Architecture: Night Photos

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The majority of us take most of our architectural photos while on trips and vacations because we are inspired by impressive and unfamiliar building designs or want to record our own personal glimpse of a famous structure. But all too often, after snapping away all day, we leave the camera behind in the evening and miss out on what can be the most impressive architectural photos of all: night photos.

Here are some things to remember to get the kind of stunning results seen above:

1. Pick a few likely candidates and angles during the day, or better yet the evening before you intend to shoot, and aim to take your photos during dusk from pre-decided locations. The best "night shots" of buildings are actually usually taken at dusk when colors are richer and details are easier to catch. Since your window of opportunity will therefore be small, it's best to decide ahead of time where and how you'd like to take your photos.
2. Use longer exposures, a wide aperture and avoid your flash. If you're going for a very specific special effect on a smaller segment of a building a flash might be OK, but in general using a longer exposure and wide aperture will give the most natural results. Your flash will also not be powerful enough to illuminate an entire building.
3. Use a tripod and 2-second delay or shutter cable. Using longer exposures increases your risk of camera shake and for extra-long exposures you simply need a tripod. For even greater insurance against camera shake, use your digital camera's 2-second delay feature or connect a shutter-release cable.
4. Experiment with different settings and keep a record of them to help you judge what will be appropriate for a given situation in the future.

There are no hard and fast rules for getting proper exposures at night. Light meters on cameras often meter improperly for long nighttime photographs, so many photographers consult an exposure chart to guess at what the appropriate exposure may be. Best of luck.

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