

Photography

A collection of innovative ideas and tips & tricks for taking better photographs

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Welcome

Well we're into issue two and its nice to see that after a few issues about getting the podcast up and running we are growing in subscribers each day. From the few comments we got so far we're pretty happy with how it's being received. We have had a few questions about how regular this PDFCast will be (e.g. monthly, biweekly)? To be honest, we're not too sure, we're still in the start up stages of writing articles, editing and adding photos. I imagine as Tips and Tricks Photography continues we will become more refined as to how long it will take to produce and issue, leading to more regular schedule. We hope this doesn't cause too much of an inconvenience. If you have something to say and/or would like to contribute an article you are more then welcome and encouraged to do so. Email us with your idea or an article and we will do our best to fit it in. After all we found the best way to improve your photography is to share ideas with each other. Take Care, *Jeff & Ervin*

Photography Critique

Critique is a great way to learn about what make a photograph good and what could be improved. We would like to try this with our readers and see how it works. At the end of each issue we will dedicate a page for submitted photographs. What we're hoping is that people will comment on them. What you liked, what you didn't and any suggestions for improving the photo. This type of anonymous critique would allow an honest/unbiased opinion and help teach what to try next time or in a similar situation. If you would like to submit a photo(s) please send it to tipsandtricksphotography@gmail.com and include your name, title of the photo (if there is one), your skill level as a photographer and any other relevant information you may want to include. We hope to hear from you.



Wedding Photography: An Amateur's Experience

Written by Ervin Tong

You've got the camera, you're known among your friends as "the photographer", and you've been asked to be your friends' wedding photographer. In this article, I'll share my experience and sugges-

tions for shooting a smallish wedding (less than 100 people).

I think perhaps the most important thing is to be honest and up-front with yourself and your

friends. Do you have the skills to do the job? Do you *really* have the skills to do the job? Are you going to be OK with putting in a full day (or more) of work instead of sitting back and enjoying the day? If everything goes horribly wrong, will you all still be friends? That might be extreme, but it's also a possibility. Essentially, it all boils down to are you comfortable doing it? If not, now's the time to tell them you're flattered, but they need to look elsewhere.

Understanding expectations, both theirs and yours, is next. What kind of pictures are your friends expecting? The list of possible pictures at a wedding is endless. Are they just interested in formal family shot? Perhaps they have something more photojournalistic in mind, following the bride and groom getting ready, to the ceremony, and finishing at the banquet. In any case, knowing what they expect and that matching that with what you're willing to do is a good idea. I've found the more you know and the clearer you are about what they want, the easier your job is. If everybody's happy, it's time for the fun.

In preparing for the big day, get the schedule for the wedding day and the rehearsals as well as the locations for the events. This way you know what's happening and where you need to be. Once you've got that, try and visit the places before-hand and take a few

test shots. If there are outdoor locations or there's large windows, try to visit around the same time you'll be there on the day to get a feel for the lighting as well as pick out some potential spaces for pictures with the bride and groom. I've found that web forums are great places to solicit advice and suggestions from the pros.

I also browsed through the galleries of some wedding photographers to get a feel of what kind of shots I should be getting, as well as ideas for creative/artsy shots. In general, the basic shots that you *need* are: exchanging vows, the rings, the kiss, the first dance, the bouquet and garter toss. Add in some family and friends shots, a few candids of the bride and groom, and you've got yourself a wedding.

Now the question is what equipment should you bring? Most locations for the ceremony and banquet have terrible lighting. From my experience, a fast lens (f2.8 or better) and a flash is a must. If you don't have them, rent them. As far as focal lengths go, people recommend a fast medium zoom as well as a wide angle and telephoto zoom. My kit included a 10-22, 24-70, and a 70-200. While I'm glad I had other options if I needed them, I found that I shot

everything with the 24-70. I found that I could get pretty much everything I wanted with that lens, and it saved me the hassle of swapping lenses and missing shots when things we're happening. I can see the wide-angle coming in handy in cramped areas as well as for sweeping shots and the 70-200



might have been useful if we were in a larger space.

When thinking about taking the pictures themselves, I think an important point is to talk with the officiant or priest. Some places don't allow flash. Some priests

don't like it when you move around in during the ceremony. I've heard that some officiants forbid photography during the ceremony itself. Whatever the case may be, it's always a good idea to know these things before hand. In my case the officiant was very cooperative, I could move around at

will and she said the more pictures the better. During the ceremony I knew what shots I wanted and tried to make myself as inconspicuous as possible, after all, it is *their* day. Personally, I tried to get a mix of wide-angled shots, to get a sense of what was going on, as well as a few close ups taken at large apertures to isolate the people from the background. When using your flash, try to bounce it. Bounce it off the roof, the walls, bounce it behind you. I find that a direct flash casts rather harsh, unappealing shadows. By bouncing the flash and toning down the power, more natural looking pictures can be produced.

Shooting a wedding is a very long day (even if it is only a few hours) but remember it's also a lot of fun. Take some time, enjoy it, and you'll get some really great pictures along the way.



Creating a Panorama

Techniques to Improve Wide Angle Photographs

Written by Jeff Tindall & Ervin Tong

Panoramas are a great way of taking pictures, they illustrate a sense of vastness, provide strong detail to focus on and create some great effects, particularly with photos that extend to or past 180 degrees. One of the great things about panoramas is that when done correctly they often look even better than if you were to purchase a super wide lens. Another great thing is that the detail involved with them supersedes wide angle shots. Consider this, with a super wide lens and a 6.0 mega-pixel camera your photograph will only retain 6.0 mega-pixels of detail. Not bad at all, but for the gear heads out there, creating a panorama using a normal lens and stitching together 4 shots, is effectively the equivalent of shooting a scene with a super-wide angle lens and a 24 mega-pixel camera. The trick is making sure you do it correctly so when you stitch your pictures together they appear seamless.

In my experience the key to creating a good panorama is patience and a good setup.

The Setup

The first step in setting up for a panorama is to make sure you have a tripod that has been leveled. This seems pretty obvious, but often people get so excited about taking a picture or impatient they completely forget/ignore this step. Without a level tripod there is a good chance your panorama will angle towards the end leaving you with one side cutting off the top and the other other cutting the bottom. If your tripod has a ball head you will also want to make sure that is level. One simple way of doing this is to use a small level that you can pick up from a hardware store. Once you have leveled your tripod, DO a practice run and look through the lens while panning SLOWLY. Make sure the horizon is level and see how the landscape changes as you move

from side to side. This is also likely the time to alter your focal length to either include or exclude details of the scene. Taking time to do a little preventative work will likely save a lot of time and frustration in Photoshop later.

The Camera

The other important thing is to ensure the settings for each photograph of the panorama will be the same:

Firstly, the lens you choose can be an important decision, we suggest against using wide angled lens (10-20mm). The distortion around the edges with wide angles can lead to alignment issues and noticeable unwanted shadows.

Turn your camera to manual if you already haven't, this lets you control the settings and makes sure not to end up with different depths of field, shutter speeds, ISO etc... Keeping the exposure constant is one of the more important things to do when making a pano-

rama. This means your best off while panning to keep an eye on your camera's light meter to make sure there is not too much of a dramatic difference so one of the photos in the panorama either isn't blown out or too dark. If this happens to be the case, try and find a shutter speed that will be a good compromise between the different photographs of the scene. This likely will take some practice, but it's worth it in particularly strong contrasting situations. Al-

white balance is not on auto and is set to one value. Auto White Balance can be very tricky. I once took two pictures within a minute of each other and they showed very different temperature values. In RAW if you forget this step, you can always change the white balance afterwards when you post process the images, but in jpg if your auto white balance changes as you pan the camera (which is likely for extended panoramas) your going to be out of luck.

why, well, in taking panorama pictures there have been multiple times where I ended up dumping the contents of my memory card onto my computer, let a few days pass and when I finally get around to sorting the pictures and deleting the bad shots, I usually end up tossing some if not all the panorama bound pictures. After all, separately they look like terribly composed pictures. By taking a picture of my hand at the beginning and end of the sequence, I



ternatively, and if you have the time, it may be worth choosing a different time of day or different type of light (e.g. overcast). Another important reason to keep your camera on manual focus when making a panorama is to ensure your focus doesn't change. It's likely the case and with many landscape shots that you will want a small aperture (high F-stop number) to capture lots of detail. The third camera setting to keep constant is less important if you shoot RAW, but very important if you shoot jpg. Make sure your

Turn off any other controls that your camera may automatically set (e.g. tonal contrast). Remember the key to making a good landscape picture is to make sure you have as much control as possible.

Taking the Photograph

Once the grunt work is complete ensuring your camera, tripod, exposure etc... are properly set the only the next step is to take the pictures. The first picture I take is not of the scene, but of my hand,

know know where the panorama start and ends.

There are four guidelines I try to follow when shooting the sequence: 1) This may seem redundant, but make sure you use the tripod to pan the camera (after all that's why you spent the time leveling it). It sounds stupid, but having a ball head on my tripod has led me more then once to unlock the head and move the camera. 2) Don't waste too much time when shooting the sequence. I know there is an innate reaction in photographers to line up the next

shot, make sure its all correct and then take the picture, but for panoramas this can often lead to changes in the scene. For example, clouds move and may get cut off at different spots, or light condi-

line each photo. Sometimes it does a good job other times, you have to line them up by hand. After all the photos are lined up I like to clone noticeable lines that can appear from stitching. I also

of equipment to put together a multi-level panorama that was free of perspective shifts and alignment errors (see photo below). Recently we discovered software that makes multi-level panoramas a



tions can change fairly fast, like at sunrise, sunset or if a cloud blocks the sun. Trust yourself that your prep work will pay off. 3) When shooting each picture, overlay each shot by about 10% of the frame. This makes stitching the picture together much easier afterwards. 4) Unless your in a rush to go, shoot the panorama several times so you can later determine which sequence works best. After all when trying something new in photography, trial and error often works well.

Post Processing (Stitching)

There are a lot of ways to stitch a panorama together, Adobe Photoshop CS2 is my preference, there is an automated script that tries to

like to clone out distracting objects that can often show up when shooting such a wide amount of space, like people, telephone poles etc...

Multi-Level Panoramas

One final technique we'd like to discuss is multi-level panoramas. Normally, when we think about panoramic photographs, we think about a single row of shots that are stitched together. However, there are times when we encounter a scene that includes both breadth (left to right) as well as depth (up and down). On these occasions, one might consider doing a multi-level panorama: stitching together two or more rows of photographs. Traditionally, one would use a lot

simple matter of taking sufficient number of shots. The program Autostitch (www.cs.ubc.ca/~mbrown/autostitch/autostitch.html) was developed in the AI labs at UBC and does an extremely remarkable job of assembling panoramas without much human assistance. The upside is that it's completely free, the downside is at the moment it's only available for PC users, Sorry to all the Apple people out there.

To shoot a multi-level panorama the general techniques outlined above should still be followed, but a few additions points are worth mentioning. Once you're finished shooting the first row, re-adjust your field of view to shoot similar

panoramic rows above or below (or both) the original row of shots. Keep in mind that by adjusting the field of view to capture the depth of the image, your ball-head is no longer level. As a result, you will get accurate images (curved images). To correct for this, we suggest taking shots at least two frames beyond the start and stop points of the original row. We've also found it useful to take another row of shots above or below the added rows just to make sure we've got all the details we want in the scene. If you take too many pictures, it's not a problem, you can always crop it out later. However, if you take too few, there may be missing areas in key positions of your composition. Once you have captured the images, batch process the RAW images (if you shot RAW) and convert them to JPEG. Try to ensure

any adjustments you make are consistent for the entire set. As personal preference, we tend to keep the native resolution and save as high quality as possible. The next step is to input all the JPEG images into Autostitch. The program will run a quick assembly and present a low resolution proof image. Depending on how much of the scene you shot, and how many shots you took, there may be areas around the edge where a pure black area is inserted. Don't be too concerned about this, you shot more than what you wanted to begin with anyways right? Autostitch allows you to rescale the image in program as well as control the output JPEG quality. Again, our tendency is to keep the native resolution and output as high quality as possible. If you're satisfied with the proof, enter your output settings, sit back and let

Autostitch do its job. A small warning, depending on the number of shots you took, and your output settings, Autostitch will draw a lot of computer power and it may take a while to finish assembling the photo. Once we have the finished image, we take that back into Photoshop and crop out the extra bits to restore our original composition.

Multi-level panoramas are not for every scene, and in fact, we would argue that relatively few instances would be well represented with a multi-level panorama. But, when you come across the scene that just screams for it, have confidence and shoot away!

Good Luck!

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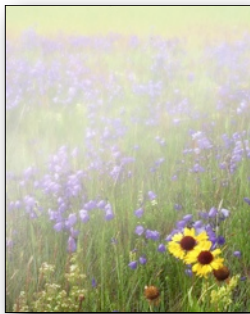


Three Photoshop Tips

Three quick tips on how to make photoshop work a little easier for you.

Written by Jeff Tindall

Adding Fog to a Photo



This is a nice photoshop tip I picked up off of Matt Kloskowski on adding fog to a landscape photograph.

Photoshop Steps:

Step 1 - Open your document and create a new layer.

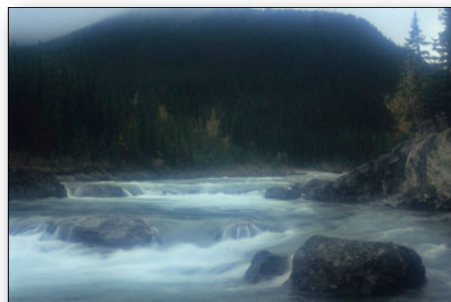
Step 2 - Now with the selection tool, outline the area where you would like to add fog. In landscape pictures the rectangle selec-

tion tool seems to work best.

Step 3 - Now feather the layer by 15 pixels and then apply the clouds filter. Afterwards, you can apply more clouds by pressing Command F (Ctrl F on PC).

Step 4 - Goto Filters --> Blur --> Motion Blur and rotate it to 90° and a distance of 80.

Step 5 - Now choose the wave filter from the distort menu. Play around with the settings until you

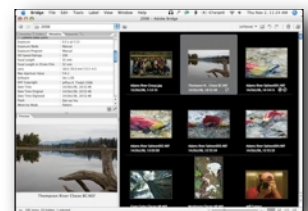


get the foggy effect you like.

Step 6 - Change the blend mode to hard light and erase what part of the picture you don't want to be foggy.

Step 7 - The only thing left is to drop the opacity of the layer.

© Your Photos



You can use Adobe Bridge to add a copyright your photos EXIF data.

Photoshop Steps:

Step 1 - Create a file in Photoshop and save it. This can be blank picture. The reason for doing this is to create a file with no metadata attached to it.

Step 2 - Open the file in Bridge and choose File --> File Info. Under the description tab you will see a place where you can specify if the file is copyright / unknown or public domain. Choose copyright and then below that field enter your copyright notice. Typically this is your name and the year.

Step 3 - In the top right corner there is a triangle (looks like a play button) click it and choose save metadata template. Give the template a name (e.g. Copyright 2007) and save it.

Step 4 - Now you can apply the template to all other photos. When you import your photos into Bridge, you can select the ones you want to copyright and then to do so choose Tools --> Append Metadata and choose your newly created copyright template.

Photoshop will append your copyright to the photos metadata. To see this, just click the metadata tab and take a look. Since this is such a simple thing to do after the template is created. I tend to batch copyright my photos as soon as I download them onto my computer.

Inserting a Backdrop



When your taking a picture of someone and don't like the background or just want to change it. It's pretty simple to insert a professional looking back drop. This trick is easiest to do when the subject is photographed on a uniform background.

Photoshop Steps:

Step 1 - Create a new document with the same dimensions and resolution as the photography you want to insert a new backdrop into.

Step 2 - Choose your colours for the background in the toolbar and then goto Filters --> Render --> Clouds. This creates a nice looking studio backdrop.

Step 3 - Goto the original image and choose the magic wand and selection the uniform background. If your background is not entirely selected you can hold shift and add the unselected background. Now ctrl-click (right click on a two button mouse) and choose inverse, this will select everything but the background (i.e. the person).

Step 4 - Click and drag the object over to the new document with the background you wanted.

Step 5 - Often when you drag in a person or generally when combining two pictures, there is often a edge about 1-2 pixels in length that are copied over. To get rid of this goto the Layers Menu --> Matting --> Defringe. This gives you the option of choosing how many pixels around the object to get rid of. Typically 2 will work. After you choose the number of pixels to remove click Okay and any noticeable edge will disappear.

What's In Your Camera Bag?

If you ask photographers what's in their bag you would likely hear about lens, bodies, filters etc... What we're interested in is the non-typical items you carry. For example, I tend to photograph a lot of flowers, so I carry a mist bottle that I can fill and spray down flowers to achieve the effect like they just got rained on. So what useful items do you carry? Drop us a line telling us the item and how you use it. Once enough responses come in we will publish the list to share.

tipsandtricksphotography@gmail.com

Tips and Tricks Photography Critiques

A place to receive and give honest opinions about photographs

Send your photos or comments to tipsandtricksphotography@gmail.com and we will include them in the next issue.



Name: Ervin Tong

Title: Wedding Rings

Skill Level: Intermediate

Other Info:



Name: Jeff Tindall

Title: Female Mallard Duck

Skill Level: Intermediate

Other Info: I like this photo because of the colour combinations reflecting off the water, but there is something about it that I'm not entirely happy with. Just wondering what I could have done differently.