PETER EASTWAY AND BETTER PHOTOGRAPHY MAGAZINE'S

CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY FOR PHOTO TOURS AND WORKSHOPS

INVISIBLE EDITING

Better
Photography

Transport, Wendover, USA. Three images were stitched together to create this montage of an actual scene. Keep your post-production technique invisible.

CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY FOR PHOTO TOURS AND WORKSHOPS

EXCERPT: **INVISIBLE EDITING**

Contents

Iceberg, Port Charcot. The stories behind this image can be read in Peter's book, *The New Tradition*. Post-production was used to regain the drama of the location.

Invisible Photoshop

Photoshop should be invisible. When people look at photographs today, the first thing they ask themselves is how much Photoshop – or post-production – has been applied to an image? But this doesn't mean our editing should be visible.

Everyone knows about Photoshop. In fact, if a photograph looks too good or too perfect, the first assumption is that the image has been doctored in some way that is probably inappropriate.

Enhanced

This is a sad state of affairs.

Photographs have always been 'doctored' or enhanced. Unlike painters who begin with a blank canvas, photographers have had to put up with what they placed in front of their camera and, sometimes, reality wasn't exactly what they wanted. So if it were possible, if it were necessary, the photograph was changed. Enhanced. Improved.

Of course, this doesn't apply to scientific, documentary, sport and wildlife photographers who wish to capture reality exactly as it is, but most other genres look to 'improve' on reality.

What I find interesting is that if an image is doctored, some critics consider it to be less of a photograph than one that is raw. Yet this summation is completely at odds with the reality of the photography process.

Let's compare capturing a photograph in camera and creating a photograph with post-production techniques.

The former is a matter of observation, framing and timing. There can be great skill in setting up the camera correctly, choice of lenses, lighting and then the nuances of pose and expression. There's no doubt capture is a craft and if you add in a healthy dose of imagination, you can be incredibly creative.

Some photographers like to stop here, leaving the rest of the image creation to the camera and its automatic processing. This is a valid approach. It's like the non-fiction writer.

However, creating a photograph may include all or just some of these capture skills and then add on additional steps in post-production. The resulting image may no longer represent reality because the photographer's imagination has taken it to another place. This is the fiction writer.

I don't think it is fair to say the post-production process automatically makes photography easier or that it is cheating. If anything, photographers should be applauded for using their imagination to take the image further.

Honesty

Post-production requires just as much imagination and skill as capturing the finished result in camera.

What I would like to encourage is both approaches to photography.

And honesty.

There are some genres of photography where the public expects an image to be 'real'. We have a contract with society which says that in some contexts, our photographs should not be tampered with, at least not too much.

So, where does this leave us? Is it okay to post-produce our photographs or not?

Yes.

There are very few photographers who take their images straight from the camera without editing the file. It's the amount of editing and how it is applied that matters.

For some, a quick wash in Lightroom or Capture One is all that's required to turn a raw file into a masterpiece.

For others, that masterpiece takes a little longer with lots of composite and adjustment layers in Photoshop. And while most people can agree on the extremes (edited or not edited), none of us agree on how much editing is allowed. Or do we?

In some ways, we all agree. If the post-production cannot be seen, then it's allowable. If we look at the image and all we see is the photograph, then the post-production has been successful.

Invisible Photoshop

Of course, sometimes we 'just know' that a photograph has been edited. It might be the extra shape and drama in the sky, the crispness of the leaves on a tree or the sheen on wet rocks by a river. Post-production can make things look more 'real' than the camera can on its own and, as we become more experienced, we can perceive the techniques.

Invisible Photoshop is when the post-production techniques are hidden within the photograph. The viewer might figure the image has been edited, but they can't put a finger on exactly where or how much.

But Invisible Photoshop doesn't mean the image has to be believable.

For me, photography is a two step process: capture and post-production. I believe photographers should be capable of both processes, especially because post-production allows them to complete the creative process more fully.
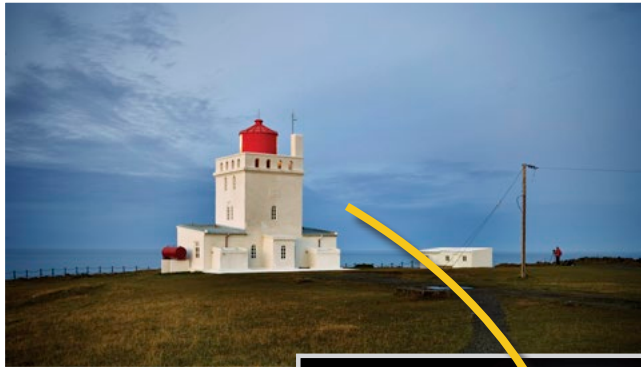
1. A large (1000 px) brush with Hardness = 0%. The subtle darkness of the centre of the image is noticeable, but not where it stops and starts.
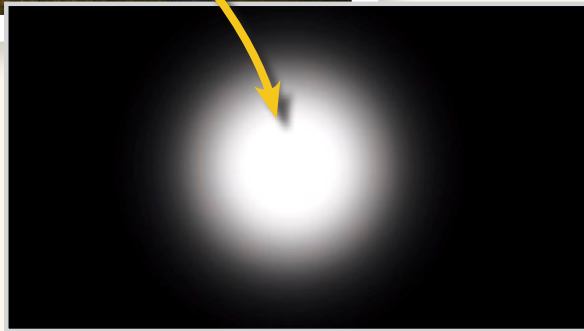
2. The same large (1000 px) brush with Hardness = 100%. The darkness of the centre of the image is now obvious and unsatisfactory.
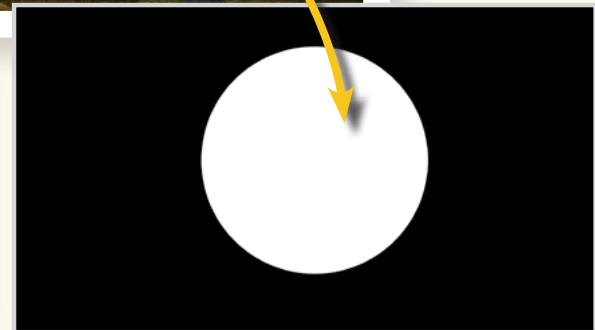
ESSENTIAL POST-PRODUCTION SKILLS

The Use of Brushes

When you make a localised adjustment to a photograph (such as darkening a sky or lightening up a face), you have to deal with the edge of that area. And that usually means using a brush.

If the edge is too abrupt or 'hard', it is very easy to see (as shown in the examples above). On the other hand, if the edge is blurred, feathered or 'soft', it is difficult to discern where the adjustment begins.

Invisible Photoshop requires us to make localised adjustments in a way that our handiwork cannot be seen.

### Photoshop, Lightroom, Capture One…

In most editing programs, we use a brush tool to determine where our localised adjustments will go. In other words, we use the brush to paint over the sky we wish to darken, or over the face we want to lighten.

In Photoshop, we are using the brush on a mask. A black area on the mask conceals the effect of the adjustment we're making, a white area on the mask reveals it. What's
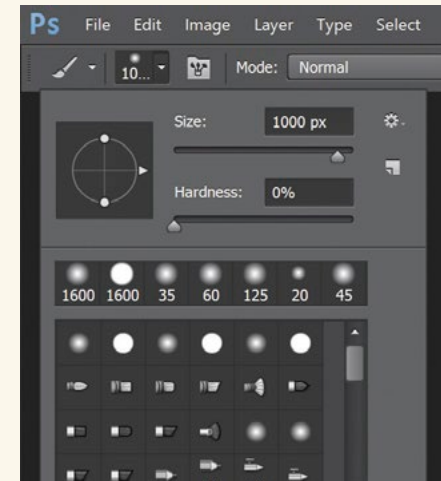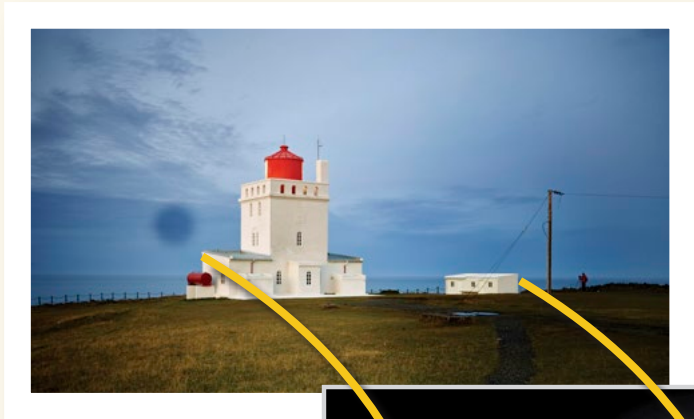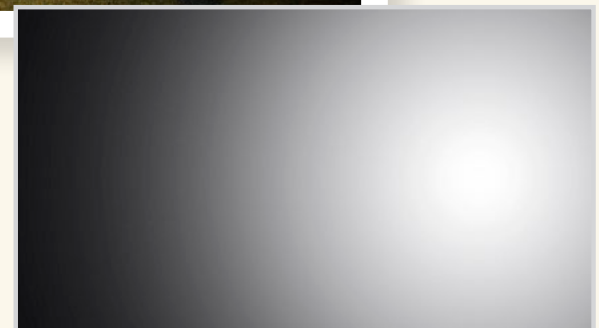
3. Even if your brush is set to Hardness = 0%, a small brush (left) can have clearly defined lines. This is sometimes necessary, but be aware!
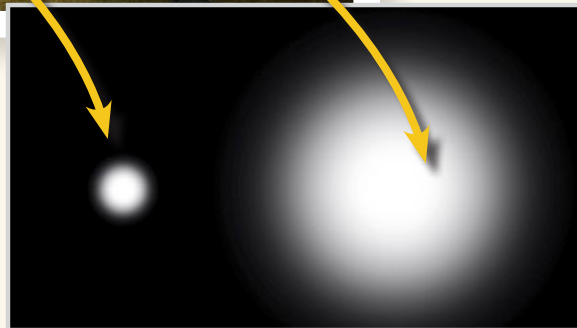
4. Making the brush really big (up to 5000 pixels) with Hardness = 0% can produce very gradual transitions from white to black.

important is the transition between the white and black areas.

In Lightroom and Capture One, the same principle applies when painting in the adjustments or using the graduated filter.

The use of the brush and its softness or hardness determines how gradual the transition is.

Size and Hardness

The brush is used to paint in large or small areas. A large brush makes the job quicker, but a small brush can be essential when adjusting fine details.

If you are wanting to lighten up a building, you probably want to use a brush with a hard edge so you can accurately outline the building's sharp edges (or use another technique to make a selection for the mask). In comparision, if you wanted to lighten up the middle of a landscape, a large brush with very soft edges is more likely to be used.

In both cases, the size and the hardness of the brush are changed to suit the subject and the type of adjustment you wish to make.

In some programs, you can also adjust

the opacity and or the flow of the brush. These affect the speed and subtlety of the adjustment areas you are defining.

Small = Hard

One useful trick in getting the most out of your brush work is understanding that the softness of the edges you produce is controlled not only by the hardness setting, but by the size of the brush as well.

A large brush with a Hardness of 0% has a very large 'feather', while a small brush with the same Hardness of 0% will have a much narrower (harder) feather in absolute terms.

To produce very broad, soft transitions, consider using very large brushes. In Photoshop, you may wish to reduce the size of the image on the screen to make it easier to apply a very large brush stroke.

In many ways, brushes are the most important key to Invisible Photoshop technique.

The use of your brush determines how the adjusted area will sit with the rest of the image.

If you can see where the adjustment begins, separately from the subject it is adjusting, then you have not been successful.
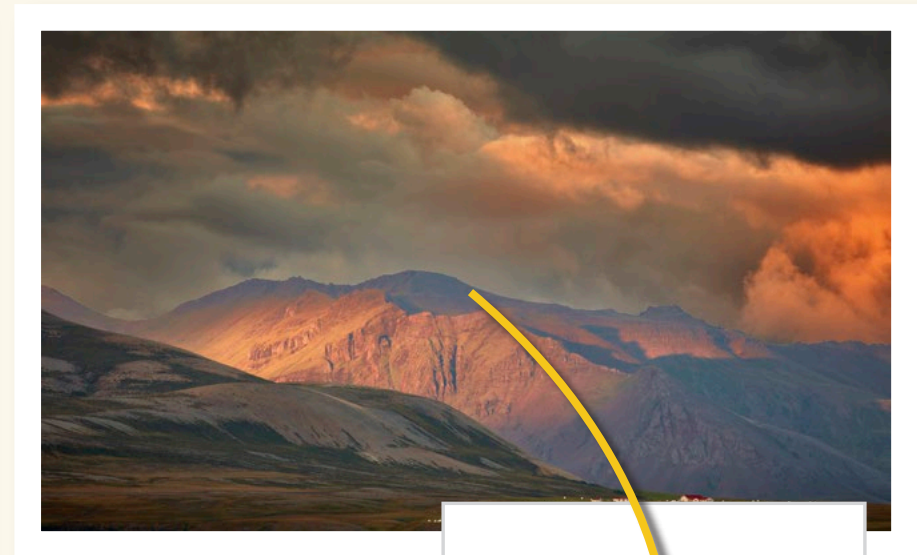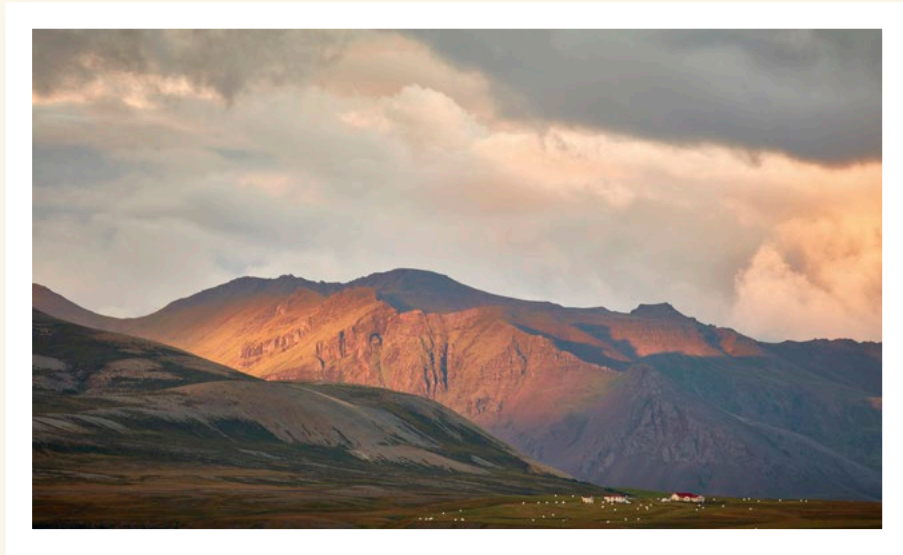
1. It is possible to make very precise masks that outline the horizon, but do they produce a realistic result, or does the horizon area end up looking a little funny?

Don't Adjust On The Horizon Line

Darkening the sky is a common adjustment – but the trick is not to use the horizon line as your edge. Rather than a precise mask, try something soft above or below.

One of the most common adjustments photographers make to their images is to darken the sky.

The most obvious solution is to select the sky and to darken it down, using the horizon line as the border.

The challenge with this approach, especially if you make a strong adjustment, is that the land below the sky can look artificial.

If you look at skies in nature, they are usually (but not always) lighter towards the horizon, and the land below is darker than the sky.

However, if you darken down the sky too much, all the way to the horizon line and without also darkening down the land below it, the result can look contrived. The more strongly you darken the sky, the more obvious the effect because the land below simply doesn't look right.

Another more practical problem using the horizon line as the border for your adjustment, is that it can be very difficult to select. In the example here, the horizon is a bald mountain range which is a simple, sharp line.

Compare this with a horizon covered with trees and it is much more difficult (maybe impossible) to create a clean border.
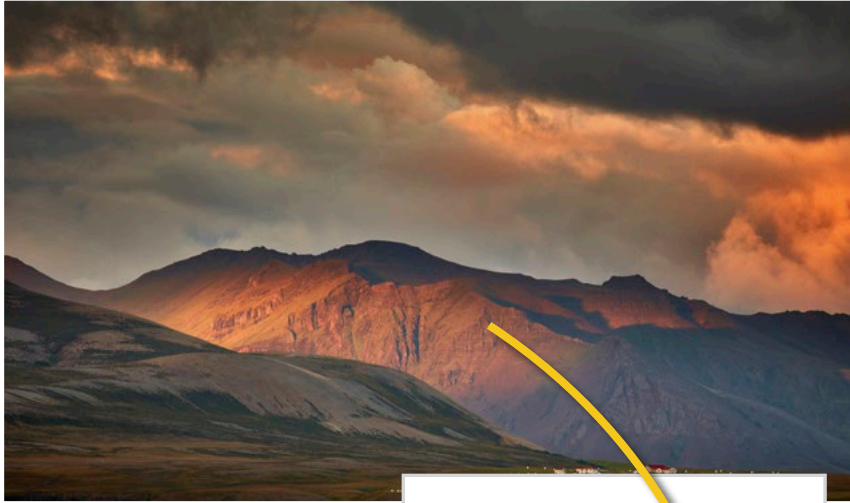
2. One option is to darken all of the sky, plus the tops of the mountain range, thus hiding where the darkening transition occurs

3. A second option is to darken only the higher clouds and not make any change to the areas immediately above and below the horizon line.

Rather than using the horizon as your border, think of using a soft edge brush, either above or below the horizon.

Below The Horizon

Using a large brush with Hardness = 0%, brush along the horizon or slightly below it. This will ensure the sky and the top of the land are darkened together.

It also means the transition area is not on the horizon (where it would be expected), but feathered across the landscape below.

The advantage of this technique is that the lightness of the sky towards the horizon is maintained relative to the density of the landscape immediately below it.

Above The Horizon

Optionally, you can leave the horizon alone completely and just darken the clouds above. Again, using a large brush with Hardness = 0%, brush above the horizon so the transition area is well above the horizon edge. You may have to experiment a little to get the right brush position.

It is also possible to do two smaller adjustments, one below the horizon and a second above the horizon.

By avoiding the horizon line itself, where the viewer's eye will naturally fall, you are helping to hide where your adjustments are being made

Graduated Filter or Mask

A lot of photographers use the gradient filter or brush (in Photoshop, Lightroom or Capture One) to darken the sky.

This works much like a graduated neutral density filter on a camera, but the problem is you have a straight transition area which may not match the shape of the horizon.

There are no absolutes when it comes to editing techniques, but a straight transition edge may not be suitable for horizon lines that have trees or buildings intersecting them, simply because the tops of the trees and the buildings will be darkened as well.

For these types of horizons, a more sophisticated approach using a channel mask in combination with a gradient mask may be appropriate, but that is beyond the scope of this article.

If you do have trees or buildings cutting the horizon, you may be better off just darkening the sky above these elements so as to avoid darkening them incorrectly.

Vignette What Is Already There

The easiest way to create a vignette is with a vignetting tool. However, vignetting tools use a regular shape (a circle or a round-cornered rectangle) and if you apply them too strongly, they simply look fake.

Check the image. Notice the diagonal line in the clouds (above). If you wanted to darken the sky, it would be harder to see your technique if you darkened along the same line (below).

However, the idea behind vignetting is a good one.

The viewer's eye will rove around the photograph and if there are light areas on the edges, this is an invitation for the viewer to leave your photograph. To keep the viewer inside, many photographers suggest darkening the edges.

You don't have to darken all four edges. Some edges may already be quite dark enough.

Similarly, you don't have to darken just the edges, but you could darken elements that surround the image naturally.

In the example above, the sky at the top of the frame is quite light and takes attention away from the icebergs below. Darkening all four edges may have helped contain the image, but it's not really necessary to darken the bottom of the image because it is already quite dark enough.

However, note the shape of the clouds that are already in the sky. There is a natural diagonal cloud front with a darker area above.

Rather than darkening the top of the image horizontally, consider darkening the triangle of sky to the top right with a soft feather along the edge of the light cloud (see the bottom image).

By darkening what is already in the image, what is already along the edges of the frame, you can create a more natural vignette that is invisible to the casual observer.

Cover up the top photograph, look away from the page and then look at the bottom photograph again.

The darkening of the top right corner is completely believable because it is based on what is already there.

Small Adjustments, Not A Big One

We don't want to spend too much time sitting in front of a computer, processing our files. On the other hand, we do want to produce work that is refined and invisibly edited.

1. Just two adjustments were applied to this image, darkening the left of the room and lightening the lady's face.

It can be tempting to just give an image one or two quick adjustments and think that will do.

True, sometimes you only need a few adjustments, but for more complicated scenes and subjects, 10, 20 or 30 adjustment layers (or brushes) may be required.

In the example above, the wall and floor around the lady required different degrees of adjustment in different places, so a single adjustment couldn't do the scene justice.

The better technique is to break down the image into small discrete areas, such as the wooden floor, the mat, the white area of wall, the rest of the wall – and so on. Then work on each area separately.

Note in the bottom image how different parts of the scene have slightly different tonal (brightness) values. Compare this to the top image. These differences are considered important by the photographer, even if subtle to the casual observer.

There's another reason for using lots of small adjustments instead of one or two large ones: the masks and the transitions.

If you make one strong adjustment with a single mask, it is harder to hide the transition area, even with a big, soft brush.

In comparison, two, three or four gentler adjustments which build up to achieve the same total effect, each with slightly different masks and mask positions, can help to hide where your handiwork has been.

Of course, if your masks are a little clumsy or not feathered enough, there's a chance your editing will look worse, not better.

However, let's look at this positively! Take lots of small steps, ensuring each is invisible before you proceed to the next one, and the final result should look stellar!

2. In the second version, 12 adjustment layers were used to more subtly achieve a similar, but more sophisticated rendition.

Removing White Halo Lines

One of the telltales of poor post-production are unsightly white lines between areas of strong tone, which can happen when using masks and layers. Here's a quick solution for fixing some of them!

For instance, when you oversharpen an image, you can get white haloes around all your subject, but you can also get similar problems when darkening a sky next to the horizon, or when dropping in (compositing) one subject onto another.

If the problem comes from your sharpening technique, you need to reduce your Amount and Radius settings. (Note, some very fine white lines from sharpening can be quite acceptable when viewed in the final image as they are not separately distinguishable.)

However, strong white lines around your subjects due to compositing or tonal adjustments should be removed to retain your invisible technique.

In some situations, the problem is quite easy to fix. It relies on the tone on one side of the white halo line being lighter or darker than the other, and then using a blending mode on your Clone Stamp Tool.

Step 1

On your screen, enlarge the area you need to work on up to 100%, perhaps 200% or 300% so you can see what you're doing.

Step 1a

If you have a lot of layers in your file, make a copy of the file and flatten it down, so you're just working on one layer. For this reason, this technique might be one of the last adjustments you do. You need to be working on an image layer, not an adjustment layer for this technique to work.

Step 2

Select the Clone Stamp Tool and set the brush to a very small size, from two to four times the width of the white halo.

Step 3

Set the blending mode to Darken. This blending mode means that when you paint with the Clone Stamp Tool, it will only work if the tone of what you are copying is darker than the area you copying onto. In the case of the white line, everything else will be darker than it.

Step 4

Select the area the Clone Stamp Tool is to copy (hold down the Alt/Opt key and click). We want to copy the lighter of the two sides of the white line. In our example, we would copy the sky as it is lighter than the sign.

Step 4a

Ensure the Aligned button is ticked as you want the Tool to sample the pixels very close to the white line.

Step 5

Use the Clone Stamp Tool to paint over the white line. If it is working properly, it will darken the white halo line, but not affect the sign (the darker area).

Try to select the area of sky as close to the white line as possible so you can't see any edges in the sky after the tool has been used. Experiment and you will soon pick up the idea.
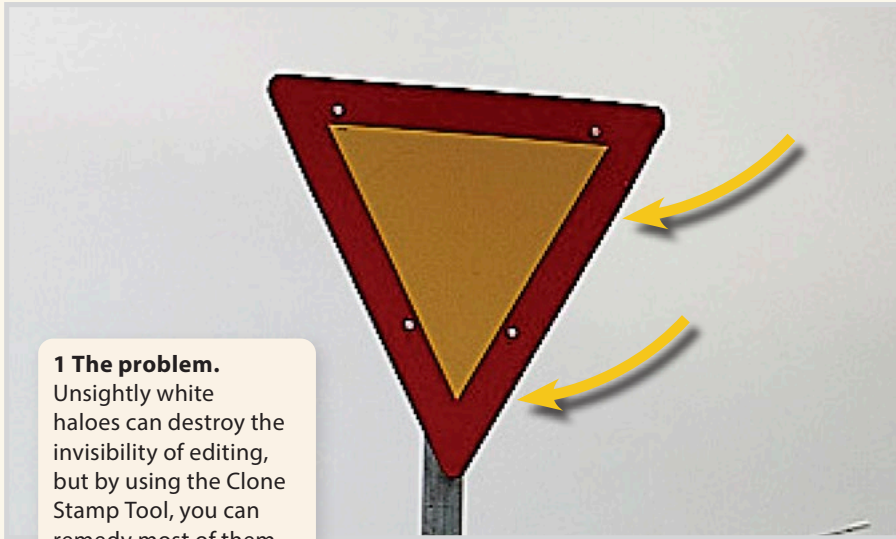
1 The problem. Unsightly white haloes can destroy the invisibility of editing, but by using the Clone Stamp Tool, you can remedy most of them.
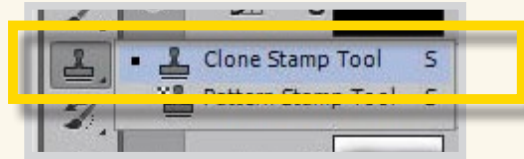
2 The tools. Select the Clone Stamp Tool, set the Mode to Darken and make sure the Aligned check-box is ticked. Use a small brush size, not much larger than the width of the halo to be repaired.
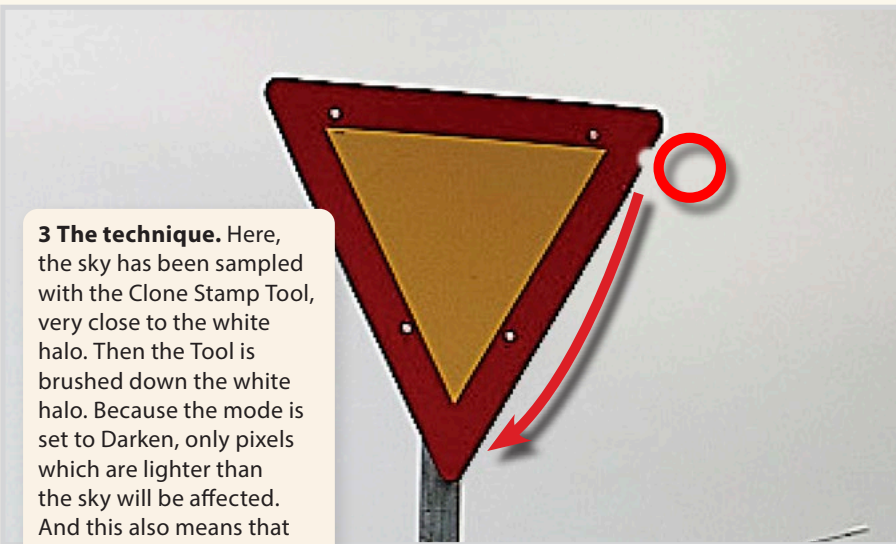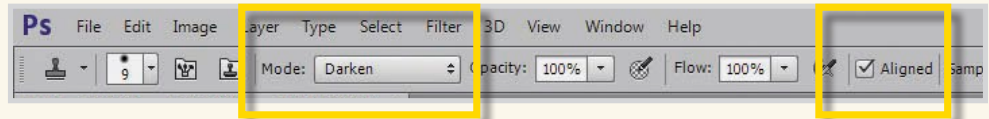
3 The technique. Here, the sky has been sampled with the Clone Stamp Tool, very close to the white halo. Then the Tool is brushed down the white halo. Because the mode is set to Darken, only pixels which are lighter than the sky will be affected. And this also means that the sign, which is darker than the sky, will not be affected.
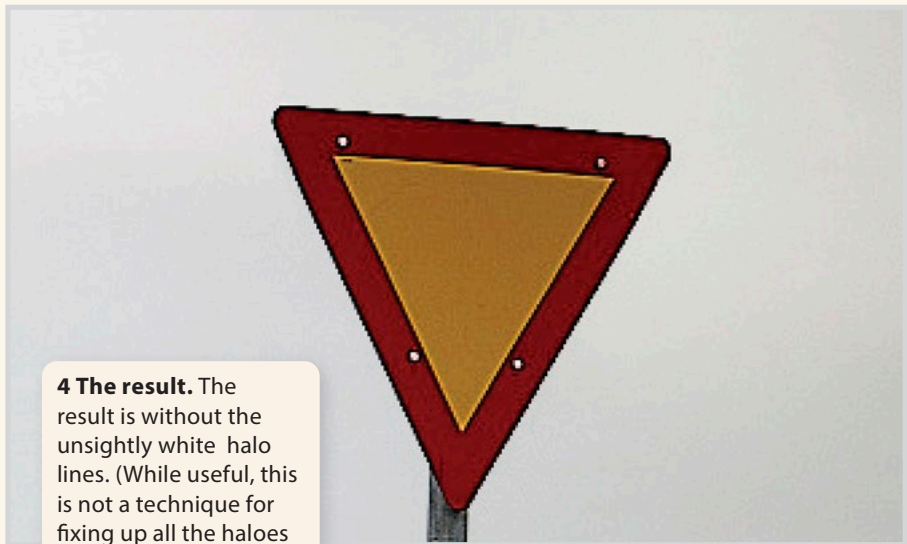
4 The result. The result is without the unsightly white halo lines. (While useful, this is not a technique for fixing up all the haloes produced by too much sharpening.)

Don't Lighten, Darken Everything Else

When it comes to tonal direction, we're told that light areas attract attention while dark areas can be overlooked. For this reason, it's suggested to have our subject lighter than its surroundings.

While rules like these are often broken, the basic premise is very helpful when it comes to lightening and darkening our images. It makes sense for our subject to be lighter than its surroundings (or perhaps darker if the surroundings are very light). We're looking for a contrast between the subject and its background.

However, don't automatically try to lighten your subject.

Your global adjustments may have already set your subject to its optimum values, so to lighten it would ruin its reproduction. It would no longer have invisible technique.

Instead, think about darkening everything else.

Remember, having your subject lighter than its surroundings is all that's required. We don't have to make the subject lighter to do this, we can make everything else darker.

The same principle applies to colour saturation and contrast. Rather than increasing the saturation or contrast on your subject, consider reducing the saturation or contrast on everything else..

1. The original image is shown above. Let's assume the hut is correctly toned and coloured.
2. In the top row on the opposite page, the hut has been lightened (left), but the result is overexposure of the wood work and door. In comparison, by leaving the hut alone and darkening the background, a better result has been achieved (right).
3. In the bottom row, the colour saturation has been increased on the hut (left) and looks pretty horrible, compared to a desaturation of the rest of the image (right) where the original colour saturation on the hut is maintained.

Why I love magazines...

by Peter Eastway

When you get into photography, everyone says you need a good camera. And a good lens, a good monitor and good software. But how many people suggest that what you really need are good ideas?

Don't get me wrong! I love buying new equipment - it's part of the thrill of photography. However, I've never taken a great photograph without first having a great idea. It's ideas and inspiration that will set our photography apart, not equipment which everyone else can buy too!

My ideas have come from reading and writing articles. Sometimes I'm reading someone else's ideas, sometimes I'm writing down the ideas of an amazing photographer I interviewed. And these ideas are ones I would never have thought about on my own. I'd never type these ideas into Google because they're simply not on my radar - and that for me is the brilliance of magazines. It only takes one idea or one image on one page to give you a great idea - a new direction, a special technique, a different concept.

Years ago I wrote a book review on Creative Elements: Landscape Photography written by Eddie Ephraums. This book was written very much like a magazine, showing Eddie's remarkable photography in a way I hadn't seen before. On the first page of each chapter, he showed the original photo and then opposite was his final interpretation. The differences were magical, inspirational - and achievable. On the following pages, he explained how he captured the photos and the steps he took in the darkroom to create the final result.

Yes, in the darkroom! I said this was quite a few years ago!

Around 12 months after reading Eddie's book, I was standing on a stage receiving the 1995 AIPP Australian Professional Landscape Photographer of the Year Award. I'd submitted four prints that were heavily inspired by Eddie's approach.

Interestingly, Tim Griffith who had won the overall 1995 AIPP Australian Professional Photographer of the Year had also read Eddie's book. It was just one idea that took us to places we'd never been before. And Tim had read about Eddie's book in a magazine as well.

I won the AIPP Professional Photographer of the Year another 12 months later and again in 1998, but I was feeling stuck. I felt I had taken Eddie's initial inspiration as far as I could and I was looking for something new.

Around this time, I interviewed legendary advertising photographer Nadav Kander and afterwards we had an informal chat over a drink. I explained the creative block I was experiencing and asked him if he had any advice. He asked me how I had got to where I was. It was an interesting question and I answered that I was just living my life, but always on the look out for new ideas and opportunities. He replied, "So relax, sit back and wait for the next opportunity. It will arrive."

And so it did. A year or so later, I moved more seriously into digital (I think I bought a 3-megapixel DSLR from Canon) and suddenly the world of photography opened up yet again. I could now take Eddie's original inspiration in directions I'd never previously thought of.

As my photography developed, I found myself working with leading camera and software manufacturers from around the world - Canon, Adobe, Phase One, Capture One. They found the way I and a handful of other leading photographers approached our work new and inspiring.

And I put all this down to my involvement with magazines, not because I was writing them, but because of the ideas and inspiration I was exposed to. The same ideas and inspiration that every subscriber got to read as well.

And that's why I'm passionate about photography magazines. They are written by professional and enthusiast photographers who are willing to share their ideas and inspiration which in turn provide the catalyst for readers to transform their own photography.

Most of us love the idea of buying a new camera, but once purchased, what are we going to photograph with it? How are we going to use it? And how will it help us make better photographs without better ideas?

This is the concept behind every issue of Better Photography magazine. We've never had an equipment focus, rather we follow a strategy about sharing ideas and techniques.

What ideas and technique could you learn? Subscribe now and find out!

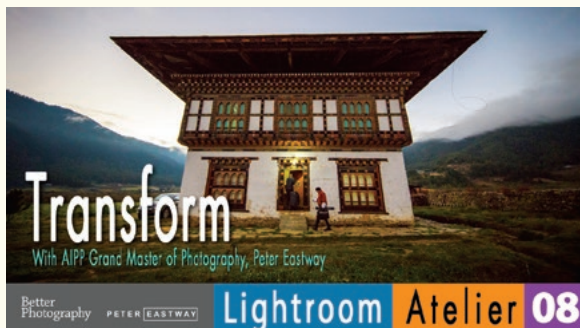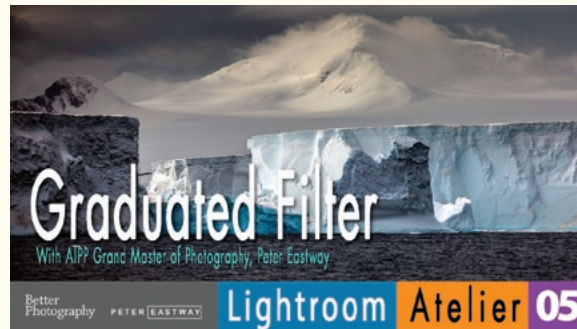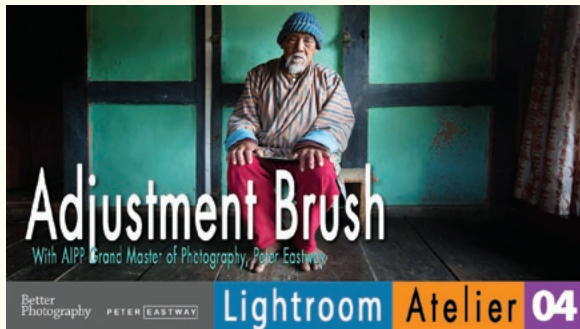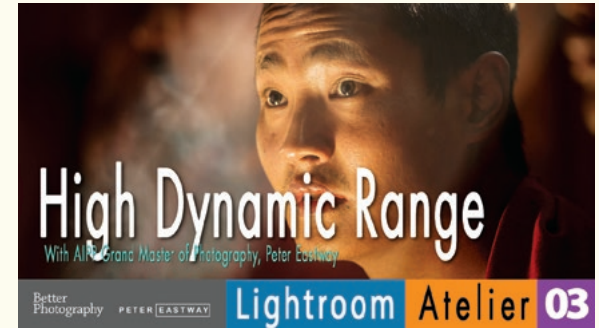Peter Eastway's
Lightroom Atelier – Easy Online Learning

The Lightroom Atelier will quickly turbo-charge your creativity! Don't waste your time using Lightroom the wrong way, subscribe to the LIghtroom Atelier now to learn how you can transform your photographs into incredible works of fine art! We know there are lots of free tutorials around that show you how to use Lightroom, so why would you be interested in the Lightroom Atelier by Peter Eastway? Well, if you're really new to Lightroom, you should take advantage of all those free tutorials first - even if they are produced by people with limited photography experience. And maybe that's all you'll need if you're happy with the average results that come out of your camera. However, as all creative photographers discover, using Lightroom isn't just a matter of sliding controls left or right, it's also an amazing tool with unlimited creativity – if you know how to use it properly. The reason you'll be interested in Peter Eastway's Lightroom Atelier is because you like what you see on the these pages and you'd like to achieve something similar with your own work. If that's you, check out the free lesson on our website and follow the links ...

www.betterphotographyeducation.com
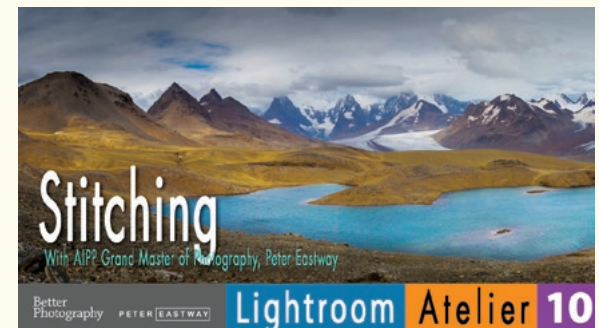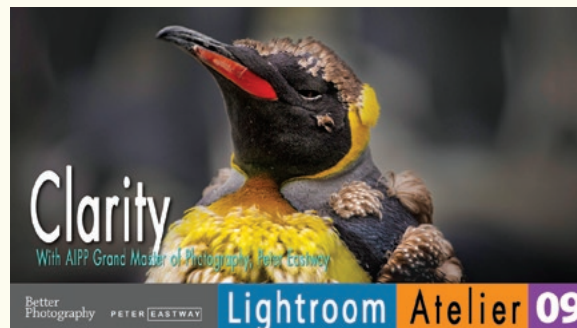
Landscape Photography MasterClass - Contents

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INVISIBLE EDITING
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