Use the golden ratio to make great pictures

The search for the most beautiful ratio between the sides of rectangles, triangles, etc. dates back to the times of the Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians. Their architects built pyramids and temples that we appreciate to this day for their beauty and elegance. When you look at nature, you will find this ratio, the “golden ratio,” everywhere—or at least curves based upon it. Examples include everything from snail shells to the way seeds are arranged in sunflowers—one of the most popular subjects for summertime photos.

During the Renaissance, the golden ratio received attention from such famous names as Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer, who explored and used it in the composition of their pictures. Thanks to their use of the golden ratio, these pictures are admired to this day for their artistic and aesthetic quality. The mystery behind the harmony in these beautiful pictures is seemingly simple—the objects or important spots within them are placed according to the golden ratio, not in the middle of the picture...

The golden ratio (or golden mean or golden section) arises when a line is divided into two parts such that the ratio of the larger part to the smaller part is the same as the ratio of whole line to the larger part. The numeric value of this harmonious relation is approximately 1:1.618.
You can also put the golden ratio to use when taking pictures or editing ones you’ve already taken. You can edit a picture whose subject sits in the center and crop it to create a new picture with a more interesting composition. You can also use cropping to get rid of unneeded empty space around the subject of a picture, or distracting elements such as strangers, traffic signs, tree branches, and the like.

When you are cropping pictures in Zoner Photo Studio, you do not need to do the rather complicated work of finding golden ratio points by hand. The program can do the calculations for you, and display guidelines for you within the cropping frame. To show or hide these guidelines, use the View | Crop Marks submenu. You can also go here to show/hide cropping marks for the Rule of Thirds.

1. Select the Crop tool.
2. Lock the crop’s ratio of sides if desired, using e.g. Fixed Aspect in the drop-down list at the left end of the Options toolbar.
3. Turn on the Golden Ratio crop marks using the command of that name under View | Crop Marks.
4. Now set the cropping rectangle position, size, and (if not using **Fixed Aspect**) shape. Click and drag the cropping frame’s edges to resize it. Click and drag within the rectangle to reposition it.
5. Click the Crop button on the Options toolbar to finalize the crop.
When you are cropping action shots, portraits, or human figures in general, place the main subject of the photo on the golden ratio line in such a way that the most space goes to the place where the subject is looking, or where the action is taking place. In portraits, the focus of the picture is the subject’s eye, or in a group portrait, the row of their eyes.

No rule in photography is a dogma that should be obeyed without question. There is no need to observe the golden ratio rule at all times, but it is good to know about it and to put it to use at the right time.

You can also take advantage of this rule when positioning horizons; they should not be located at the center of the picture, but instead on the golden ratio line.

Start putting the secrets of the golden ratio to work, and you will soon see much greater interest in your photos.

Download Free Trial of Zoner Photo Studio

For more photo editing tutorials, see Tutorials.