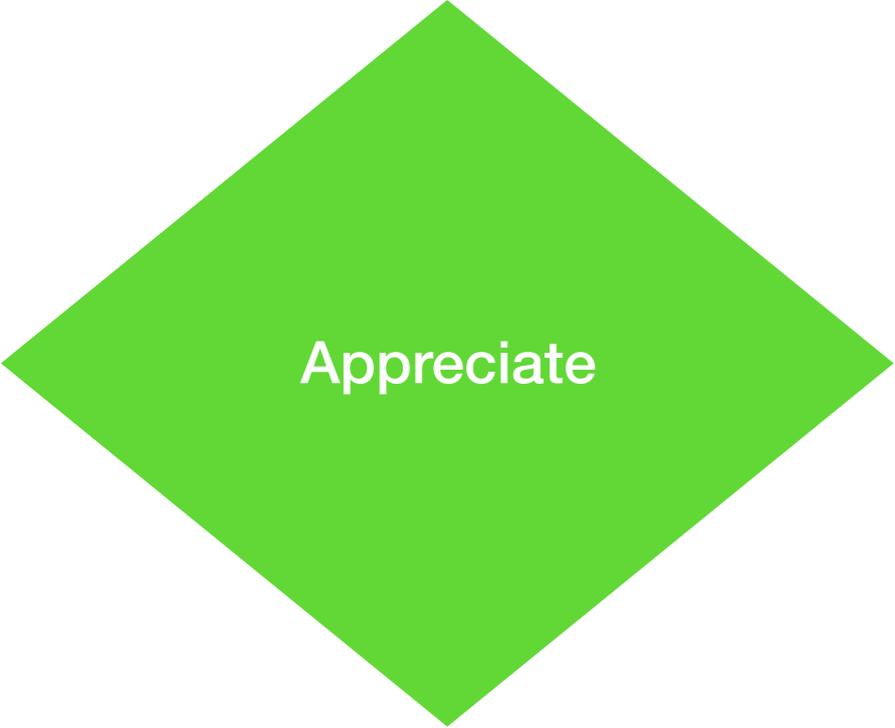
**Muddy footprints on a wet pavement.**

**Wrinkles on a familiar face.**

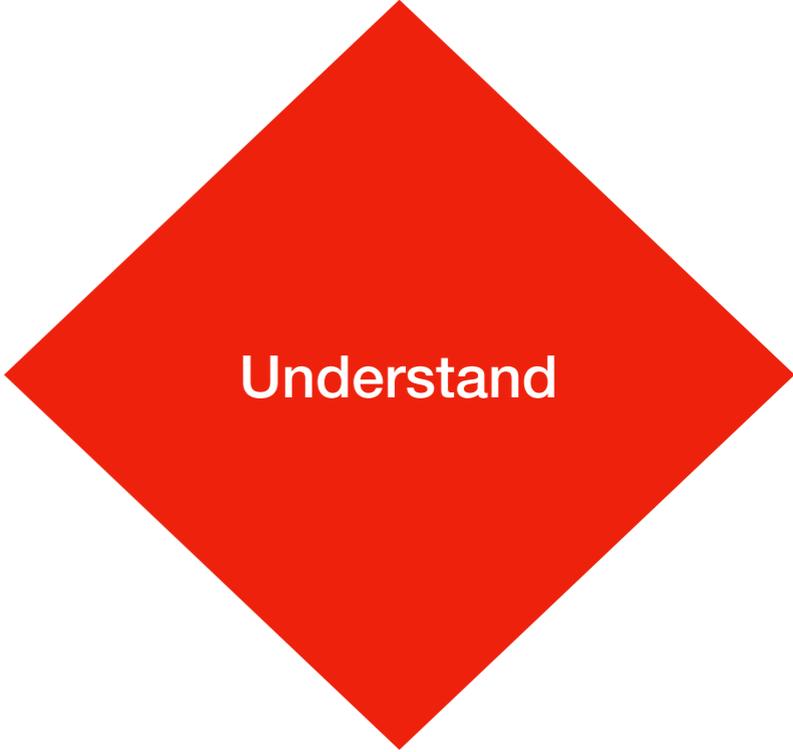
**Withered branches under a winter sky.**



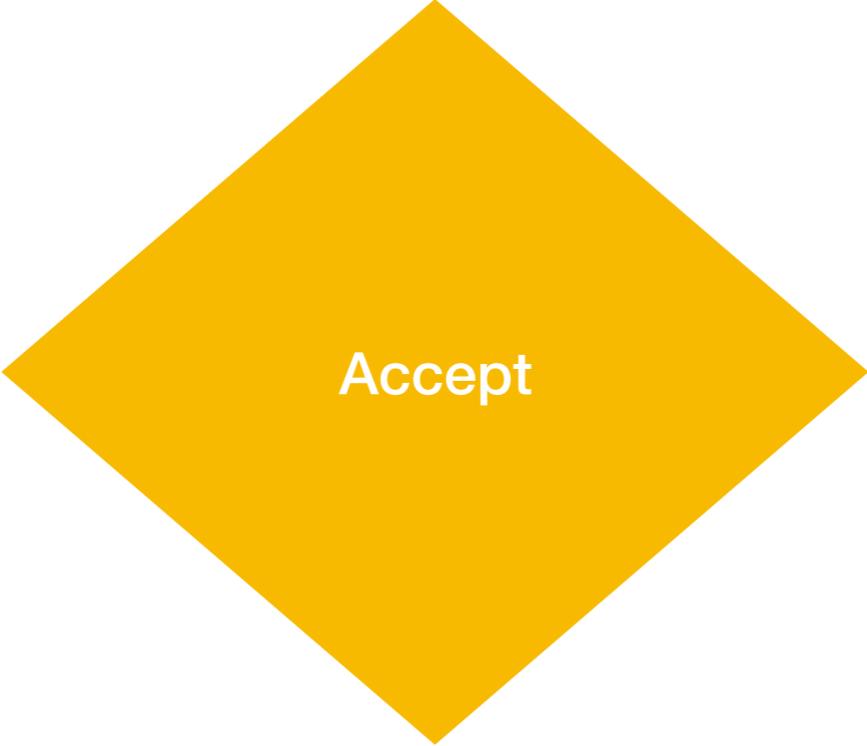
Quiet your  
Mind



Appreciate



Understand



Accept

# Approach to Taking Photos in a Wabi Sabi Way

- Quiet your mind
  - Let your mind be still as you observe the world around you
- Understand
  - Allow yourself to understand “what is” before you take a photograph
- Accept
  - Accept that understanding before you “click”
- Appreciate
  - Let your photo speak to you and appreciate what it is saying to you.

# Wabi Sabi

- **Do:**
  - Photograph objects or people or both that represent Wabi Sabi
  - While photographing consider
    - Quieting your mind
    - Understanding
    - Accept the Wabi Sabi that is before you

# Wabi Sabi

- **Reflect:**

- Select 5 photos that seem to best represent Wabi Sabi to you
- Look over each selected photo individually and write about what you understand about the photo. Think about simplicity. Think about what suggests grace with age or something that wore well over time. Think about the care that someone has given to an object over a period of years. Think about someone who is understated and wonderfully genuine in what they say and do.
- Is there anything in your image that suggests “perfectly imperfect”? How does it suggest that? How does it represent “what is”?
- What do you appreciate about your photo? Is it obvious or did it come to you over time?

# Approach to Editing Photos in a Wabi Sabi Way

- Quiet your mind
  - Let your mind be still as you study the photos you created
- Understand
  - Allow yourself to understand “how you might enhance” your photo so it’s closer to your minds eye when you captured the image.
- Accept
  - While editing accept any new changes that add to your understanding of what the photo might mean to you
- Appreciate
  - Let your edited photo speak to you and appreciate what it is saying to you, including any new insights.

# Giving and Receiving Feedback

- Often when we show our photos to others, we get feedback that is more destructive than constructive. In the spirit of Wabi Sabi, **consider pausing to quiet your mind of your own preconceptions and try to reach an understanding of the photo that is in front of you**
- With this mindset, then prepare feedback
  - Praise first....what you like, how it makes you feel, what you appreciate
  - Suggestions in the mode of
    - “If this were my photo, I might.....”

# A Couple of Exercises

# Preparing Your Mind

- Quiet your mind
  - Focus on your Breathing
  - Quiet, peaceful music
  - Write what is on your mind
  - Talk out loud about what's on your mind
  - Write a love letter to nature

# Seeing a Wabi Sabi World

Look for the imperfections that are all around us:

Stains on an old kitchen pot.

Rust on a weathered gate.

Muddy footprints on a wet pavement.

Wrinkles on a familiar face.

Withered branches under a winter sky.

# Looking for Imperfections

- Take a 30 to 45 minute walk, with image capture device in hand and an overall mindset that you are looking for imperfections
  - However you define, “imperfect”
- Stop whenever you sense an imperfection

# Looking for Imperfections

- When you are stopped, ask yourself these questions:
  - What **caught** your attention?
  - What are all of the ways that you are making a **connection** with what you see in front of you?
  - How might you **capture** this in a way that is meaningful to you and to others?
- **Now, capture the image in as many ways that show the “perfectly imperfect”**

# Resources

# Source: Books

- How to Photograph Landscapes, by Joseph K Lange
- John Shaws Landscape Photography
- National Audubon Society guide to Landscape Photography by Tim Fitzharris
- Inspiration by Andre Gallant
- Series of books by Freeman Patterson and Andre Gallant
  - Photography and the Art of Seeing
  - Photography for the Joy of it
  - Photography of Natural Things

# Sources: Books

- Adventures in Seeing: How the Camera Teaches You to Pause, Focus, and Connect with Life by Kim Manley Out
- The Practice of Contemplative Photography: Seeing the World with Fresh Eyes by Andy Karr and Michael Wood

# Sources: Websites

- Contemplative Living through Photography by Kim Manley Ort
  - [www.kimmanleyort.com](http://www.kimmanleyort.com)
- The recent images pages on Andre Gallant's website:
  - [www.andregallant.com/#1/page/366426/-recent-images](http://www.andregallant.com/#1/page/366426/-recent-images)
- Blog article by Menka Sanghvi on Wabi Sabi Photography
  - [www.wearejustlooking.org](http://www.wearejustlooking.org)
- Seeing Fresh, the Practice of Contemplative Photography by Andy Kart and Michael Woods
  - [www.seeingfresh.com](http://www.seeingfresh.com)
  - This is what I used as some of the examples during the workshop

# Sources: Websites

- Blog article on Demystifying Wabi Sabi by David (very good article)
  - [www.randomwire.com](http://www.randomwire.com)
- Blog article by Tineke Stoffels on Wabi Sabi, The Art of Imperfection
  - [www.tinekestoffels.eu](http://www.tinekestoffels.eu)
- Wabi Sabi for Photographers by Eric Kim
  - [www.erickimphotography.com](http://www.erickimphotography.com)
- Wabi Sabi Photography—The Art of the Imperfect
  - [www.discoverdigitalphotography.com](http://www.discoverdigitalphotography.com)

# Appendix

# Background on Wabi Sabi

- Was inspired by the blog article by Mike Sturm
  - Wabi-Sabi: Beyond Minimalism, and into a Unique Mode of Mindful Simplicity
  - [betterhumans.coach.me](http://betterhumans.coach.me)

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