The Image – Monthly NEWSLETTER

The Abertawe Photographic Society – Based near the heart of Swansea, Abertawe Photographic Society is an established, friendly and welcoming club, who's members both amateur and professional all share a common interest, in all aspects of photography.

Whether you are a complete beginner or a seasoned snapper, interested in digital techniques or 35mm film, there is a warm welcome by a likeminded group of people sharing in the search for the perfect image.

By sharing, not only our enthusiasm but also our skills, techniques and knowledge, we all grow as a club and by trying new things we all get the opportunity to stretch our boundaries. All members are encouraged to take part in club events.

The Society meets every Tuesday at:
Greenhill Community Centre
Chapel Street, Dyfatty,
Swansea.SA1 1NB.

This Month's Events: May

2nd May Open
9th May Editing Images
16th May Hand-In for 4th Competition
23rd May Studio Evening
30th May 4th Monthly Competition – Rob Mitchell

Using a Workflow in Your Image Processing

You may well as, "**What is a Workflow & Why Use a Workflow?"** – A Workflow is basically a step-by-step process or a repeatable pattern of activities that enable you to develop an organised method of processing your images. Think of this workflow as a framework that guides you through developing an image from start to finish. We actually use workflows in our daily life without noticing them as such. Take for example preparing a meal; we decide what we want, buy it, prepare it, cook and eat it, and that is a simple workflow.

By developing your own workflow in your post image processing you will find that all your images should end up with a consistency of higher quality. In other words, with consistency comes quality!

I'm not going to go too deep into the Photoshop techniques here, I'll leave that to you.

Below is a Workflow which I shall describe in this article, use this method if you wish, or develop your own, but in essence, you should follow the workflow in each and every post image process.

Diagrammatically below is a Work Flow that I hope to explain here:

Image File Preparation
⬇
Create an Even Exposure
⬇
Colour Correction & Calibration
⬇
Contrast & Drama
⬇
Enhance & Embellish
⬇
Resize, Sharpen & Export

As I mentioned earlier, you can follow this workflow or develop your own, but this is a recognised workflow within photography. I will now go through each of the above steps in more detail for you.

Image File Preparation - In order to achieve the best out of your workflow happens in your camera, and this requires you to shoot in RAW. JPEG is a file format that will result in loss of your overall image quality in your final processed image due to loss of a large quantity of data.

I was told of an analogy of this, which is; you bake a cake, but forget to add sugar into the mix before baking it in the oven. Realising this mistake after baking, you may decide to put some sweet icing on top of the cake to make up for the error. Despite this effort to sweeten the cake it just isn't right. You can't un-bake the cake to add sugar, then bake again, it's too late!

This is what happens when you edit a JPEG in Photoshop, you are editing the pixels that have already been 'baked'.

However, if you have a RAW file, then this is the equivalent of being able to go back and 'un-bake the cake', and change the original 'batter mixture'.

Each stage has to have goals to achieve, and these are for this stage 1 are:

- Camera profile calibration
- White balance
- Lens distortion corrections
- Noise reduction
- Remove default sharpening
- Fix chromatic aberration

Create and Even Exposure – This is the stage where you should recover any shadows which are too dark and any highlights which are too bright, or blown out.

Also, in this stage, you need to create a neutral and slightly flat-looking image that is basically the starting point for the creative skill edits that you perform in the following stages.

It's perhaps a bit of a skill to ensure that you preserve a realistic link between the shadows and the highlights in your image.

The goal for stage 2 is:

- Reduce contrast by brightening shadows and recovering highlights, without pushing either too far.

The two previous photos are an example of this, with the top photo clouds a bit too bright, and the Shadows too dark. Whereas the second image has been adjusted to show better contrast between the lowlights and the highlights

Colour Correction & Calibration – Now you begin to make creative decisions, be careful though to what level you decide to go.

It's possible to go one of two ways here, by either choosing a Natural path or a Creative path. So what does Natural really mean, as it can be construed as many different things. For example you are photographing a sunrise with a warm glow cast across the landscape due to the sun's rays; this is Natural.

However, if you decide to neutralize the colour cast, which creates a "perfect" white balance, you are therefore creating a photo that is not matching what you saw; this Creative.

Therefore the purpose of this stage of your workflow is to adjust and fine tune the colours in your image. Hence the goal of stage 3 is:

- Obtain perfect natural colours and white balance.
- Slightly warm or cool the image
- Enhance the natural colour cast that may already be in the image, e.g. sunset or sunrise shots.
- Selectively adjust colours in various areas of the image for creativity, e.g. changing the hue in water, etc., or by performing selective corrections by warming parts of the image that may be in the shade, etc.
- Convert to B/W (if you so wish).

Contrast & Drama – Up to this stage the workflow has concentrated on preparation of your image for what is to come. You are now going to add some interest to your image, hopefully to make it get noticed.

The goal of stage 4 is to show your creativity, and will hit your creativity to its zenith.

Photoshop and the many other programs out there have hundreds of methods that can help you achieve the goal at this stage. However, whatever of these techniques you end up using you must always remember this simple yet important rule:

Many subtle changes trump fewer big changes, - Every – Single – Time.

Use of Layers is of paramount importance at this stage because the development of making contrast adjustments through layers and/or filters, or plug-ins (such as Nik Collection) allows those effects to be applied to your image.

Use of Layer Masks allows you to either paint "paint" the effect on to or out of your image, thereby only applying that effect to a precise area that you want.

By the use Layers and Masks you can add colours that are deep, rich and vibrant to your image.

Enhance & Embellish – By this stage of your workflow your image is probably around 90% to 95% complete. However that extra 5% to 10% should probably add approximately 50% to your finished image.

This where, those changes that you make are so refined that they may appear to have very little affect at all. They will however, in your final photo make it a finished and polished look.

As with the previous stage, this stage mostly involves contrast. The adjustments you can call **Micro-Contrast Adjustments**, and it requires you to consider which are the most important objects or areas in your image. This may include such areas as:

- Rocks/Stones
- Mountains/Hills
- Lakes/Sea
- Clouds
- Buildings
- Trees/Bushes
- etc.

The goal in this stage is:

- Enhance the edges of the above areas, perhaps by dodging and burning.

For example, you have an image of a wood with bluebells, and the sunlight is just peeking through. By using the dodge tool you can subtly brighten the bluebells in the path of the sunlight. Alternatively, you can subtly darken areas of the wood away from the sunlight.

Also at this stage, you can make Macro Contrast Adjustments; this is a vignette and is obviously an optional process. However, if you want the eye drawn into an area or object then a vignette is the answer. This is achieved by darkening the edges of your photograph to create a vignette, which causes your eyes to be indirectly drawn into towards the centre of the image.

We have heard it said by one judge, that a vignette is a bit like Marmite; you either like it or hate it. Personally I don't agree with this ethos, but more perhaps if the vignette is too obvious then perhaps it has failed in its reasoning.

Instead of a vignette you can use the burn tool around the edges to gradually darken those areas you want to draw attention from. Thereby not darkening areas that perhaps should not be darkened

Almost there, just some **Image Clean-Up** to be carried out, such as moving any unwanted objects, wires, poles, 'dust bunnies', etc., with the clone tool, spot healer, patch, etc.

Resize, Sharpen & Export – First is to resize your image, namely 1400 pixels for Landscape, or 1050 for portrait, both at 300 pixels Resolution. However, if you put a border around your image don't forget to allow for this in your image sizing. As an example, of you place a 25 pixel boarder around your image then the image size needs to be 1375 & 1025 respectively.

Always **Resize** first then **Sharpen**. My favourite method for sharpening is the Photoshop Un-sharp Mask Filter, although you can use the Smart Sharpen Filter.

If you are going to share your image, perhaps by entering into a competition, then there are a couple of things to be considered.

Save your image in the **sRGB Colour Profile**. In Photoshop go to **File>Export>Save for Web (Legacy)**, and tick the box alongside **Convert to sRGB**.

Alternatively you may want to though **File>Save**. I you do this then you should remember to convert your file through **Edit>Convert To Profile**.

If you want to learn more about this here is the address of an online Video to watch:

http://postprocessingmastery.com/workflow-fundamentals-videos/

Free Plug-In Filters for Photoshop

During our recent Competition, the judge for the night, Gareth Martin, mentioned a program called Fractalius. This is actually a filter add-on suitable for Photoshop in the same way that the Nik Collection is an add-on, but it's not free, and has a cost of about $39.00 This prompted me to take a look at other filter add-ons available on the Internet that are free, and here are some that I found. But beware; downloading from certain sites comes at a risk as supplementary programs will also download on your computer, as this is how a web company supports itself.
Here are just a few examples of free on-line add-ons or plug-ins.

Creative Market is a web site that has more than 490 plugins that are suitable for Photoshop, and Lightroom. These plugins add functions which are more suitable for design projects rather than photography, but maybe worth a look through.
Web Address: https://creativemarket.com/add-ons/plug-ins

Mystical is a program that gives you 10 free Auto FX Software Photo Effects within a free **Sampler App**. You get 2 example effects from each of the three individual Mystical Suite Gen2 Products, DreamSuite Ultimate Gen2 as well as PhotoGraphic Edges Gen2. They cover a reasonably large variety of photo enhancements, and can be used with Photoshop, Lightroom 5, Corel and Serif products. If you don't have any of these its not a problem as this program runs as a stand-alone.
Web Address: http://www.autofx.com/download-free-photoshop-plugins/

Summer Haze is a filter add-on, and adds to images taken in the summer sun much more summery with a great turquoise haze effect. Outdoor portraits taken in natural light are most suitable for this filter.
We Address: http://photographypla.net/free-summer-haze-photoshop-action/

Hazy Afternoon is another filter add-on outdoor pictures', the Hazy Afternoon action lives up to its name by creating a soft gradient colour layer. You can use this free action on black and white or colour images, plus you can easily adjust the gradient until you get the exact look you're after.
Web Address:
http://www.thecoffeeshopblog.com/2014/07/coffeeshop-hazy-afternoon-photoshoppse_10.html

…… and finally:

Q: Why is flying an F-16 better than flying an F-22?

A: It's one stop faster!