Roger Lourie's Considerations When Judging Photographs

1. Does your photograph have a defined center of interest?
   Can the viewer quickly identify the main subject? While this may seem obvious, many photos fail to clearly delineate the subject. Does one see a somewhat haphazard group of conflicting elements? In a strong photo, the subject immediately asserts itself. This is the viewer's first impression -- usually the most important impression.

2. What about image composition?
   Is there evidence of organization by the photographer? Has he/she composed the picture well into segments that allow the eye to progress from the area of main importance to the areas of lesser importance? Is there proportionality among the parts: i.e. the main subject should have the greatest proportional space (or conversely, -- much more difficult -- the least amount of space). Is there something that might distract the viewer's eye from the photographer's main goal? (i.e. background jumble or too much stuff on the edges of the photo). Does the depth of field, focal setting of lens, and angle of camera enhance or distract from the composition?

3. Is it simple?
   For me, this is of utmost importance as a judge! Less elements in a photo=simplicity=impact. The simpler the image, the greater the impact. It is very hard to create a simple photograph! Often there are too many competing points of interest: most will be of secondary interest. Secondary items make for secondary photos. Let your image be as simple as you possibly can. This is very hard - most photos are insufficiently simple. Less is more, as Mies van der Rohe said.

4. How about the focus?
   Everyone notices a sharp focus immediately. The main subject of the photo should be sharp as a needle, in order to immediately attract the eye. A purposely blurred photo is acceptable, when the photographer purposely feels that a blur or soft focus enhances the subject - especially in portraiture. If you are depicting motion, obviously this changes - but showing motion has to be the objective of the photographer: not a coincidental element.

5. Does the image tell a story?
   A strong photo tells a story. And hopefully, this story immediately awakens the viewer. Very hard to implement this criteria. The story has to be immediate, obvious, and eye-stopping. Could be the photo might show a moment of impending doom. Or sudden joy. Or surprise. Or an unexpected visual twist. The best visual stories provoke an emotional response from the viewer. It can be a positive response or one of disgust/horror.

6. Color or black-and-white?
I am not impartial here!   It is much harder to take a strong B&W photo than a color one, in my view. Because we see in color, it is harder to view in B&W. B&W tends to focus the eyes, so you see more of the distracting elements. Also B&W means many more gradations of tonality and shade - which translates into more complexity.
Look at Ansel Adams' use of shades of black - he did it in the darkroom, in the printing, not digitally. But, it is his shading that makes his photos so memorable. Light and shadow should be used to focus attention on specific elements of the photo. Light is another tool to be manipulated. It can be harsh and distracting, or too monotone, banal and flat. Or it can light up a person's face or body. Nude or skin shots show light effects enormously.

6. Uniqueness and creativity?
This probably means not predictable. There are photos that violate every one of the above criteria and are superb. This is an intangible element that a photo might possess, but which is hard to plan for in advance. A sudden inspiration, surprising good luck, fortuitous happenstance: you can't plan for that. It just happens and the photographer ends up with a unique shot because she snapped the shutter at the right moment.

I hope this gives some insight into one person's criteria!