



JANUARY 2004

Table of Contents

[This Month's Feature Article:
Turning Day Into Night: Part I](#)
by Joe Ramsey 2

[The DIPSIG Page](#)
by Joe Ramsey 4

[iView Media Review](#)
by Joe Ramsey 5

[December DIPSIG Report](#)
by Jerry Dupree 5

[Beginner's Page:
A Short \(?\) Primer on Layers: Part I](#)
by Stuart Lynn 6

[Love Me, Love My DIG](#)
by Jerry Dupree 9

[Tip of the Month:](#)
Two Gradients For The Price Of One 10

[Woody's Corner: Memory! Know What?](#)
by Woody Kaplan..... 11

[Transition Masks: Making The Grade](#)
by Stuart Lynn 13

[Putting Transition Masks To Work Two and a Half Examples](#)
by Stuart Lynn 15

This month's *e-focus* features Part I of Joe Ramsey's great December DIPSIG talk on "Turning Day Into Night". Jerry Dupree also kicks off a new series "Love Me – Love My DIG" that will feature member experiences with their digital cameras.

We also introduce a new column by Woody Kaplan – Woody's Corner – that will showcase bargains that can be purchased and other items related to changing technology. We challenge any member to find a better price than Woody!

Stuart Lynn also presents Part I of a (somewhat) short primer on "layers" for beginners, a topic that should no doubt have been discussed before last month's Beginners' Page article on Layer Masking. Oh well!

Stuart also reviews the subject of "Transition Masks" and gives examples of how they can be put to work.

A Happy (and very Digital) New Year to all readers! – Ed

This Month's Feature Article

Turning Day into Night - Part 1 by Joe Ramsey

Filmmakers have used filtering, lighting and exposure techniques for many years to turn daylight scenes into night on film. Now using Photoshop you can get the same effects in your still photos. Thanks to Sean Duggan's MacDesign tutorial for this technique that we're applying to a photo taken in Bodie.

To begin choose a photo (*Figure 1*) such as an old mansion, a photo from a ghost town or any scene that might be suitable for a night treatment.



Fig 1: Ghost Town in Daylight

To get the muted blue color seen at night we need to add a Hue/Saturation Layer. In the Options Bar go **Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Hue/Saturation**. In the dialog box click **Colorize**. Set **Hue** to 220 and **Saturation** to 30. Click OK then lower the layer opacity to 40-50% (*Figures 2 and 3*).



Fig 2: Hue-Saturation Applied



Fig 3: Hue/Saturation Settings

Next we'll darken the scene and increase contrast by adding a Curves Adjustment Layer. Go to **Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Curves**. Adjust (*Figure 4*) the curve as shown, click OK then lower Opacity of this curves adjustment layer to around 50%.

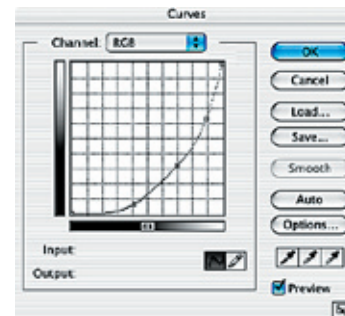


Fig 4: Adding Curves Adjustment Layer

Now let's make a deep blue night sky. Using your choice of selection tools select the sky area of your image. With the sky selection active add a Color Fill Layer. Go **Layer>New Fill Layer>Solid Color**. When the Color Picker appears choose a suitable dark blue shade for the sky and click OK.

Like magic (*Figure 5*) your sky selection is turned into a layer mask so that the blue fill is visible only in the sky. If the selection had been 'off' the entire layer would be blue with nothing else visible.



Fig 5: Blue Fill in Sky After Curves Adjustment

Well, the blue sky is nice but what about stars you ask. No problem. Click the *New Layer* icon (Figure 7) at the bottom of the *Layers Palette*. See illustration. Be sure the new layer is at the top of your *Layers Palette*. Press “d” for default colors (B&W) making sure that Black is set as Foreground color.

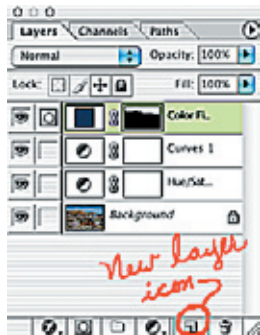


Fig 7: Add a New Layer

Press *Alt+Backspace* (PC)/*Option+Delete* (Mac) to fill the New Layer with black. Or, you can use the *Paint Bucket* which also fills with the Foreground color. While we’re at it if you press *Backspace* ((PC)/ *Shift+Delete* (Mac) the Fill dialog box pops up where you can select black fill.

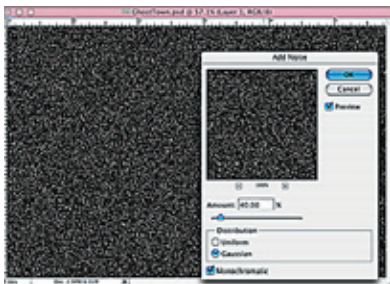


Fig 7: Black Fill Layer with Add Noise Dialog

So where are the stars? They’re coming. With the black filled layer active go to the **Filter** menu. Choose *Noise>Add Noise*. Adjust the noise settings to 40, Gaussian and Monochromatic (Figure 7). Click OK. To soften the edges of the noise go **Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur** and adjust the radius to 1.5 pixels.

Here is where you make the stars shine. Go **Image>Adjustments>Threshold**. Move the slider to the left until you see a reasonable number of stars and click OK. Set the layer blend mode at the top of the *Layers Palette* to *Lighten*. Now we’ll run the Gaussian Blur filter one more time with a radius setting of 0.5.

Wow! We’ve got stars but they’re all over the place. To make them shine only in the sky press *Ctrl+click/Cmd* on the Layer Mask in the Blue Color Fill layer. This will load the mask of the sky as a selection. Click the stars layer to make it active and go **Layer>Add Layer Mask>Reveal Selection**. Hit *Ctrl/Cmd+d* to turn off the sky selection and there you have it - another way to mask a selected area and turn daylight into night with stars in the sky (Figure 8).



Fig 8: Ghost Town at Night

For final touches go to the *Hue/Saturation* and /or *Curves Adjustment* layers that you created and fine tune the settings until your Day-Into-Night effect looks just right.

Save your files from this exercise. We’ll use them in Part 2 to replace the stars with storm clouds, add rain, turn on a light in that forlorn miners cabin and maybe even light a fire in the fireplace.

the dipsig page



by Joe Ramsey

DIPSIG is the Digital Photography Special Interest Group of the Coachella Valley Desert Camera Club. It meets monthly (except July and August) at 6.30 pm at the Courtyard Marriott at the corner of Cook and Frank Sinatra in Palm Desert

January 20 DIPSIG Meeting: Selections and More!

Making Better Selections in Photoshop

We all know about selection tools because we use them frequently and have a favorite or two. But are we using the best tool for each particular job? Are we making the most effective adjustments? It can be a daunting task. For instance, did you realize that there are three variations of the Lasso tool, four variations of the Marquee tool and a Magic Wand selection tool. You can also make selections by Color Range or Luminosity (Photoshop 6.0 or higher) or by applying Brush and Pencil tools either alone or in combination with masks and channels. Then to compound our dilemma every tool

has adjustments that affect it's application. If you are feeling somewhat intimidated by now, fret no more. Stuart Lynn will expand our bag of Photoshop Selection tricks at our January meeting when he discusses "Ten Ways to Make Better Selections in Photoshop". Knowing Stuart we can expect a very thorough and lucid presentation that will hone your selection techniques to expert levels.

Resizing Images

Even though some guidelines were presented in our club newsletters there are still questions regarding resizing images. We'll try to shed some light on this question with a discussion of resizing images loaded into your computer from various sources. Which settings should be used and which should be avoided. Also, we will discuss how the intended use of each image affects resizing decisions.

Bring Your "Day Into Night" Images!

Bring your prints or files on CD (at most 2 "before" and "after" images per person – that is, 4 in all) to the meeting, and show us how you applied "Day Into Night" techniques to one of your own images.

It's not required, but you will get more out of the meeting if you are able to bring laptops and power cords!

iView Media Review

by Joe Ramsey

Originally designed for Mac computers but now also available for PC Windows, iView Media is an easy-to-use cataloging program for making professional quality computer slide shows. You simply drag-and-drop or import photos and/or sound clips via menu commands. After all the files you want are placed in a catalog, which can be named to suit your show, the order in which they are displayed can be changed and the duration can also be adjusted either individually or globally in one second intervals from 0 to 60 seconds.

Sound tracks can be started to coincide with any slide. For instance, you can insert a voice sound clip that describes a particular photo and adjust the duration of the slide to match the duration of the sound clip. Great for narrating travel shows.

Joe Ramsey demonstrated the use of iView Media at the November DIPSIG meeting. Here he reviews its capabilities

You can show images full screen or there are several templates for showing multiple images simultaneously. Transitions between slides are selectable globally, yet fades, wipes or other transitions can be applied to individual slides even within the global. If you need prints, contact sheets of any show can be printed directly from iView as well as individual images.

A companion program, iView Catalog Reader, is available as a free download. It permits burning your show to a CD that can be viewed by anyone with a PC or Mac without having to install iView Media on their computer. However, you do need iView Media to make the original catalog. iView Media Pro is a more powerful version of iView Media, but if you use images that were processed in Photoshop you do not need iView Media Pro to make slide shows. Pro adds image adjustment functions which can be useful but not as comprehensive or refined as Photoshop.

For more information and to purchase iView

Media, see <http://www.iview-multimedia.com>. The iView Catalog Reader can be downloaded for free from <http://www.iview-multimedia.com/products/download.html>. A datasheet can also be obtained from http://www.iview-multimedia.com/press/ivm_datasheet.pdf.

Report on December DIPSIG Meeting

by Jerry Dupree

At the previous two meetings, the group had been learning portrait retouching techniques. This meeting was an opportunity for members to show what they had been doing and how they did it.



Dan Chalfont showed a number of pictures of his co workers he had taken and had changed backgrounds, lighting and settings. He showed several facial touchup techniques to improve the appearance of a picture. Jerry Dupree showed two “models” who had been retouched. One of the retouches also reduced the model’s weight by using the *Free Transform* tool to squeeze the image, therefore giving the impression of being thinner. The “before” and “after” pictures looked like they were years younger.

Joe Ramsey demonstrated a series of interesting Photoshop (or Photoshop Elements) techniques for changing a picture from “day” to “night” – and how to make it look like it’s raining by using the “noise” filter; how to darken the scene to take on the blue tones of night; and how to add stars, a moon, and clouds. There are endless possibilities for how artistic one wants to be with digital imaging. Joe is summarizing his talk in an article to appear in two parts. Part I appears in this issue of *e-focus*: “[Turning Day into Night - Part 1](#)”

Beginners' Page

A Short (?) Primer on Layers: Part I by Stuart Lynn

In earlier issues of *e-focus* and in last month's edition of this column, I introduced the subject of "layer masking" (see December 2003 *e-focus* "Beginner's Page: Layer Masking in Photoshop Elements"). I may have jumped the gun: not everyone understands what a "layer" is, let alone "layer masks". In this article I backtrack slightly, and provide a brief primer on "layers". It is written from a Photoshop Elements "perspective", the tool of most beginners; Photoshop itself differs in some details, but the basic concepts are similar.

"Layers" are powerful tools that allow digigraphers to "stack" images or parts of images on top of one another and control how much of each image shows through and in what manner. Imagine you have painted a series of images on different sheets of transparent plastic, and then you stack these sheets on top of one another – you have created a stack of layers!

Of course, one painting could cover an entire sheet of plastic, blocking anything showing through from the lower sheets or layers. But Photoshop Elements also allows you to control the transparency of each layer, so that some of the lower layers do show through an otherwise "blocking" image. And you can control other ways the layers interact with each other ("blending" for example, as we shall see later), and to create other interesting effects.

Getting to Work

Let's plunge in, Open any image in Photoshop Elements. Click on the *Layers* tab at the top right-hand corner to open the *Layers* Palette; and, still holding on to the tab, drag the palette down to "tear" it away from the dock (otherwise, it will keep closing after each use). You see an icon of

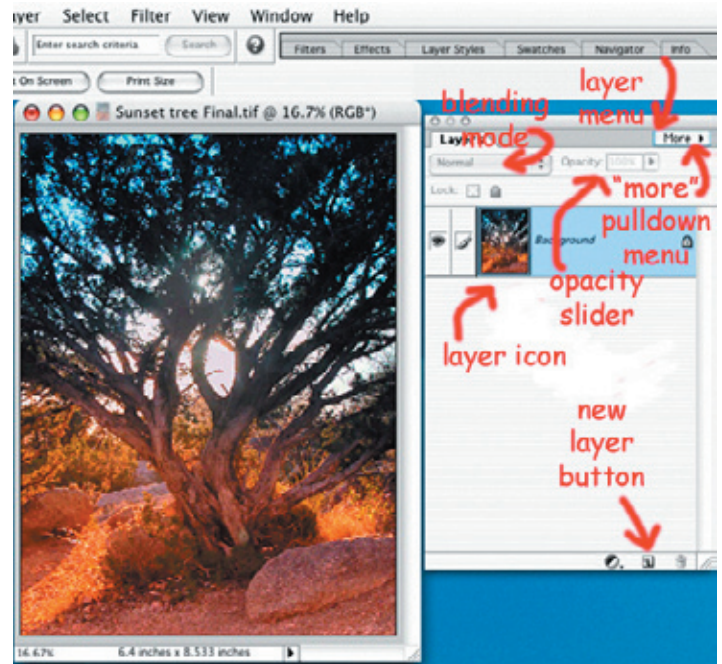


Fig 1: Original Image and Layers Palette

your image on a layer labeled "Background". Double-click anywhere on that layer to bring up a dialog box that allows you to change the name of the layer: change it to something more descriptive. (Renaming your layers is useful when you have several layers. It helps you to identify each layer.) Close the dialog box and you see your new name in the *Layers* palette.

Now open a second image in another window, preferably one of approximately the same size and resolution as your first image. Make a selection from this image (in the illustrations, I selected a "rose" from a larger image). Spread the two windows so that the second does not entirely block the first. Select your *Move* tool (type *v* as a shortcut to invoke the tool, or select it from your *Toolbox*). Holding down your mouse button, drag the selection (the "rose") over the old image and release the mouse button.

What have you done? The new image sits on top of the old image, partially or wholly blocking the old image. You have created a second layer. Still using your *Move* tool and holding down your

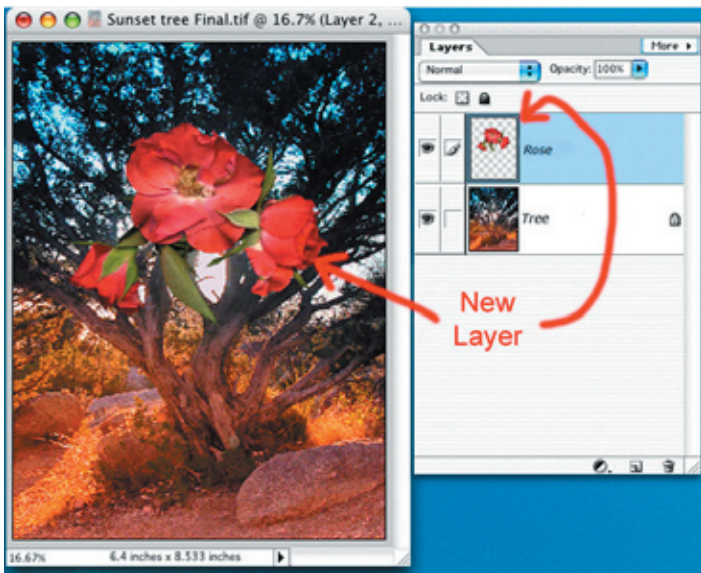


Fig 2: The New Layer is Added

mouse button, drag the new layer around on top of the original layer. There are also handles around this new layer allowing you to resize, distort, or rotate it as you wish.

Now look in your *Layers* palette. You see an icon of your new image in a new layer that sits on top of your old layer. You know how to rename this new layer (see above). Note that the new layer is highlighted, indicating that it has been selected. Click on the old layer, and it will become highlighted (selected) instead.

Now, clicking anywhere on the new layer in the *Layers* palette to select it and holding down your mouse button, drag it down below the old layer. You have reversed the “stacking” order so the old layer sits on top. This ability to control the stacking order is often important. Undo what you just did to restore the original stacking order (Ctl/Cmd-z).

Interactions Between Layers

But now the real fun begins. Select the top (new) layer. Now, in the *Layers* palette, click on the *Opacity* slider and drag it to the left. What happens? The further you move it to the left, the more of the bottom layer shows through! Your top layer has become partially transparent!

There are many reasons why transparency is important. We will give an example later in this article.

There’s more. Click on the little arrow by the small window in the *Layers* palette that currently displays the word “Normal”. This invokes a pulldown menu of choices affecting how the layers interact with each other, so-called “blending” of layers. The meaning of each of these different blending modes is beyond the scope of this article (some will be highlighted in future articles), and indeed some remain a mystery even to the most advanced aficionados.

For now, why don’t you experiment by selecting each in turn to get a sense of how each one effects the ways in which layers interact? In the example, I have selected “Vivid Light”. In combination with use of the *Opacity* slider, many different beautiful effects can be created. Incidentally, two of the most important blending modes for digigraphers are “Multiply” and “Screen” – this will be featured in next month’s *Beginners’ Page*.

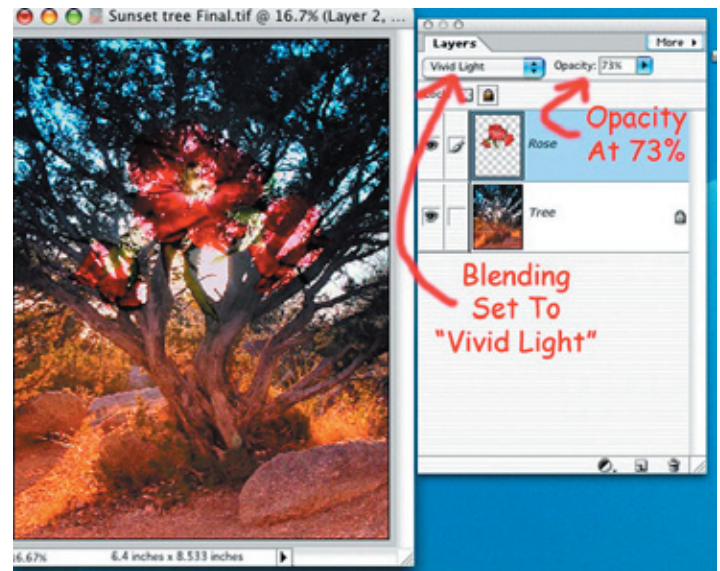


Fig 3: Changing Opacity and Blending Mode

Modifying Your Original Image (Non-Destructively)

Layers allow you to modify your image without losing the original image, in case you want to reverse your work. Let’s see how this operates in practice. Select your your new layer and then delete it by clicking on the “More” button at the top right of your *Layers* palette, This invokes a pulldown menu. Select *Delete Layer* and click on “Yes” from the dialog box that pops up. Or even quicker, just click on the *Trash* icon at the bottom

of the *Layers* palette. Now all that remains is your original layer.

Make a selection of part of your original image with the *Marquis* (shortcut: m) or *Lasso* (shortcut: l) tool. Now from the **Edit** menu, *Copy* and *Paste* this selection (you can also use shortcuts Ctl/Cmd-c and Ctl/Cmd-v). Photoshop elements *automatically* pastes this selection to a new layer above your original layer – you can see it in the *Layers* palette. By the way, you could have copied and pasted the entire image to a new layer by selecting the entire image in the first place (shortcut: Ctl/Cmd-a), but a quicker way to do this is to choose *Duplicate Layer* from the *More* pulldown menu in the *Layers* palette.

Now, making sure your new layer is selected, apply a filter such as a Gaussian blur: **Filter**>*Blur*>*Gaussian Blur*. Make a good blur by choosing a radius of, say, 8.0.

Note that you have made the change to the *copy* of the original image, but the *original* remains intact. To convince yourself of this, temporarily turn off the top layer by clicking the *eyeball* to the left of the layer. All that shows is the bottom layer. Turn the eyeball back on and select the top layer. Now note that you can vary the amount of the blur by moving the *Opacity* slider in the *Layers* palette to the left, that is, changing the transparency of the top layer to combine the two layers. If you like, you can “finalize” your image by flattening the “stack” of layers (in this example, two layers), collapsing it into a single image. Just select “Flatten Image” from the *More* pulldown menu in the *Layers* palette.

Note the other options in the *More* pulldown menu: *Merge Down*, used for merging a selected layer with the one below when you are working with a large stack of layers; and *Merge Visible*, useful when you want to just flatten a few layers from a whole stack – just turn off the eyeballs temporarily of the layers you do *not* want to collapse before invoking *Merge Visible*!

Special Layers

Photoshop Elements also provides three special kinds of layers: Adjustment Layers, Fill Layers,

and Type Layers. We will defer discussion of these to a future article. Adjustment Layers and Fill Layers are both invoked from the **Layers** menu. Type layers are invoked by selecting the *Type* tool (shortcut: t). Of most importance to digigraphers are the Adjustment Layers. For example, invoking a Hue/Saturation Adjustment layer (**Layers**>*New Adjustment Layer*>*Hue/Saturation*) places a separate layer on *top* of the selected layer that allows you to use the Hue/Saturation dialog without modifying the underlying layer(s), that is, retaining the original image! And you can manipulate the *Opacity* and *Blending Modes* of these Adjustment layers to determine how they interact with the underlying layer. Go ahead and experiment for now.

Fill and Adjustment Layers also allow you to add *Layer Masks* to control how much of the top layer is visible (see December 2003 *e-focus*: “Beginners’ Page: Layer Masking in Photoshop Elements”).

Layer Styles

One final note that we will take up in more detail in future articles. Photoshop Elements also allows you to create *Layer Styles* (also known as *Layer Effects*) invoked from the *Layer Styles* tab at the right of your *Toolbar*. These enable you to implement “drop shadows”, “neon glows”, and other interesting effects around the visible pieces on your layers (they really do not have much meaning when the layer consists of an image that fills the entire window). Again, for now, go ahead and experiment!

Layers are extremely powerful tools for building images. I find new ways to exploit them every time I use Photoshop or Photoshop Elements. There is much more than I can compress into this article, but I hope I have whetted your appetite to read more and experiment on your own.

By the way, you can always create an empty new layer by clicking on the New Layer button at the bottom of the *Layers* palette (or click on **Layers**>*New*>*Layer*). Blank layers are useful when you want to paint into them, for example, using the *Brush* tool.

Love me, Love my Dig

by Jerry Dupree

The advantages of digital photography are obvious; no film, therefore an unlimited amount of shots of a given subject. You, as the photographer, can experiment with angles, exposures, flash, or other settings without running out of film. You can immediately see the results and make any corrections in settings, perspective, or lighting. You get all that and eliminate the cost of film and processing. Who could argue with that?

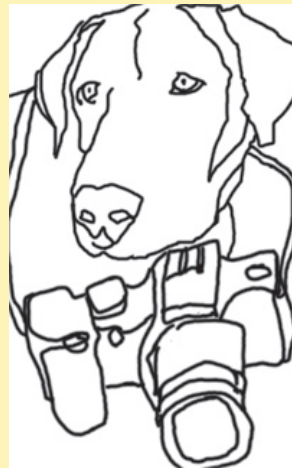
You also get to enhance, manipulate, lighten, darken, combine, crop, enlarge, and reduce the photo, and print it on photo paper, greeting cards, or many other types of media such as tee shirts, bumper stickers, and an endless assortment of banners, and holiday items. You can store thousands of pictures on CD's and DVD's in a shoebox. Try doing all of that with film!

I bought my first digital camera several years ago and it recorded on a floppy disc. Wow, I could get 20 pictures on a 30-cent floppy disc, what a bargain. They were reasonably good snap shots, but nothing worth framing.

The technology continued to advance faster than any consumer product I have ever seen. I visited a commercial

photo lab that specialized in digital photography and they "offered" me a high-end digital camera for \$25,000. I replied that I to less than \$5,000 before I would are several digital cameras that can less than \$2,000, and falling.

Canon has already brought to follow very soon – an excellent SLR \$1,000. I recently bought a Nikon of expensive Nikon lenses that am finding the manufacturers are for digital SLR cameras that are focus lenses.



would wait until they came down take a serious look at it. Now, there out shoot that one on the market for

market – and others will surely digital camera that costs less than D100 SLR because I had a collection have been taking up space. Now I making lenses especially designed light years beyond the earlier auto

Friends and relatives have asked my advice on which type of camera to buy. I believe the major brands are very competitive as far as technology goes. Some folks like Chevies, some like Fords. The same is true among photographers. Some like Nikon, some like Canon. There are many other fine brands.

The major division comes at whether to get a "Big Zoom" or an SLR camera. When traveling by air or by car, space and convenience mean a lot. We have enough luggage to hump in and out of airports, hotels, and cars, without adding a few more pounds and cubic feet of lenses, tripods, and gear. For that reason, I prefer to carry a 5.2 megapixel Sony F 707, which will soon be replaced by the newer 8.0 megapixel F 828. It is small enough, light enough, and takes excellent quality pictures. With the added

LOVE ME...

LOVE MY DIG...

wide angle and telephoto adapters, I have not felt “under powered” as far as cameras are concerned.

I used to laugh at the fathers at Disneyland bent over with a heavy camera around their neck, a camera case and tripod in one hand, and diaper bag in the other. I never wanted to be that guy. The high-end 4.0 to 6.0 megapixel zoom cameras are great for that kind of shooting.

While in Hawaii, I was taking pictures of surfers riding waves. I would center the surfer in the frame and shoot the picture, only to find that when it recorded the image, the surfer slipped away or wiped out. anything moving a quick shot, or shot, the Sony was

“You Get All That And Eliminate The Cost Of Film And Processing. Who Could Argue With That?”

I found that for that demanded more than one inadequate.

It was for that reason that I chose to buy a 6.0 megapixel Nikon D100. While the Sony will remain as my primary camera, the Nikon will be for specialized photography such as nature and wildlife. As one of my hobbies, I call predators and can entice them from a long distance to come in to my call. I will be using the Nikon to bring in coyotes, foxes, bobcats, and badgers, and hopefully some mountain lions for some candid shots. The call works equally well for owls, hawks, eagles, and ravens. I have an 80-400mm telephoto zoom lens to shoot wildlife pictures. Recently, pictures of hummingbirds. outside of our kitchen lights off, at the right time hummingbirds to show lens long enough to get some

This is the first, in what will be an occasional series, of articles by club members and others on what they particularly like about their digital camera – Ed

I have been shooting We installed a feeder window and with the of day, I sit and wait for themselves in front of my pictures.

I have been experimenting with shutter speed and lighting to try photographing a hummingbird and stopping its wing motion. That kind of photography is only possible with a more advanced SLR camera.

TIP OF THE MONTH:

Two Gradients for the Price of One!

In several articles in this issue of *e-focus* (see “[Transition Masks – Making the Grade](#)”), we describe how to use gradients in masks to create a smooth transition between different layers, what I call a “transition mask”. But often you want to use *two* gradients in the same mask for even more interesting effects. Can this be done – without the second gradient wiping out the first?

You bet. The trick is for the *first* mask as usual to use a black to white gradient as described in the article. But for the *second* mask, use a black to *transparent* gradient. You select this option in the *Gradient Toolbar* at the top of the screen when the *Gradient* tool is selected.

You can even add a third and fourth gradient that way! Try it.

Thanks again to [Steve Broback](#) of [Avondale Media](#) for this tip. [Click here](#) for more tips from his website.–MSL

Woody's Corner by Woody Kaplan

MEMORY! KNOW WHAT?

Now that you have that new camera with a 16mb card, what do you do now?

My suggestion is to get on line and start looking for the biggest memory card you can afford. Just in case you've been locked up in the closet of late, prices are dropping faster than the price of gas has been going up.

Think of all the trips of interest you have taken with film. Some years ago the "little woman" and I went to Africa for 30 days: she used film and I shot digital. One thing you don't want to ever do is run out of film or memory on a trip of a lifetime. Digital memory was easy – obviously I could pack all I had in virtually no space at all and it was just not a weight factor. Bulky film on the other hand required its own suitcase significantly adding to the total weight. Digital is so much more convenient – I can't understand why everybody has not yet switched!

Digital "everything" is our future. The way we live is changing all around us. Have you been in for medical testing that required an MRI lately? In the "old" days it was done with film and it wasn't easy to obtain copies for all your doctors, and the cost was much greater. Today MRIs are stored digitally – and copies can be emailed to your doctor in minutes. And 2004 is projected to be the turnaround year for movies when they convert to all digital format.

Now that we all realize digital has changed our life style, we must shop for the best prices for digital memory.

From time to time in this Column, I will update you on what's new and where the best bargains can be found. This will help us all save money so that we can afford our next digital camera! Yes, obsolescence is a factor. A digital camera does not cost \$1,000 – it costs \$300 a year for life. But it's worth it – and each cycle brings so much more capability!

While shopping around for a bigger compact flash card for my Olympus E-20 I came across a site with great prices. How about a 1gb MicroDrive for less than \$140? How about a 2gb MicroDrive for less than \$200? Only a year ago, you could expect to pay around \$400 for a 1gb Microdrive.

Link to <http://www.mydigitaldiscount.com>. All kinds of goodies can be found: MP3 players, batteries, hard drives, and naturally any kind of memory (wish I could find brain memory ;-))

Scour the Internet yourself. Let us know if you find lower prices or "must have items." This Column is for all of us, and we can all help each other.



Woody's Corner Continued On Next Page

More of the Future

What will “they” come up with next? Just when you thought it was safe to say, “ They can’t top this do-hickey,” along comes something new.

3D Is Easy

How would you like to shoot *and* show 3-D pictures without giving up your first born? For less the \$130 you can have eye-popping pictures. Sure you must wear 3D glasses but can you imagine looking at a picture of our new governor, contours and all, vs. a boring flat picture?

Link to: <http://www.Photo3-D.com>

The Best Little Picture SlideShow Maker on the Web

So many programs, so little time to use them all. Each of us have different views on showing pictures. How about nice, neat little package called “iView”? See Joe Ramsey’s review of this product in this issue of *e-focus*: “[iView Media Review](#)”.

Check this out: <http://www.iview-multimedia.com>

Facelifts Made Easy

If only life was this simple! Only \$29.95 and you can make that less then perfect picture a “Mona Lisa.” Try it free for 7 days.

Only one little thing wrong with program, Windows only.

For true fun: <http://www.facefilter.com>

Emailing Photos with a Flair

Make your own stationery, drop as many pictures as you want into letter and send by any email service. Over 100 fun and creative stationery designs. (Windows program, but can be used on Virtual PC on a Mac).

30 day money back guarantee: <http://www.sendphotos.com>

Transition Masks – Making the Grade

by Stuart Lynn

In an article “Layer Masking: the Basic Concepts” in December 2003 e-focus, I reviewed the basic theory underlying layer masking in Photoshop. I deferred to this issue some ideas on how layer masking can be used in neat ways to improve your images. “Transition Masks” is one of those ways.

By the way, this works best in Photoshop. It’s application in Photoshop Elements is limited. But it’s still useful to understand the idea, because it has applications there, too ! Remember, the main constraint is that in Elements, you can only apply masks to certain special kinds of layers.

The name “Transition Masks” is mine. I would prefer to call them “Gradient Masks” since they

Making Smooth Transitions Between Layers

make use of gradients, but that means something else in Photoshop and Photoshop Elements. Too bad!

The idea is simple, First, makes sure you have read the “basic concepts” article in the last issue and understand the concept of layer masking. You now know that wherever the mask is painted black, the underneath layer shows through; wherever it is painted white, only the top layer shows; and wherever it is painted gray, a mixture of the two layer shows. The darker the gray, the more of the bottom layer shows – just as if you had set your Opacity slider in the Layers Palette somewhat over to the left.

But if you could use your Gradient tool to paint a continuous gradient from black to white into your mask, then the image would smoothly change from the bottom layer to the top layer! That is what I mean by a “Transition Mask”.

Let’s look at how to create “transition masks”.

Then we will present a two or three illustrative examples where they might prove useful.

Making a Transition Mask

Let’s use the same example we used in the “basic concepts article”, a red layer sitting on top of a blue layer. Add a layer mask to the red layer (you remember how to do this – and you practiced doing it, right?), by clicking on the *New Layer* button (second from the left) at the bottom of

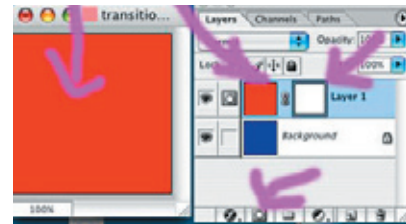


Fig 1: Adding a Layer Mask

the *Layers* Palette. As always, this fresh mask is painted pristine white – so only the top layer – the red layer in our example – shows. And the mask itself is selected (shown by the double line around it in the top layer). See *Figure 1*.

Now click to select your *Gradient* tool in your *Toolbox* (it may be hidden behind your *Paint Bucket* tool, so you may need to click on the little arrow to reveal your *Gradient* tool). Note this brings up a dialog box in your *Toolbar* at the top of the window. It presents several choices, including whether to select a linear gradient, a radial gradient, or other gradients. For now, make sure you have selected a linear gradient (see *Figure 2*). Note also that the gradient layer is

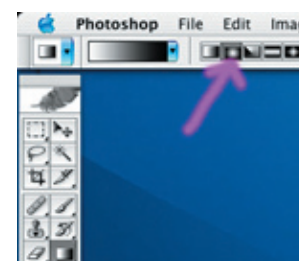


Fig 2: Selecting a Linear Gradient

represented with white on the left shading to black on the right.

Making sure the mask is selected in the “red” layer (if not, just click on it) as well as the *Gradient*, click somewhere in the top left of your image and keep holding the mouse button down.

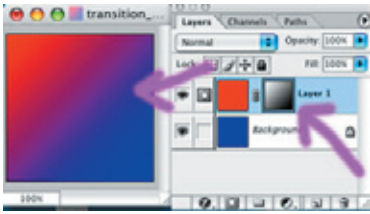


Fig 3: Applying a “Transition” Mask

Now drag a line to somewhere in the bottom right corner and release your mouse button.

Wow! Two things have happened (see *Figure 3*). First, your image is now continuously changing from red to blue through various shades of purple. And you can see why because, second, in your layer mask you can see that you have painted a smooth gradient from white to black – and you know what layer masks do to your image layers. It is white on the top left allowing the red top layer to show, and blue on the bottom right allowing the lower blue layer to show. White to black, because you dragged that way and that is how the gradient is showing in the tool bar.

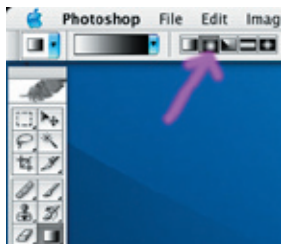


Fig 4: Selecting a Radial Gradient

What would happen if you used a radial gradient instead of a linear gradient. Well, just experiment. Undo what you last did (*Ctrl/Cmd-z*) and click on the *Radial Gradient* in the *Toolbar* (see *Figure 4*). Now drag your line from the center of the red image out towards the corners and release.

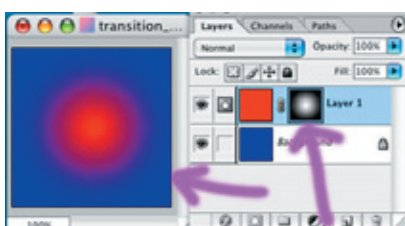


Fig 5: Applying a Radial “Transition” Mask

You have now created an image (*Figure 5*) which radially changes from red in the center to blue at the edges. And you can see why by looking at what has happened to your layer mask.

So that’s what “transition masks” are all about – ways of creating smooth transitions between layers.



Fig 6: Adjusting the Gradient

Oh, one more thing. If you double-click on the gradient icon in your *Toolbar*, a dialog box will pop up (*Figure 6*) that allows you to fine tune your gradient. If, for example, you want a more gradual transition from white to black in your layer mask, just move the center point on the slider to the right. You may want to experiment with different settings so you learn how to gain precise control.

So What’s The Use?

These “transition masks” are very powerful. In other articles in this issue of e-focus, I show how they can be used for more precise blurring of backgrounds when, for example, improving portraits as we reviewed in the December, 2003 issue of e-focus. I also show how they can be used for “Making Shadows Sing”, and how to counter the fall-off effect that often occurs with the use of flash.

In a nice application at the last DIPSIG meeting, Joe Ramsey showed how a “transition mask” could be used to make added light fall off with distance from its source (in this case, a window lit at night) as it lights up the surrounding area.

You will find other ways, too. By the way, in this month’s “Tip of the Month”, I show how to add two “transition masks” to the same image. Comes in useful at times.

(Footnotes)

¹ Recall our convention that *Ctrl/Cmd-z* means *Ctrl-z* on a PC and *Cmd-z* on a Mac.

PUTTING TRANSITION MASKS TO WORK: TWO (and a half!) EXAMPLES

1. Blurring Backgrounds The Right Way

In the December 2003 issue of *e-focus*, I described “Ten Digi-Steps to Better Portraits”, including the step of blurring the background to focus attention on the portraits itself. I suggested using the *Gaussian Blur* filter after selecting the background.

The problem is that this blurs the entire background uniformly, ignoring the fact that those parts of the background that are closer to the portrait (which is presumably in sharp focus) will be sharper than those parts that are further away. Fortunately, we now have another tool at our disposal to come to the rescue: *Transition Masks* as described in this month’s *Feature Article*. You will want to read that article before reading this one.

How does this work? Let’s go back and look at the portrait that occupied our attention in last month’s article. Recall that we selected and then blurred the background. This time, *before* blurring



Before (Blurred)

the background, copy it to a new layer (Ctl/ Cmd-j in Photoshop, or *Copy* and *Paste* in Photoshop Elements). Call it “MyBackground” to distinguish it from the original *Background* layer. Unfortunately, Photoshop labels the original layer *Background*, which confuses the term with the sense in which we are meaning the background to the portrait. You can figure it out, I’m quite sure! Once the background is safely on the new layer above the original layer, you can proceed to blur that new layer using **Filter: Gaussian Blur** according to taste. Blur it sufficiently so that the areas furthest away look right.

Now we want the areas further back to remain blurred, and those closer to be sharper. Here’s where “transition masks” come into play, just as

in the previous article: [“Transition Masks – Making the Grade”](#).

Just add a layer mask to the top *MyBackground* layer. Then select your *Gradient* tool from the *Toolbox*. Make sure you have selected a linear gradient in the *Toolbar*.

Also make sure your foreground color is black and your background color is white (typing the character “d” on the keyboard is a shortcut that makes this happen).



After
(Graduated Blur)

Now click on the background to the portrait at a point furthest away from the portrait – in this example, somewhere around the base of the trees. *But don’t release your mouse button*. While keeping the mouse button down, drag a line vertically down to somewhere around the plane of the portrait, and then release your mouse button.

What has happened? You can see the gradient “painted” into your *Layer Mask* icon. And you know the effect by now. Where the mask is white, the blurry top layer shows – that is, towards the “back” of the picture. Where the mask is black, the sharp top layer shows – that is, towards the v“front” of the picture. And the grays in between

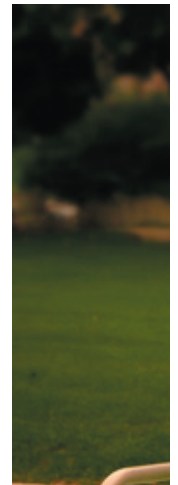
of the gradient ensure a smooth transition from one into the other.



Before

Since the effect may be hard to see in the small images above, here is a slice of each image that may make it easier to see what is going on

Problem solved!



After

2. Removing Flash “Drop-Off” Effects

Flash is both a blessing and a curse. Used correctly, it provides an essential light source. But there are many pitfalls in its use that can lead to ugly effects. The worst of these is harsh shadows. Perhaps the next in order is that because its power drops off so rapidly with distance, closer objects appear so much brighter



Before



than those further away – and this “drop-off” effect plays out even over short distances of a few feet.

“Transition” Masks to the rescue! Simply duplicate the image to another layer, and lighten that layer (you can use the *Lighten* slider in

the *Hue/Saturation* window – invoked with *Ctrl/Cmd-u*; or blend the two layers using *Screen* in the *Layers Palette*) to the point where the darker (further away) area in the duplicate layer (normally at the top of the image) more closely matches the lighter (closer) area in the original layer (normally at the bottom of the image).

Now apply a “transition” mask to this duplicate layer, using a white-to-black linear gradient



After

in the mask. See previous article [“Transition Masks – Making the Grade”](#) for the mechanics of doing this. And the whys and wherefores of how it works.

Presto! The “transition” mask has graded the areas into a more uniform lighting appearance.

Problem solved!

The third example “*Making Shadows Sing*”, that was promised in the December 2003 issue, was not ready in time to meet the deadline for this issue. My apologies to readers!

The idea is essentially to apply “transition masks” to harsh shadows to provide a somewhat smoother, or graduated, shadow. First copy a selection of the shadow to a new layer. Second, lighten the new layer. Third, apply a “transition” mask to gradually change the shadow from its original dark tones nearer the object casting the shadow to the lighter shadow further away from the object.

But it is not as simple as this description would imply. Shadow tones have to be carefully monitored. Often, the far edges of the shadow become harsh or ultra-light borders that have to be cloned out with the *Stamp* tool. Occasionally, more than one gradient has to be applied (see this issue [“Tip of the Month”](#)) because of changing directions for the shadows.

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**E-FOCUS IS ISSUED AS AN ELECTRONIC SUPPLEMENT TO
IN FOCUS, THE NEWSLETTER
OF THE COACHELLA VALLEY DESERT CAMERA CLUB**

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