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(industry insiders share their best-kept secrets)

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# MAKING YOUR STUDIO WORK FOR YOU

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# LAUNCH POINT

a word from the editor



" **Focus on you!**

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*Be accountable for you!* "

WITH SAL CINCOTTA

TWO WORDS THAT CAN SEND YOU INTO A TAILSPIN...

SALE$TAX

WITH KRISTIN KORPOS

©Kristin Korpos

by Kristin Korpos

**"Sales tax for photographers."** Your first instinct might be to run for the hills, but sales tax is definitely something you need to understand as a business owner. During the past few years I have seen countless photographers ask about sales tax in online forums and groups. All too often the conversation includes at least one photographer having what I call an "oh crap" moment in which they say, "Huh, I had absolutely no idea I was supposed to collect sales tax!" Here is an example:

*Amy spent four years building her wedding photography business and things were going great. Her booking percentage was high and she had worked hard to improve her album sales process, which helped to significantly increase her annual gross revenue to $150,000 in 2011. Then one day she received a letter from her state tax office informing her that her business was selected for a sales tax audit. During this audit, she discovered she should have collected sales tax from her clients on not only her album sales, but also on the photography services she provided. She had erroneously believed that her photography services were not subject to sales tax and now she owed the state over $25,000 in unpaid sales tax, plus fines and interest!*

I don't want you to be in Amy's shoes. I don't want you to be the photographer who fails to collect sales tax from your clients and finds out too many years down the road that the state is coming to audit you and wants its money. The tax money that you fail to collect comes straight out of your pocket. Sure, you can try and find your clients and ask them if they will pay the sales tax you mistakenly didn't collect from them two years ago…good luck with that! They are under no obligation to pay it.

I want you to be the proactive photographer who ensures you are running your business legitimately! I want you to be the photographer who thinks about the health and future of your business and plans for long-term success!

In part one of this two-part series I will provide an introduction to sales and use tax, explain why services may be subject to sales tax, and address a big sales tax myth regarding the taxability of electronically delivered images.

## Sales and Use Tax Overview

A sales tax is a transaction tax that is charged to the consumer on the sale of a taxable item or a taxable service. It is paid to the seller as an addition to the sales price. The seller is obligated to collect this sales tax from the customer on behalf of the state. The seller then remits the tax to the state tax agency (often called the Department of Revenue or Tax Commission) when they file their sales tax return. Sales and use tax returns are filed on a yearly, quarterly or monthly basis depending on state law and the amount of annual sales made by the business.

A use tax is a corresponding tax that applies when sales tax has not been paid on items that are going to be used in business. Photographers need to be aware of use tax because they will need to record and pay any use tax due with their returns. If a photographer purchased a camera from an online retailer and did not pay sales tax, they will likely need to pay a use tax to their state for using that camera in their business.

Sales tax is imposed in 45 states. New Hampshire, Oregon, Montana, Alaska, and Delaware do not have a state sales tax (but note that Alaska has several local boroughs with a sales tax). The laws governing sales and use taxes differ from state to state, and sometimes from city to city. This means the taxability of sales (and use) transactions can vary from one state to the next depending on the law.

In some states, sales tax exists at both the state and local levels, such as county, city and district levels. Sometimes an item that is not subject to sales tax at the state level may be subject to tax at the local city level. Colorado is a good example of a state where this type of variation in taxability rules can occur.

Sales tax is not the same as income tax! They are two separate and distinct taxes that are not related at all. Paying one does not offset or alleviate the obligation to pay the other. Income taxes are paid on the income you earn as a photographer and can be offset by your business expenses. This is not a sales tax. You need to think of the two taxes as absolutely separate. The laws for each are very different.

### *Services May be Subject to Sales Tax*

Most of us know sales tax applies to sales of tangible items, such as an 8"x10" print or an album. But did you know that sales tax could also apply to photography services?

The number one mistake I hear from photographers is the belief that they are only providing a service and that services are not taxable. In many states, when the services photographers provide are so closely connected to the tangible property being delivered to the client, the photography service itself also becomes taxable.

*But, you might say, that doesn't make sense!*
*It does make sense for the following reason....*

Why did the clients hire a photographer? They wanted photos! If the photographer didn't provide the service of taking photos, the photographer would not be able to provide the client with the other tangible items they are selling to the client such as a wedding album or flash drive of the images. If there are no photos of the wedding day, there is no wedding album. Due to the fact that the service is so closely intertwined with the end product, the entire transaction–service plus product–is taxable.

Is this the case for all states? No. Sales tax law varies from state to state, and to make it even more confusing, some states treat portrait photography different than wedding photography. This is why it is very important to know the laws in your state. You need to make sure you are applying the proper sales tax to the transactions that occur in your photography business.

**MYTH:** Sales tax does not apply to electronically delivered images.

Many photographers believe that if you provide photography services, and only deliver digital images to the client electronically (no albums, prints or other items or products are sold to the client), sales tax does not apply to the transaction.

This is a myth, because electronically delivered images are subject to sales tax in a variety of states. Alabama, Maine, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington and a handful of other states require that sales tax be charged for digital images, which are transferred electronically. Yes, you read that correctly. If you provide photography services along with electronically delivered digital images, the entire transaction *may* be subject to sales tax depending on state law.

And in some states, while neither photography services nor electronically delivered digital images are subject to sales tax, as soon as the photographer provides just one print, an album, or another touchable product to the client, the entire transaction becomes subject to sales tax. Say what?

I strongly recommended that photographers do not try to find ways to avoid collecting sales tax from their clients in the hope of "saving" their clients money or being more competitive in the marketplace. It is the photographer's butt on the line when the auditors come knocking on their door. Photographers should not subject themselves to the risks of under-collecting their sales tax liabilities.

Collecting the proper sales tax on each of your business transactions is seriously important to the success of your photography business. What would you do if five years from now you discovered you owed your state tax agency $20,000 in unpaid sales tax liability along with penalty fees and interest? Ask yourself that question when you try to avoid thinking about sales tax today. I personally don't want to be forced to fork over $20,000 of my profits, which *should* have been paid for by my clients.

In part two of this article on sales tax, which will be in the June issue, we will dig a bit deeper. We will address sales tax issues that arise for photographers who do business in multiple states, as well as issues facing photographers who provide their services to clients that may not live in the states in which they do business. ∎

learn more!
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# LET'S GET LOW

with Michael Corsentino

by Michael Corsentino

Great lighting is as much about adding light as it is about subtracting it. Low-key lighting is essentially lighting that creates a dramatic difference between the highlights and shadows in an image, also known as chiaroscuro. Typically two- to three-point lighting is used, consisting of a main light, background light or accent light(s) and sometimes a fill light or reflector. Using multiple points of light helps create a layered quality to the lighting and adds depth to your image. This stye of lighting has been historically favored by master painters and is now embraced by film makers and photographers alike. The rapid transitions between highlight and shadow have a sculpting effect that creates volume, contour and drama as it falls on a subject or object.

## Modifying & Shaping the Light

Low-key lighting is all about controlling, containing, directing and shaping light so it falls exactly where you want it without any unintended spill onto surrounding areas in the image. To do this effectively a variety of light-shaping tools are employed, from simple to sophisticated.

Because I wanted a rapid fall-off of light and a specular quality for the highlights in these portraits, I choose a Mola Demi 22" beauty dish with no diffusion as the modifier for my key light. This lightweight and easily portable light shaper creates a snappy quality of light that's perfect for a wide variety of lighting styles. If you haven't checked out beauty dishes yet I encourage you to do so. I'm using a 500 WS Profoto D1 Air strobe as my main light. The good news is with an accessory bracket the Mola Demi can also be used with Speedlites, which I've done on other occasions as well.

To create the rim/accent light on the left and right sides of the images I used two 500 WS Profoto D1 Air strobes. One fitted with a standard reflector and 20° honeycomb grid attached and the other with a small octabank. With the D1s, grids can be attached directly to the light head; however for these portraits I used the older style grid that requires an intermediate reflector. I did this to create a punchier quality of light with the accent light. Grids are essential light-shaping tools and definitely fall into my desert island, lighting-modifier category. Again these are worth looking into when you can. They're available in hard discs and fabric panels known as "egg crates."

## Flags, Cutters, Panels & V-Flats

In the arsenal of low-key light-shaping tools, flags, cutters, black blocking panels and v-flats are among the most useful and least expensive. These are tools that help direct, block and create edges with light. While all are available from photographic supply houses, in most cases you can easily get by using large 4"x8" sheets of foam core. Look for the kind with black on one side and white on the other. The one caveat is with using flags. In addition to being available in solid black, flags also come in woven fabric with varying degrees of transparency. These are known as "nets" and are used to reduce the light falling on an area but not entirely block it. For the portrait of Dennis in this article I used a net to cut down on the amount of light falling on his bare shoulder.

## The Eyes Have It

One of the first things I look for after the initial placement of my main or key light is the catch light. This is a highlight created by the main light in the subject's eyes ideally located at between the 10 to 2 o'clock positions in the eyes. A solid catch light is essential for creating eyes that look alive, contain some sparkle and have a feeling of curvature. I always start with my main light alone. I prefer to build and refine my lighting pattern one light at a time. This way I can see exactly what each light is contributing to the effect and exposure. Then after I've got my main light and its catch dialed in I'll add in each additional light, again one at a time.

Keep in mind varying the position of your subject changes everything. The same, exact lighting setup was used for both of these portraits, but both have a very different quality of light. Only the position of the subject has changed. Keeping the lights in the same position but changing the subject position produced very different effects without moving one light!

## Putting It all Together

Whether I'm working on location or in the studio I always try to shoot tethered to a computer so I can see exactly what's being captured and what my lights are doing. Everything looks great on the back of your camera's three-inch LCD monitor! It's when you look at your images later on a much larger monitor that the things you didn't see before become glaringly obvious, and most of the time extremely difficult or annoying to correct or recreate. This is when the extra effort of shooting tethered really pays off and has saved my butt more times than I care to admit.

A quick note on grip equipment: The heavier the lighting instruments and modifiers you use and the further you want to boom them in around your subjects, the more important robust grip equipment such as light stands, grip heads and boom arms become. Here I'm using Kupo Grip. The last thing you want is a falling light stand or creeping boom arm. Always, always use sandbags to protect your subjects and gear investment.

**RIGHT RIM LIGHT**

PROFOTO 500WS D1 AIR HEAD. PROFOTO 10 DEGREE GRID SPOT. LIGHT PLACED APPROX. 4.5' FROM SUBJECT, AT F:4.5 OR 2 2/3 STOPS LESS THAN THE KEY LIGHT. THIS IS 2 6/10S STOPS LESS THAN THE KEY LIGHT USING 10TH STOP INCREMENT CLICKS ON THE AIR REMOTE.

**LEFT RIM LIGHT**

PROFOTO 500WS D1 AIR HEAD, PHOTOFLEX SMALL OCTA. LIGHT PLACED APPROX. 3.5' FROM SUBJECT, AT F:6.3 OR 1 2/3 STOPS LESS THAN THE KEY LIGHT. THIS IS 1 6/10S STOPS LESS THAN THE KEY LIGHT USING 10TH STOP INCREMENT CLICKS ON THE AIR REMOTE.

**KEY LIGHT**

PROFOTO 500WS D1 AIR HEAD, MOLA SOFTLIGHTS DEMI BEAUTY DISH, KUPO HIGH OVERHEAD ROLLER STAND, BABY STEEL BOOM. LIGHT SET AT F:11, APPROX. 2' AWAY FROM SUBJECT.

1/125 SEC.     f/11     ISO 100

## Finishing Touches

Since low-key lighting is all about the difference between highlights and shadows I have a few post-processing techniques I use in Photoshop to help accentuate the effect. To independently control the highlights in a low-key image I create a "levels adjustment layer" targeting only the highlights. This way I'm able to boost the highlights until just the right contrast between shadow and highlight is created. Additionally with an adjustment layer I have the use of a mask so I can paint the effect in or out at varying opacities as desired.

Here's how: Highlight the Select menu in Photoshop and choose Color Range. In the Color Range dialog box click on the Select drop-down menu, choose Highlights from the list and click OK. At this point you'll be returned to your image and all the highlights will have a marching-ants selection around them. Next click the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers Palette; it looks like a yin/yang symbol. Select Levels from the list of adjustment layer options and a Levels adjustment layer with a black mask will be added to the top position of your layers stack. In the Levels adjustment control panel, use the highlight slider on the right of the Levels histogram to control the image's highlights. Typically I'm using this slider and sometimes the others to boost the highlights and create a more specular appearance. It works really well but be careful not to overdo it. If necessary try switching the blending mode of this layer to Softlight to soften the effect.

These low-key portraits grew out of a personal project of weekly self portraits designed to explore and develop new looks and skills. Try setting up your own self portrait project–it's a great way to learn without pressure or the expense of models. Low-key lighting is one of the best ways I know to learn about lighting by isolating and seeing the effect each light has on your image. Give low-key lighting a try and let me know you think! ◼

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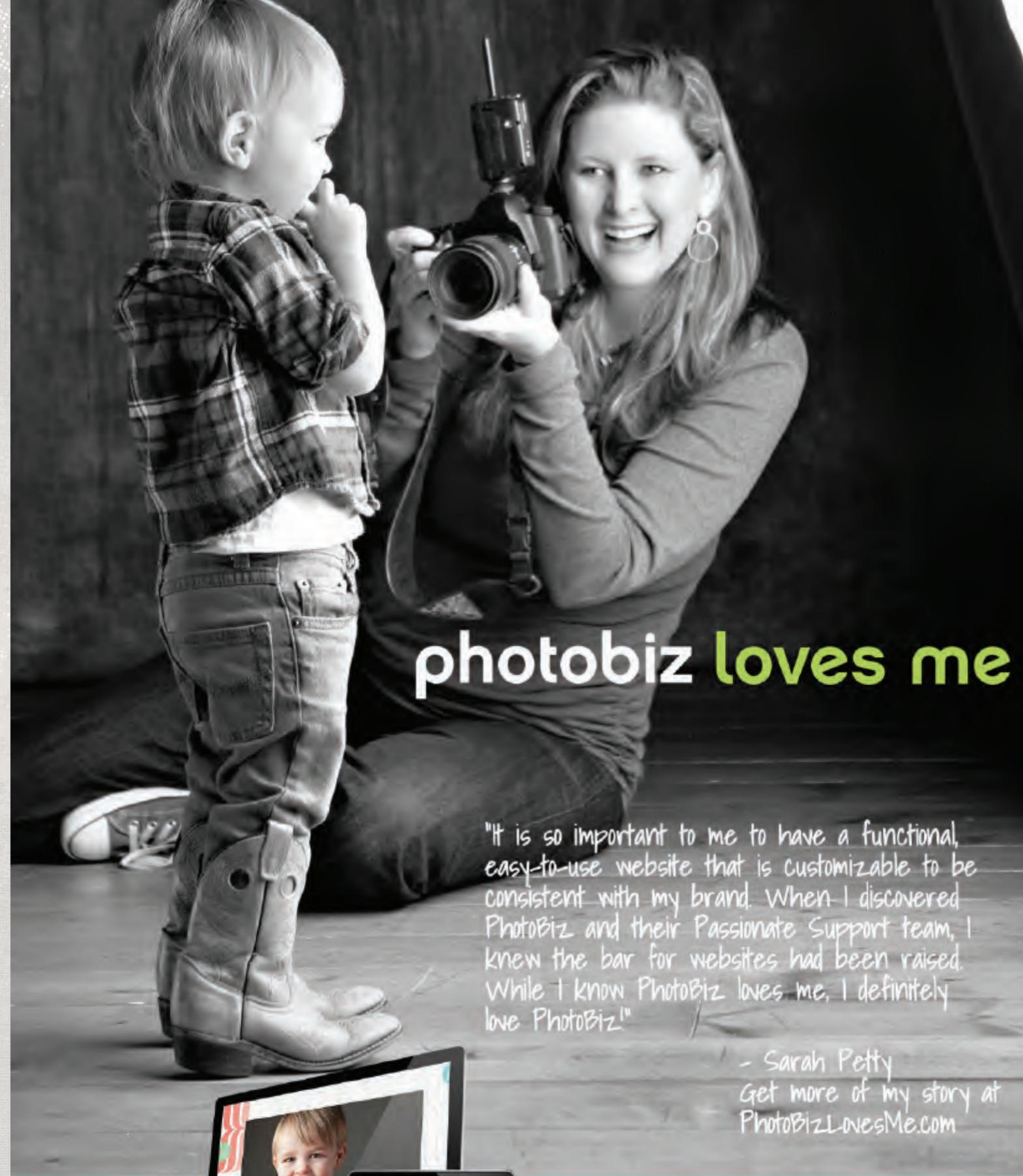
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# THE *importance* OF A
# (TEAM)

with Laurin Thienes

by Laurin Thienes

Every photographer has a team that surrounds them. Even if you do not realize it you have a team. This team could consist of actual employees and assistants that you direct on a daily basis. It could consist of your accountant, financial advisor or your photo lab. It could be as simple as your spouse or significant other–confidants who know how to push you to be better; always with the goal of moving you forward. The simple fact is you must have a team to function as a business and to help you proceed toward success.

I founded my first post-production business in the fall of 2007. With unbelievable growth and potential at our fingertips, it failed a short four years later. At the core of this failure was a dysfunctional team that did not have the right pieces in place for success. How did we get from having so much potential to failure in just four years? When I started the business, I did not know what having a solid team actually meant.

Our story was like many photographers–the jobs started coming in, growth was fast, and I thought, "My background is in photography; I should find someone with a business background to help me out." I brought in a friend to be a partner and help with sales and marketing. We never truly had defined roles…red flag number one. As we grew, we added employees and layers of management within the organization–all without a set profile for the types of people we wanted as employees. What's more, we never took the time to put together the true team of people behind the scenes–the bookkeeper, the accountant or real decision makers–people to tell us, "No, you shouldn't do that." What we ended up with was potential to reach for the sky, but a mismatched team with no real leadership, direction or defined goals. Everyone marched to a different beat, and the team mentality was, "Every man for himself."

Hindsight is 20/20 and I did not know what was missing until it was too late. Our downfall was not that we did not work hard enough, or had a lack of ideas. We had no true, defined focus or leadership, myself included. And because of that we fell flat. Without going into all the details, our biggest downfall was not putting in place the pieces of our team that would make it really work well together. The dissolution of the company was not easy, and it ruined or strained many relationships.

I started to rebuild my team quickly with people around me who could help set us on the right path rebuilding a business concept with unlimited potential. Our mantra became "Laser Focus," and we put together roles and responsibilities for the whole team. People who brought down the team mentality were let go. Ultimately, it was hard to put the team mentality above any one person. This team, this culture, was what had driven us to where we are today.

Our goal today for our business is to make sure the team we have in place is always focused on the greater good of the business, always pushing forward to be on top. We recently went through an exercise using a personality test (gallupstrengthscenter.com) to help us understand one another better. The result was nothing less than an "ah-ha moment." Out of 34 defined personality strengths, my number-one strength was "Adaptability" followed by "Ideation."

## (adaptability)

People with strong Adaptability talents live in the moment. They don't see the future as a fixed destination. Instead, they see it as a place that they can create out of the choices they make right now. They discover their future one choice at a time. This doesn't mean that they don't have plans. But their Adaptability talents enable them to respond willingly to the demands of the moment, even if circumstances pull them away from their plans. They don't resent sudden requests or unforeseen detours. They expect them. Indeed, on some level they may actually look forward to them. They are, at heart, very flexible, and they can stay productive when circumstances pull them in many different directions at once.

## (ideation)

People with strong Ideation talents are creative and appreciate originality. They relish free-thinking experiences such as brainstorming and discussion groups. They have a natural capacity to consider issues from multiple perspectives. They revel in taking the world we all know and turning it around so people can view it from a strangely enlightening angle. They think outside the box. They are fascinated by new ideas and concepts, which come to them easily. They love ideas because they can be profound, they can be novel, they can be clarifying, they can be contrary, and they can be bizarre. For all these reasons they derive a jolt of energy whenever a new idea occurs to them.

© Salvatore Cincotta Photography

These really summed up my personality in many ways and helped me understand that some of the mistakes I had made previously were in part due to how I am wired. Even more so, my current partner's top two strengths–Command and Focus.

## (command)

People with strong Command talents naturally take charge. They see what needs to be done, and they are willing to speak up. They are not frightened by confrontation; rather, they understand that confrontation is the first step toward resolution. They need things to be clear among people and will challenge others to be realistic and honest. Their talent pushes them to take risks. At times, those with strong Command talents may intimidate others. And while some may resent this talent, others often willingly hand them the reins. People are drawn toward those who take a stand and are willing to lead.

## (focus)

People with strong Focus talents prioritize and then take action. They set goals. These goals serve as their compass, helping them determine priorities and make alterations when needed to get back on course. Their Focus is powerful because it forces them to filter; they instinctively evaluate each action before taking it to determine whether it will help them reach their goal. In the end, strong Focus talents push them to be efficient. They are extremely valuable team members because their single-mindedness enhances the speed and quality of their performance and keeps the team on track.

While these traits are not polar opposites, they definitely work well together and play into our direct roles specifically. While you often have a gut feeling about your strengths and weaknesses, many things were put into perspective once these tests were taken. We were able to shift some points of our attention to where it was most effective, knowing where the strengths and weaknesses landed. In this case, knowledge is power.

I would recommend without an ounce of doubt, for anyone going into business with another, to take this personality test. Could you imagine a scenario where two leaders in the same small business have the Command personality trait? Two people always trying to best the other, talk over and confront each other? When building a team, knowing who your team is, and what each person brings to the table is invaluable. It, of course, is extremely impractical to have each person you engage with in business take the strength test. Your accountant, banker or camera salesman are likely not going to share their strengths and weaknesses with you. But you can look for people to surround yourself with who exhibit behaviors that would compliment your strengths. You will find that you are able to be more focused and efficient with your own time and, therefore, able to chase success that much more effectively.

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# HIRING & TRAINING staff

### WITH VANESSA JOY

by Vanessa Joy

*Last month we talked about these four steps to hiring and training staff:*
**1**. Know Your Demographic **2**. Have a Relevant Interview Process
**3**. Create a Job Description **4**. What Kind of Staff Member?

If you haven't had a chance to read Part 1, definitely make your way over there as we'll build upon those concepts in Part 2.

The final four steps include the methodology behind how to train staff for specific tasks, anticipating turnover so it doesn't throw a wrench in your production engine and what to pay. Let's get started!

# Train Them Right

Training staff doesn't have to be difficult or an overwhelming task. It does take time, but it doesn't have to be wasted time. First, remember your staff member is not you. It would be nice if we could clone ourselves, but we can't, and we can't expect our staff to morph into our clone either, or read our thoughts for that matter. Training will take communication and time.

The key to training staff is to train them strategically so their skills build upon each other. The first thing I teach my office assistant or intern is how to work my collage and album-building program, LumaPix. I do this because I'm teaching them a skill that they'll use to do multiple projects in the office. Next I teach them our shipping system. Again, a skill that I can have them use often.

Understandably, we're photographers with photography training, not teachers with educational training, so teaching someone the ropes doesn't come naturally for us. Having a Bachelor of Education degree, I learned a simple, four-step method to teach effectively. I have used the same process to teach my staff and many photographers around the world.

### Show and Tell.
Explain in detail and demonstrate the task you want to teach.

### Walk Through.
Guide them through the same task, allowing them to physically do it while you watch and help them along.

### Observe.
Watch while they do the task on their own and don't correct them when they make mistakes. Rather, let them work through it to the end before correcting mistakes. Ideally, they'll start to recognize mistakes on their own.

### Pass It On.
Let them teach the skill to someone else. Being able to teach a skill to someone else indicates mastery of the skill.

Finally, to successfully train a staff member you want to teach them WHY you do what you do instead of just HOW you do it. This helps them make good decisions on their own without having to nag you for every little thing. Dave Ramsey teaches this concept in his book *Entreleadership* and says, "Guiding values make decisions clearer."

Ramsey suggests teaching them to understand your thinking methods. So when they have a problem, tell them to come up with three or more possible solutions plus a suggested course of action. Have them bring those solutions to you and discuss which you would pick and *why*. After doing this a few times, your staff member should start to see a pattern and be able to determine what it is you want without having to ask.

## Create a list of responsibilities

I first learned to create task lists while I was working as a marketing associate for Lawn Doctor, a 350+ franchise company based in New Jersey. Task lists help both you and your staff member keep track of responsibilities and workload. A list of responsibilities will help maximize your staff's efficiency and manage their task priorities.

Their task list should first be created by you and derived from the job description that you created for them earlier. The task list should be divided into short-term, long-term and ongoing projects to ensure your staff always knows what they should do, and if things are slow in the short-term tasks, they have long-term projects to work on.

## Use tools to easily assign tasks

Giving your staff new tasks shouldn't be a chore or take too much time. There are many methods to maintain clear communication with new or ongoing tasks. Evernote or Google Documents allow you to maintain a task list that both you and your staff can access and change. Personally, I use my email for task lists, so when new tasks come in (i.e. email from clients asking for something), I simply forward the emails to the staff that I want to assign the task to. Use whatever works easiest for you–white boards, planners, Post-it notes–just be sure it's consistent and clear.

## Anticipate turnover

As we discussed in last month's article, the job position you're offering will most likely cater to a certain demographic depending on workload, salary and lifestyle. Eventually, even your best staff member will grow out of the demographic and be ready to move on. It's just the life cycle of your job position, but it doesn't have to throw you for a loop. Knowing your demographic will help you anticipate and be prepared for turnover with your current employees. If you've had someone working for you for a few years and they're beginning to outgrow the job, it's probably time to start finding and training their replacement. If you don't, you run the risk of overpaying the existing staff member simply because you weren't prepared for turnover and you need them to stay on until you are prepared. It's just not a good position to be in for you or the staff member.

Don't wait until the last minute to train your replacement. This will leave you in a rut, likely to hire an unsuitable replacement for time's sake and leave you to train the new staff member from scratch. The only time you should have to train a new staff member is the first time you hire them for that job. After that, your senior staff member should participate in training his or her replacement or new colleague. Not only will this lessen the stress and time commitment on your part, but it also gives your new staff member multiple teachers to learn from. You should still supervise and participate in the new staff member's training, just let the menial task training to be done by the senior staff member.

## What to pay?

Appropriate compensation will vary depending on where you live and what you can afford given your business' income level. Do your research. Ask other professionals in your area what they think is fair or what they're paying their staff members with a similar job description. This will help you avoid over- or under-paying your staff. Also, ask how they pay their staff members, (per diem, salary or hourly), taking into consideration their legal staff position (independent contractor vs. employee).

Keep in mind that you can also use pay as incentive for exceptional performance. Creating a bonus system to motivate staff members can be rewarding for everyone involved. Keep the bonuses (or penalties) consistent with staff performance and fair to the task and all involved.

Ultimately, no matter what or how you pay your staff, make sure they feel appreciated beyond monetary compensation. Taking extra time and effort to make your staff feel appreciated will mean a lot more to them than earning a dollar more per hour than the area average. You can do this in a lot of different ways like writing encouraging notes, buying them lunch on occasion (or making it!), or giving them a thank-you gift every now and then. Be creative, genuine and let your personality shine!

## Get Started!

Bogged down with work but can't figure out what to have your staff do? Watch this video for my staff's task list and how it helps my business and me. Use it for inspiration to create work for your staff, free up your life and improve the workflow of your business. ■

learn more!
### Check out this video.

SHUTTER MAGAZINE

© Vanessa Joy
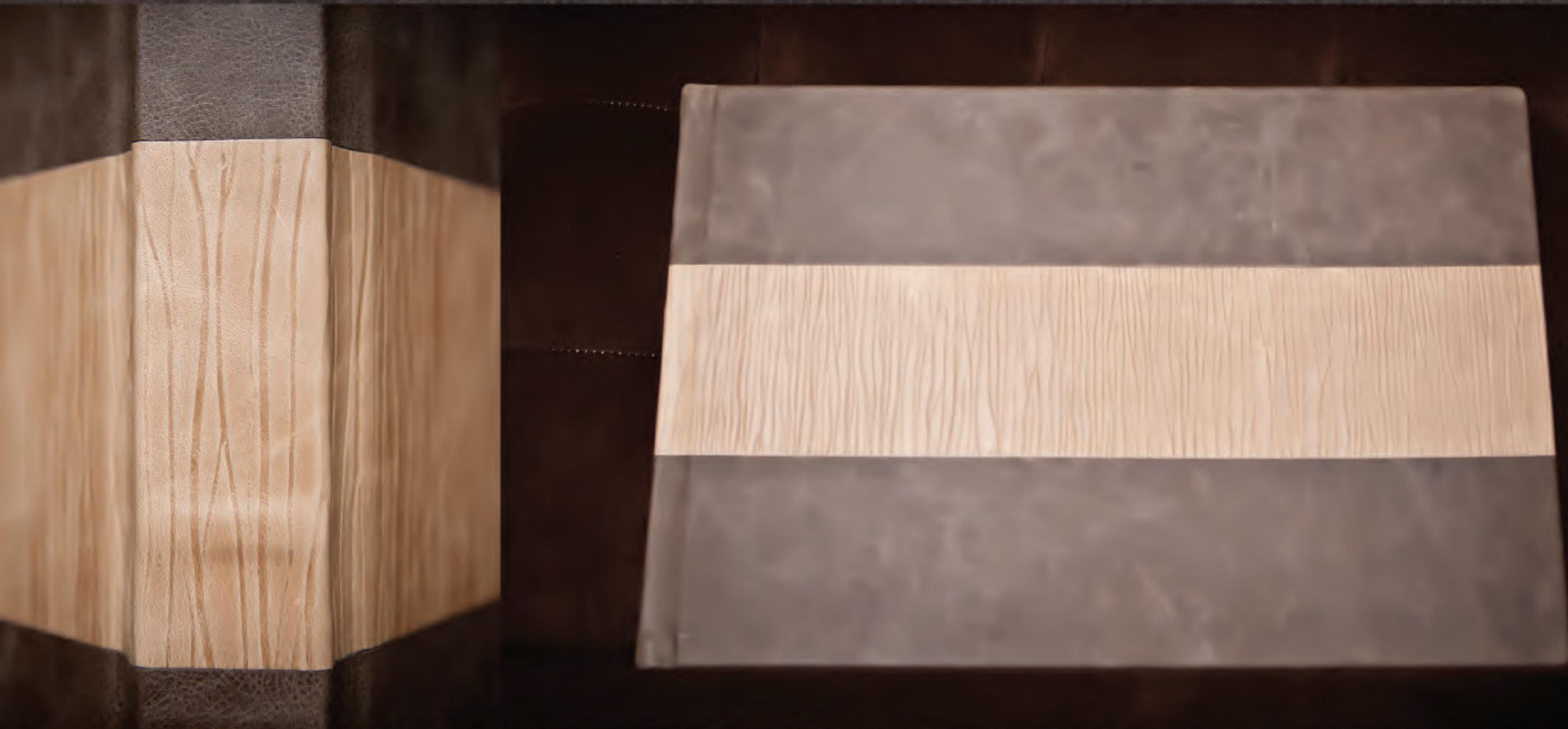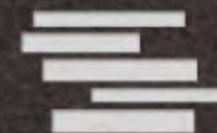
TEXTURES

+++ADDING
TEXTURE
TO YOUR PHOTOS
with Dave Cross

by Dave Cross

As is usually the case in Photoshop, there are probably five different ways to quickly and easily add an effect to photos, but I want to show you a couple of my favorite methods. They're my favorite methods because they meet my requirements of being flexible (easily editable) and reusable.

## Smart Filters

The first method is great because it doesn't require any external images–everything is built into Photoshop. In order to make this work, we need to convert our Background layer to a Smart Object. You can do this either by going to the Filter menu and choosing Convert for Smart Filters, or by right clicking beside the Background in the Layers panel and choosing Convert to Smart Object. Same end result, just two different ways to get there.

Now from the Filter menu we'll add a texture. Again there are plenty of interesting choices here and I'm not going to go through them all, but instead show you the steps and you can experiment with different filters. In my example I'm going to use the Texturizer filter, which as of Photoshop CS6 is found in the Filter Gallery. One of the suggestions I have is to overdo the filter settings at first so you can easily see the results, remembering that you can always back off the settings (that's the beauty of using Smart Filters).

Here I chose Canvas as my texture and put the relief setting quite high, which created an effect that was a little much. The Smart Filter shows up in the Layers panel, and that's what will give us some options.

For example, if you double click on the icon to the far right of the Smart Filter it will open the Blending Options for the filter. In here you can change the blend mode and/or opacity of the filter.
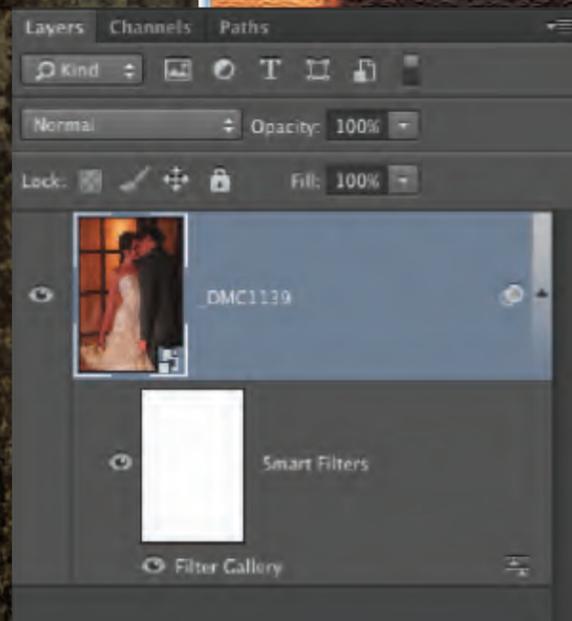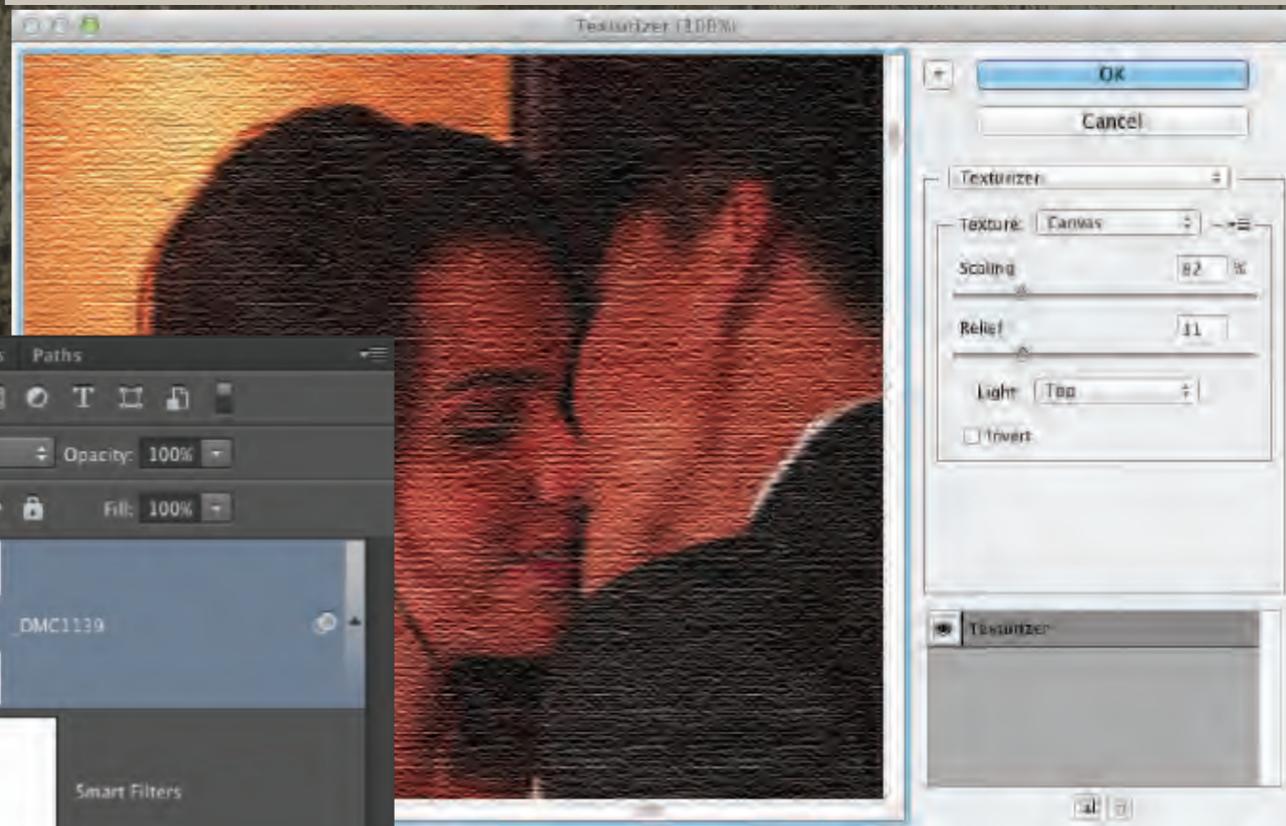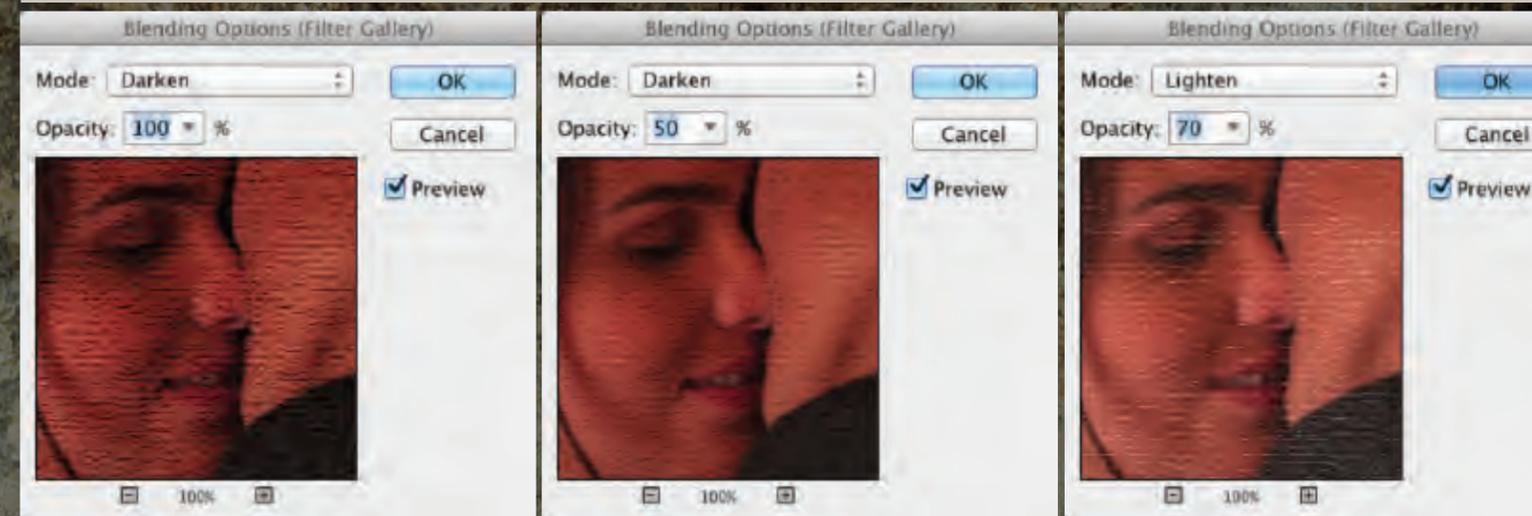
It's important to note that you'll get a very different result by using high/large settings in the filter and lowering the opacity than you would if you simply used lower settings to begin with. That's another reason I almost always start with filters settings that seem too high.

Of course at any time you can see what your texture would look like with the blending mode applied and with lower/different filter settings. To do this, double click on the filter name to edit the settings. When you do, you'll see the original filter without the blending options applied–you'll see the full result once you click OK.

If you look at the results of the texture filter and want to lessen the effect in certain areas or randomize the overall effect, use the Smart Filter mask. Here I painted on the Smart Filter mask with a large brush set to black at 40 percent opacity. Wherever I painted I hid the effects of the filter–but gradually since I painted at 40 percent opacity. You can always gradually show areas of the filter that you've hidden, by painting with white at a low opacity.
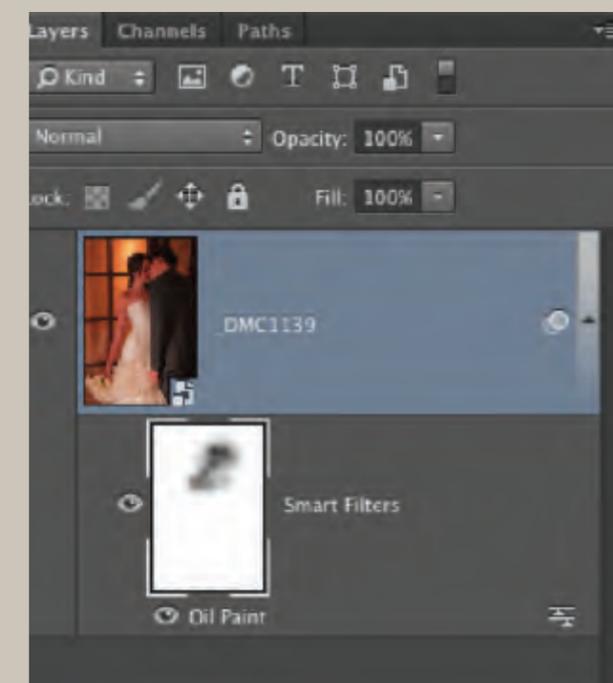
To randomize the effect of the filter so it's stronger in some areas and less visible in others, try applying the Clouds filter to the mask. Click once on the mask and then use Filter>Render>Clouds. Since this filter is random, you can generate other cloud patterns (and change the visibility of the texture filter) by pressing Command-F (PC: Control-F), the shortcut to re-apply the same filter. If you want to get "angrier" clouds, press Command-Option-F (PC: Control-Alt-F). And you can press Command-I (PC: Control-I) to Invert the Mask, or use the Masks option in the Properties panel to Feather (blur) the clouds.
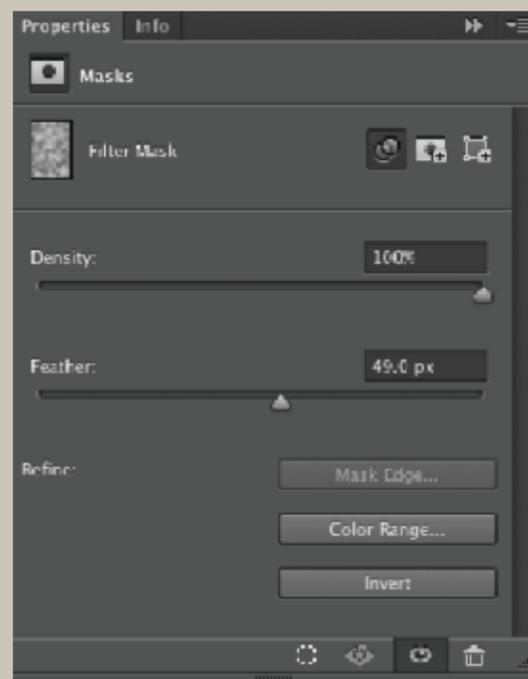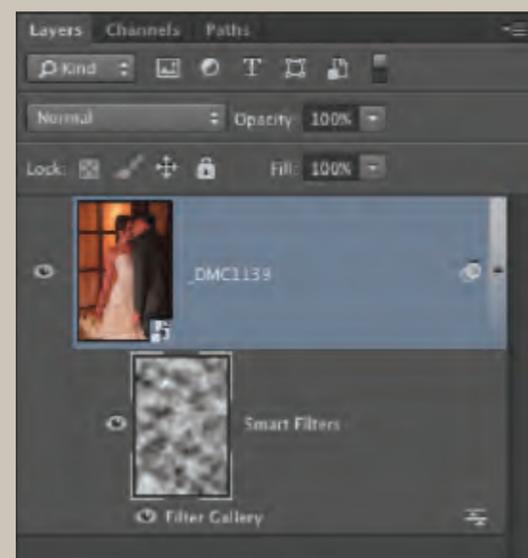
Another option for randomizing the effects of the filter is to paste a photographic texture onto the mask. In order to do this you must view the contents of the Smart Filter mask by holding down Option (PC: Alt) and clicking in the mask. Then when you paste a copied photo it will paste into the mask rather than creating a new layer.
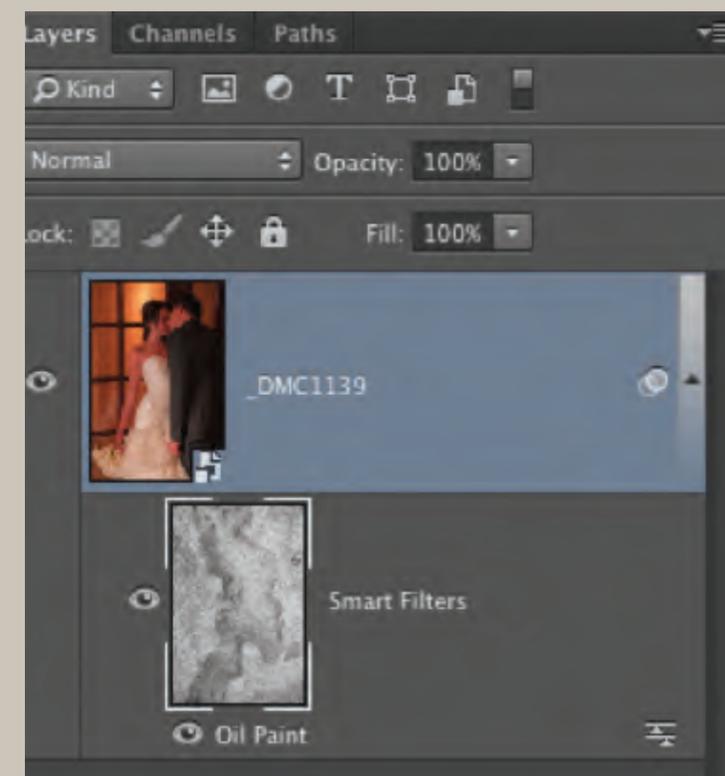
If you want to use the same Smart Filter in another photo, you'll have to drag and drop the entire Smart Object onto another photo; you cannot drag only the filter. Then convert the new photo to a Smart Object and drag the copied Smart Filter onto the new Smart Object, and delete the copied Smart Object (it's easier than it sounds).

Once the texture layer (Camera Raw Smart Object) is sized, you have many options to blend the layers together and tweak the result:

**Blend Modes & Opacity**

Choose a Blend Mode in the Layers panel, or press Shift + to scroll through the blend modes. You can also lower the opacity, either alone or in conjunction with a Blend mode. Here's the texture in Overlay mode.
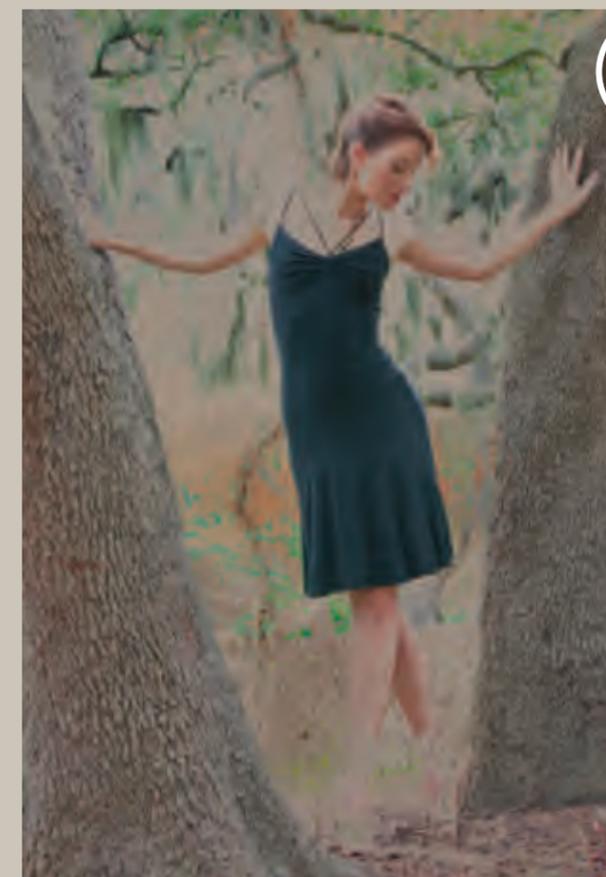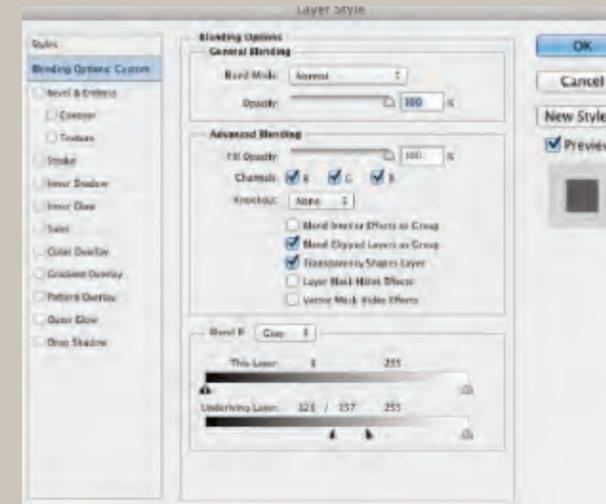
**Blend if Sliders**

Double click to the right of the layer name to open the Layer Style dialog in the Blending Options: Custom View. Here you can use the Blend If sliders to make portions of the texture see through based on its lightness and darkness values, by moving the small triangles. In many cases like this example, it may work better by moving the sliders on the underlying layer. Hold down Option (PC: Alt) to split the triangles into two halves to create a smoother blend. Once you click OK you can come back and adjust these settings by double clicking again.

## Photographic Textures

One of the best parts of using photographic textures is that you can find them anywhere–just take a walk with your camera and I bet in no time at all you'll have a folder full of textures. Here's a sampling of the many textures I have captured–all as Raw files by the way (more on that in a moment).

There are a few ways to add a texture photo to your project, with the hardest way being to open a texture and then drag it into your photo. That's potentially the longest way since the sizing might not fit and you'll have to scale it. I prefer to either drag from Mini Bridge into my document, or in Bridge select the image and use File>Place>In Photoshop. Both of these methods create a Smart Object that is automatically scaled to fit the document. At worst you'll have to rotate the placed texture to fit the orientation of your image.

I suggest using Raw to capture all your textures so they come in as a Camera Raw Smart Object. This happens automatically if you use either the drag for Mini Bridge or Place options.

After dragging in or placing, the image will open in Camera Raw where you can make some initial adjustments. I wouldn't worry too much about this yet as we'll adjust it later, in the context of our photo. Click OK to add the Smart Object layer in your document.

Note: Of course you can combine these options using both a Blend mode and the Blend If sliders. It's possible to choose a Blend mode in the same dialog as you're experimenting with the Blend If sliders. Here's the result of changing the blend mode to Divide, with the previous blend mode applied.
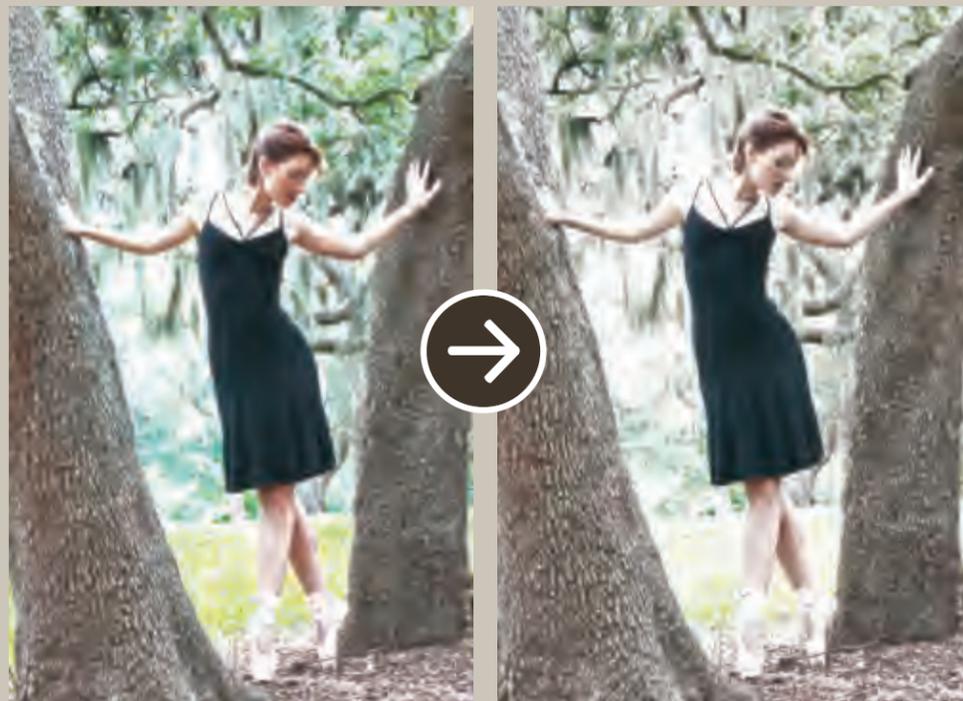
### Adjust in Camera Raw

At any time you can double click on the texture thumbnail to edit the Camera Raw settings. Here I changed Exposure, Contrast and Clarity in the Basic tab and added a Vignette in the Lens Correction tab.
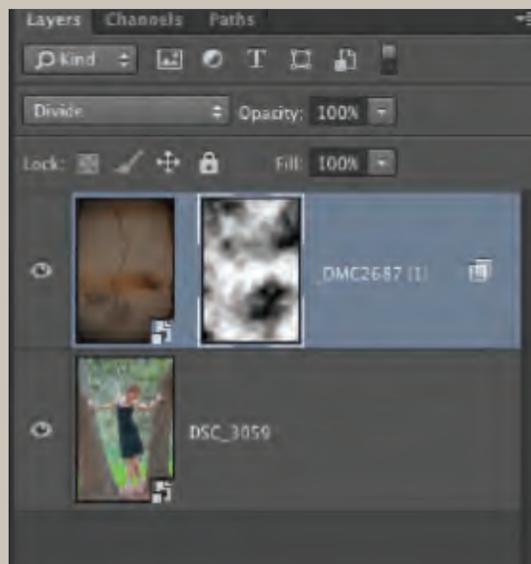
When you close Camera Raw the layer will update and re-apply the Blend Mode and Blend If sliders. Although I didn't mention this before, I would always have my original photo as a Camera Raw Smart Object so I can edit its settings, just as I can edit the texture photo layer.

### Apply a Layer Mask

In a process that's about the same as we talked about with Smart Filters, you can further vary the effects of this photo layer through a mask. The only difference is the Smart Filter mask is automatically available, whereas in this case we have to add a Layer Mask. Once you have a Layer Mask you can use all the techniques mentioned before: Clouds filter, pasting a texture, using Properties.

### Adjust in Camera Raw

This is not a typo, but a reminder that even after doing all these steps, you can, and should, continue to return to Camera Raw to change the settings for the texture and/or the underlying photo. For example, removing all the color will often dramatically affect the results of many Blend modes.

One of the best parts of using these methods is nothing is ever final. You can edit all these options: Smart Filter settings, Camera Raw settings, Blend Modes, Blend If Sliders, the Layer Mask and the Mask settings in the Properties panel. And you can repurpose the effect onto another photo and change the results on the new photo.

learn more!
( Check out this video. )

SHUTTER

© Dave Cross

( TIME FOR A
CHECKUP )
with Blair Phillips

© Blair Phillips Photography

by Blair Phillips

I have taken the past several weeks to evaluate what it is that makes my senior business work so well. There are many elements that must come together in order to achieve success, but I really want to get your mind turning and raise your awareness. We spend so much time doing what will help us to simply get by. If you live with fear of uncertainty, you will find yourself doing the same thing year after year.

With an open mind, a strong will and a clean heart, anything is possible. If you grow to only expect one thing, it's likely to turn out to be a disappointment. Now is the time photographers have to evolve and pay close attention to avoid complacency in our present marketplace. I have pulled out several small components that add major value to my brand and my business. Every business decision I make requires that I ask two questions. The first is do I believe in it; does it make me feel proud? The second is does it make good financial sense?

There have been a lot of questions lately regarding session fees. I live in a very economically depressed market and I am definitely on the high end of pricing here. If I can get the client in the door, I can show them the difference and easily validate pricing for my services. However, my senior session fee is really low in relation to the rest of the world. The reason for that is simple. People generally ask for the session price first, and if that is really high, they will probably not even give me a chance. It is unfortunate that price has taken the place of value these days with most consumers.

My goal is to get them to call. Once they call we educate them on what we do and how they get what they pay for. During that initial phone conversation, we explain everything in great detail; we explain our minimum order requirement and we talk about price ranges. This is the time that we pre-qualify each client. Offering a lower session fee, but maintaining my print pricing has worked well for me and my senior business. In my area we have clients that we can raise to a $2,000 order, but who may not have called if I had a $200 order. It is all about proper education and validation.

There are many elements that must come together in **order to achieve success,** but I really want to get your mind turning & raise your awareness.

Have you ever had a senior spend 20 minutes in the dressing room during each outfit change? If they change outfits six times, that's two hours of time you are not getting paid for. I never have that problem anymore. We base our sessions solely on time. We tell clients we have roughly two hours to photograph their session; that seems like a long time to a potential client. We tell them to bring tons of outfits and we never limit the amount of changes they can have. The reason is simple; if they only brought five outfits and four of them suck, my job would be much harder. They generally bring in a huge suitcase; therefore I have tons of choices to ensure my job will be easier. I tell them the faster they change outfits in the dressing room, the more time we will have to photograph. This motivates them to change quickly so we are ensured an opportunity to create a lot of variety for them.

We are encouraged to set goals from the day we are old enough to understand, and it is sometimes easy to set too many. This has been one of my problems over the past few years. I realized in order to really attain my goals I needed to set only three. I find it most efficient to focus on one goal at a time. It may seem like you are not achieving as much, but goals are met much faster when all your focus is on only one. You can spread your focus over all three as long as you keep it limited to only those three. If there are no business goals in place for your senior business that may truly be the missing link to your growth.

Last year one of my three goals was to work on efficiency. I wanted more time with my family, but wanted to make more profit. We sat down and thought of all the things that would have to happen in order to make that goal a reality. After days of analyzing, it was clear what needed to happen. I needed to photograph fewer seniors and somehow make more money so we put the pricing changes as well as a few other elements in place. I photographed 20 less seniors and made more profit. Choose your destination and believe that you can get there. There is nothing wrong with looking at the big picture, but don't lose sight of all the elements that make up that picture.

Our world is getting faster paced with each year that passes. I have found it important to slow down when it comes to your clients. Every time I see a client walk through the door, I make an effort to stop what I am doing and walk up front to say hello. We have an office manager that normally takes care of clients when they come in. I think it shows a ton of appreciation if I can at least make an appearance to thank them for coming. If they are at the studio for a session I will always run up front, thank them and try to make them comfortable. Some studios have a really commercial feel that is not very inviting. While it is fine to be commercial, be sure to add that personal feel that clients may not get with any other business transaction they have that day. Being able to take time to sit down with clients and simply have conversations is one of my favorite benefits of being self employed. There is no need to rush and my clients are not getting that anywhere else. If you don't have time to do this with your clients, it is because you are not making the time to do so.

I find it most efficient
to focus
on one goal at a time.

There are some things you just never like to even think about. There are also things that you think could never happen to you or your business. For example, we never like to think about being sued for any reason. This was brought to my attention through an experience a photographer friend of mine had while shooting a wedding in New York. Photography is generally an upbeat and cheerful occasion. While shooting the New York wedding, a lady tripped over his camera bag and claimed she suffered injuries. She actually tried suing him for a ridiculous sum of money. His insurance company went to work on a very thorough investigation and found that she has tried to pursue similar cases in the past. Her claim was found to be fraudulent and thrown out of court. This experience he shared was a real eye opener. You need to make sure you have a large blanket insurance policy that protects you and your business even when you are on location. Make sure you keep equipment up off the floor and keep a clean working environment to ensure safety. You may think a client would never do such a thing, but the world is becoming more surprising each and every day. ◼

# VIDEO LIGHTING

# 101

## with Rob Adams

**by Rob Adams**

When I opted to join the thousands of event cinematographers making the jump to HD-DSLRs about four years ago, they completely changed my mindset and approach in a number of key areas of production. Most heavily in the area of seeing light the way I need to in order to create stunning images with this newfound, large-format sensor. I had a whole new plethora of pixels to work with and I wanted my images to look crisp and sharp. I loved being able to shoot at high ISOs and wide apertures. The issue was I had to compensate the way I lit certain scenes to account for this added capability.

These days HD-DSLRs are seriously amazing in low light, especially for cinematographers who, other than working with film, have never had digital capabilities that allowed us to push so far into the ISO scale. High ISOs traditionally meant unwanted noise and artifacts. Trouble is, video noise is not artistic, generally speaking. It looks like bad television reception and it's distracting to the viewer and awful to work with in post. But while we can push higher and higher into new realms of ISO cleanly, shooting at these ISOs doesn't always mean sharp, highly-dimensional images. In fact, when relying on only ambient light without supplementing your scene with artificial continuous lighting, that's exactly what you may get–flatly lit images with no depth. This is where video lights come in and it's good to know how to use them effectively.

For photographers adept at using off-camera flash, these concepts will seem familiar. After all, we are using the same light waves in video as in still photography, although we are applying the basic principals in a more four-dimensional setting, time. The use of continuous lighting in video goes beyond lighting a single subject. It's about having light where you want it, when the lens needs it. I will outline four basic video lighting techniques and products that will hopefully stave off any fears you may have about purchasing a continuous lighting kit that will not only serve your video needs, but can help with your still shooting as well.

## BASIC THREE-POINT LIGHTING

Many of us are already adept at this technique. You have a *key light* providing for the brightest exposure of the subject; *fill light* to illuminate and communicate the shadow areas of a shot, and there's *back light* to keep our subjects separate from our background and add a sense of depth and dimension. To accomplish this during a basic interview shoot I use a set of Kino Flo Diva-Lite 401 fluorescent lamps.

They provide rich, white, dimmable light and include slip-on Flozier diffusers for maximum softness. They also generate very little heat for extended use and help keep my subject's face from melting off. I like to position my key light 45 degrees off the subject on the side opposite from where my camera will face. I set my camera's exposure based on the intensity of the key light and I never shoot with my key light over my lens. Shooting "into" my key light keeps the shot dimensional and more dynamic. The fill light will bring up the focus exposure by filling in the shadow left by the key light. I place this lamp 45 degrees to my camera opposite the key light. I always adjust the light's distance to the subject before adjusting the light's intensity to allow for options with the dimmer in case my ambient light changes while filming. See the diagram below to see how I accomplish professional set lighting on location.

### Wedding Reception Lighting

B&G

DJ/BAND
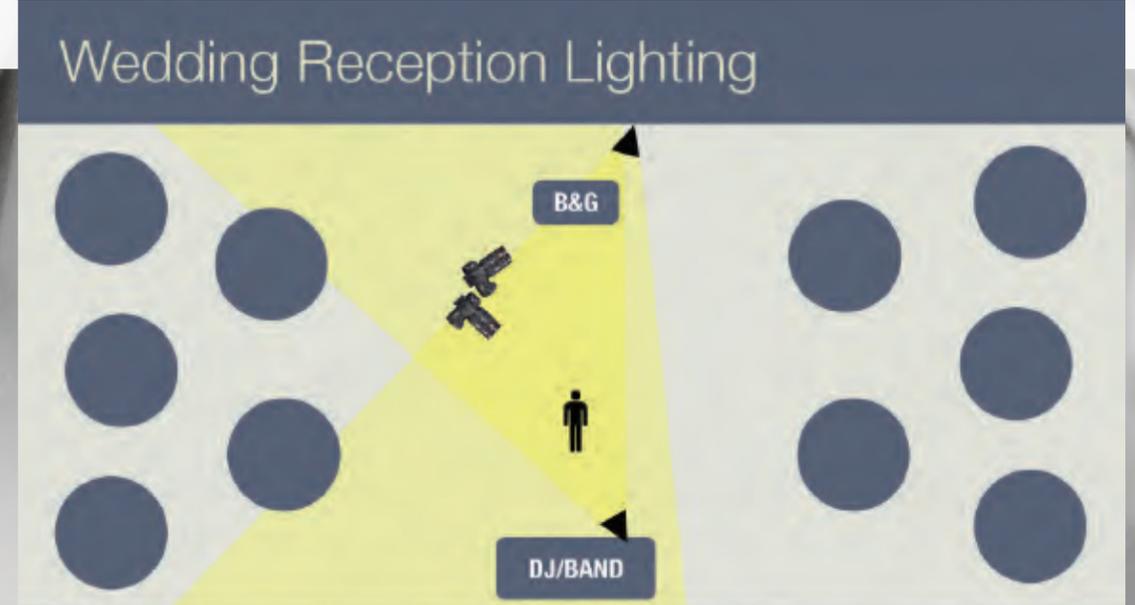
## WEDDING RECEPTION & TOAST LIGHTING

For event photographers looking to do a little video shooting I'll share my technique for lighting wedding receptions. The ability to photograph without having to use much flash will greatly enhance your video quality because you won't have flash frames going off all the time in your video shots. If the lights are set properly, they will be minimally obtrusive and provide stark-enough light that you may not need flash at all.

I start by deciding that the person(s) giving speeches will stand on the dance floor or at the center of the room facing the head table. I do this because I want the bride and groom to be looking at the toast giver. I don't want them craning their necks to look at someone standing behind them. You may have to coordinate with the DJ or emcee and the caterer to plan this in advance. It makes for more dynamic shots because the bride and groom will look natural while reacting to the speeches. It also sets the stage for great dimensional video lighting. I light the room using 2 ARRI 650 Tungsten Fresnels.

Why not the Diva-Lites described above? They don't have the throw I'll need to get strong, focused light across a large room and prevent the spill from annoying guests at their tables. Throw some barn doors on the lights or use some flags to control spill even more.

The ARRIs have an adjustable spot and flood position tuner to help me aim the light right where I want it over long distances. I place each light opposite each other on the same side in relation to the head table and the dance floor. I then place my cameras opposite the lights for dimensional shooting. The ARRI 650 across the room from the head table provides three-quarter key light for the bride and groom while adding rim or back light to the toast giver. The ARRI placed behind the head table (when room allows) gives the toast giver three-quarter key light while shining back/rim light on my bride and groom. See diagram left.

## Basic Interview Lighting

FILL LIGHT

KEY LIGHT

BACK LIGHT
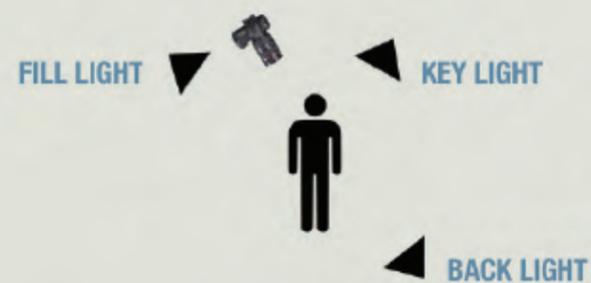
# PORTABLE PORTRAIT & EVENT FILL-LIGHT

There will be times when stationary studio or event lighting won't do the job. After all, these lights can only cover so much ground without becoming ridiculously annoying. To add light to a shoot where your camera's location will be changing often such as senior or family portrait shoots or even wedding photo sessions, consider the Frezzolini Mini-Fill. It gives off a warm, indoor-balanced light (up to 50 watts) and is fully dimmable. You can also get a dichotic filter for outdoor color balance.

You can power this light using a multitude of power sources. I use the Anton-Bauer Dionic Series batteries but they require an older camera mount sandwich adapter to allow for the power-tap connector.

I recommend using the Bescor BES015NC battery pack. Just make sure you purchase your Frezzolini mini-fill with a cigarette lighter adapter.

By mounting the Frezzi on a standard flash pole, you can bring this powerful light with you wherever you need it. I use it for photo sessions and cake cuttings at wedding receptions when the caterer decides to hold certain ceremonial events outside the range of my stationary lights. Simply grab it and go. There's a nifty soft box add-on for it as well.

## DETAILS & ACCENT LIGHTING

When I shoot a couple's wedding-day details, I like to add a touch of artificial light for dramatic effect or to even out ambient light. For small details and product lighting, I use the Bescor Morning Star Series LED light. These 5600K balanced LED lights are dimmable, run on standard AA batteries and two or more can be linked together to build an array of increasingly powerful portable lights. They each include a tungsten filter insert for temperature control and are perfect for ring shots and adding a pop of light in tight spaces. Use them off-camera for best effect. I like to use these lights to accent a still life from behind or up through glass-top tables. Mount it on a slider and have your light source move relative to your camera and subject...cool stuff.

When working with continuous video light it is important to make sure your lights are positioned for when the camera moves. Our eye does perceive changes in lighting as we move around within a setting, so you need to cover your scene with ample light. Be sure to consider where your subjects will move within a scene and make sure there is enough light hitting them to determine the mood you want to convey. If your subject is stationary, simply placing your lights relative to their position may be enough. However, if your subjects will move around, you may need additional lighting to cover more than just one spot. Don't rely on ambient light when shooting scenes that are scripted or may take a long time to shoot. The changing position of the sun will make everything look much different throughout the day. Try to control as much of the environment as possible when time permits. Event cinematographers and photographers can rely on portable lights to get things done quickly with fabulous results.

*All equipment in this article is available at http://www.bhphotovideo.com*

learn more!
Check out this video.

SHUTTER MAGAZINE
behindtheshutter.com

# YOU'VE GOT QUESTIONS? WE'VE GOT ANSWERS

## SHUTTER
behindtheshutter.com

**GOT MORE QUESTIONS?**
*Every month we will have a call for questions on our Facebook page and Sal will answer them with real-world advice.*

with *Salvatore Cincotta*

# creative LIVE

## A LIVE, WORLDWIDE CREATIVE CLASSROOM

>>>>

Celebrate Mother's Day Weekend by learning the delicate art of newborn posing. In her 3-day course, Australian Creative Photographer of the Year Kelly Brown will give live demonstrations to cover basics like using creative props and taking vital safety measures, to the more complicated skill of working with parents to gain trust..

Take control of your environment and master simple lighting techniques to create amazing images within minutes. In this 3-day course, Scott Robert Lim will show you how to shoot in a variety of lighting situations and give you the tools you need to add drama to your images.

KELLY BROWN | MAY 9-11
*Newborn Posing*

SCOTT ROBERT LIM | MAY. 13 & 14
*Crazy Stupid Light*

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# EDIT
## FASTER

BRIDAL SKIN RETOUCHING

with Kristina Sherk

# EDIT
# FASTER

by Kristina Sherk

I recently had the pleasure of being spotlighted in one of PhotoShelter's webinars on their blog where I taught people how to create actions that would save time. While creating the action that I shared with the webinar attendees, I was able to fine tune a skin technique that I use in almost every portrait image and then automate it!

If any of you are familiar with my work, you know I hate skin that looks too smooth. I think it's one of the first signs of bad retouching, along with fluorescent teeth and eye whites, the first things that jump out at me when I see a badly retouched image.

In this article, I'll show you how to smooth skin without losing texture, and teach you how to automate this process by creating an action. Thanks again to Greg Gibson for letting us use another of his wonderful wedding portraits as an example image.

© All Images Greg Gibson

**1** Let's get started by opening our image in Photoshop. For this action I am using Adobe Photoshop CS6. If you have CS5 or earlier, this specific action won't work, but there is a workaround that I'll explain later.

To create the action, we need to make sure our Actions pallet is visible. If you can't see it open, or you're not sure where it is, you can easily go to your Window menu at the top to make sure the word Actions has a check next to it.
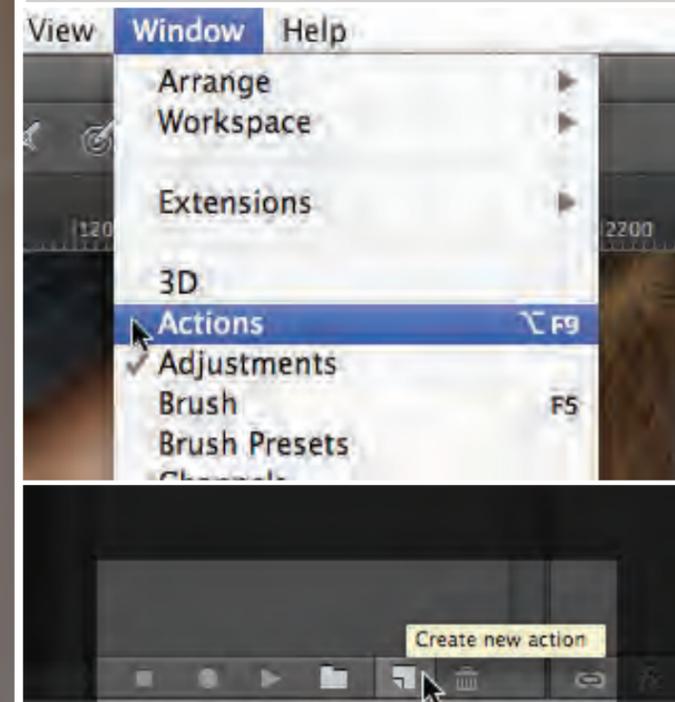
**2** Once you've opened your Actions pallet (or confirmed that is open) you're ready start. Click the new action icon in the Actions pallet–it looks exactly like the new layer icon in the Layers pallet.

**3** I'll name the action "Bridal Skin" and then hit record.
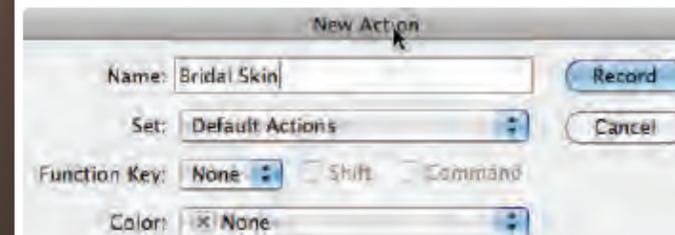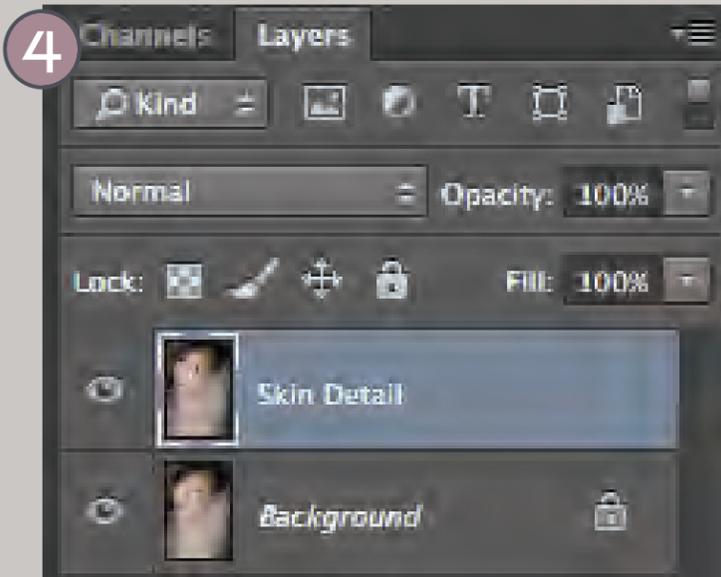
**4**



Critical Note: Actions do not get along with mouse or tablet strokes that are "painterly" in nature. Whenever possible try to avoid using strokes across the image, and try to use as many automated, general menu commands as possible.

I'll start by dragging my background layer to the new layer icon in the bottom of the Layers pallet to duplicate it and then label it "Skin Detail." (Since I'm the shortcut queen, I'll just use Command J (PC: Control J.)

**5**

Then I run a High Pass filter on this layer in order to isolate (and protect) the skin detail. To do this, make sure Skin Detail layer is selected, and then go to your Filter menu and choose Other>High Pass.
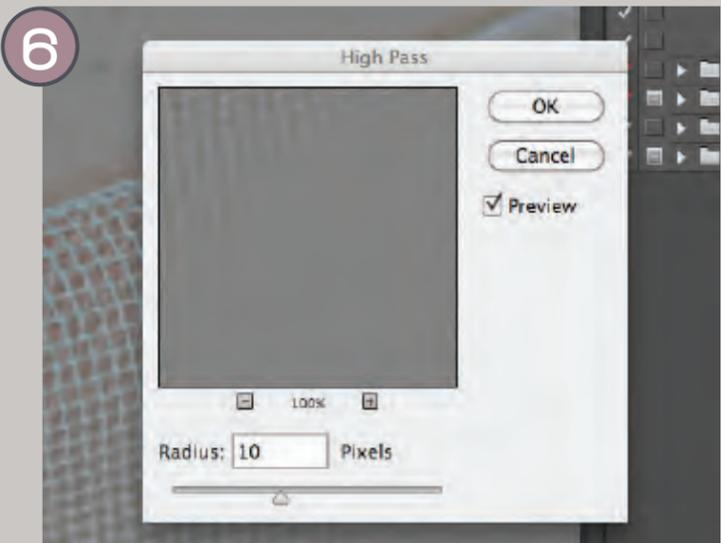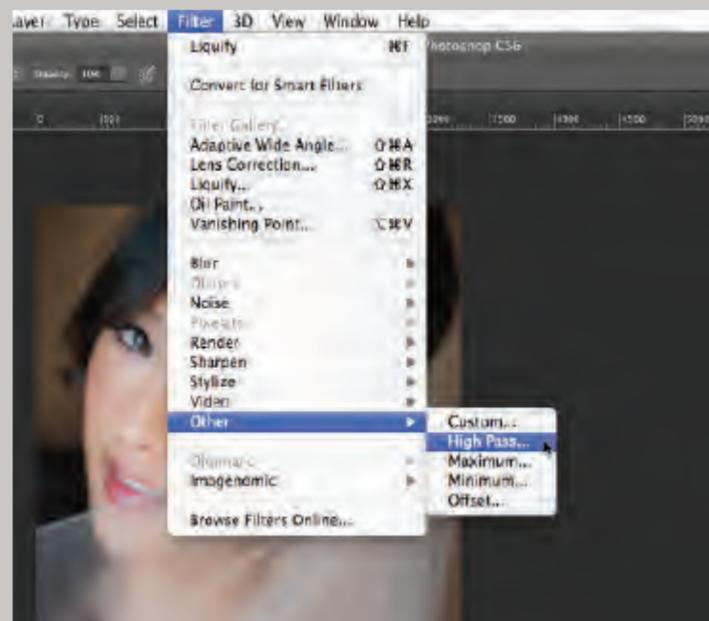


**6**



I like to then zoom my image to 100 percent and increase the radius to wherever I see the skin texture start to be accentuated in the filter. For me, it's at a radius of about 10. Then I'll hit OK.
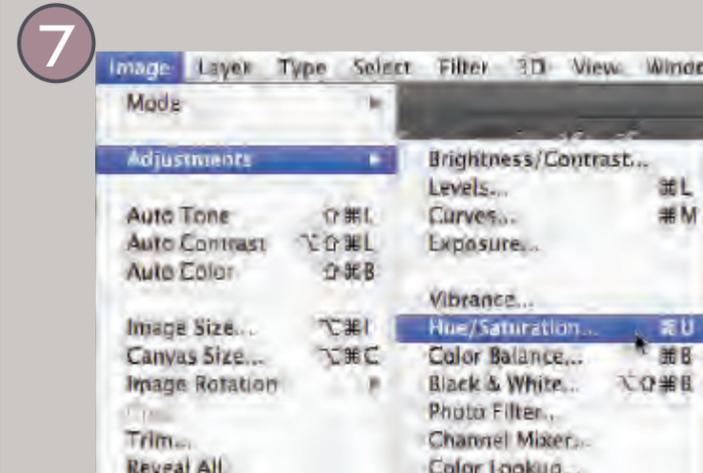
**7**



If I just leave this Skin Detail layer as it is, I'll start to see some crazy color variations appear in the highly contrasted areas once I change the blend mode to something else (which we will do next). First, we need to make sure we desaturate the layer. So with the Skin Detail layer selected, go to your Image menu and choose Adjustments, and then Hue/Saturation. Again, for those of us who are *patience challenged*, you can press Command U (PC: Control U).

**8**

Make sure you drag the saturation value all the way down to -100 and then press OK.
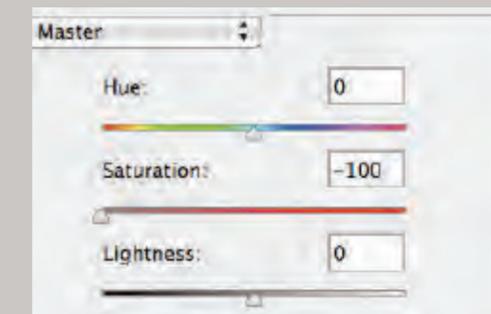


**9**



Once you have desaturated your Skin Detail layer, you can change the blend mode of that layer from Normal to Soft Light. You can access the Blend Mode dropdown menu, which is in the upper left corner of the Layers pallet by clicking the arrows next to the word Normal.

**10**

Congrats! You've now isolated the skin texture. Now, onto blurring the skin tone. You'll need to select and duplicate the background layer again. Then label that layer Skin Blur.

Next, you'll want to blur that layer, but let's do it the non-destructive way by using a smart filter. Select your Skin Blur layer and go to the Layer menu and choose Smart Objects Convert to Smart Object. A small box will appear on the thumbnail of your Skin Blur layer.
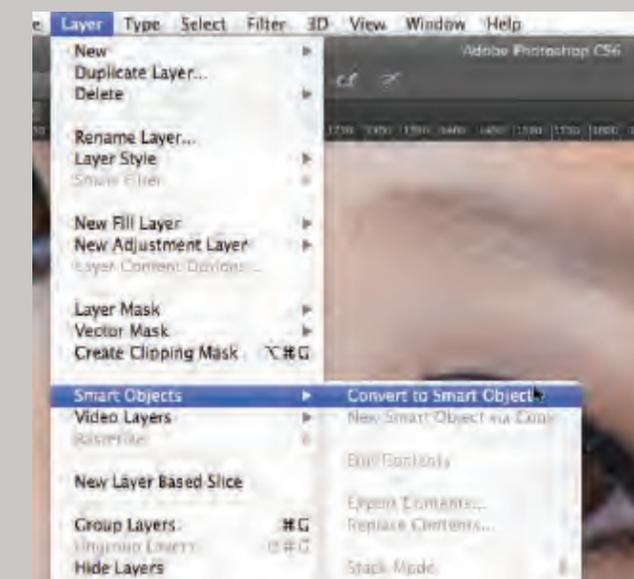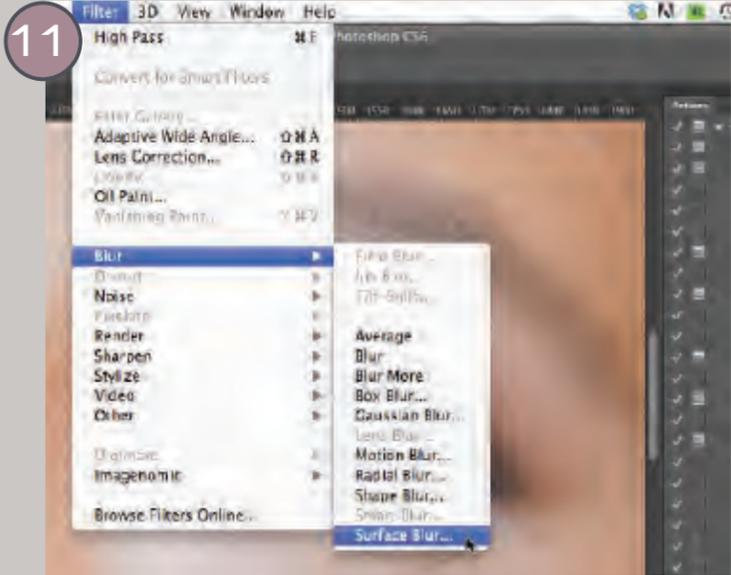
**11** 

After you've converted your layer to a smart object, you can now apply a blurring filter nondestructively! So let's go to the Filter menu and choose Blur>Surface blur. Since I isolated the skin texture earlier, I can focus on blurring the skin to get a nice even tone throughout the face. And the nice thing is, if I go too far with the blur, I can always come back later and edit the amount of blur I originally applied since it is a smart filter! I'll use a Radius of 30 and a Threshold of 20, and then press OK.

**12** Once the processing finishes, find an opacity for that skin blur layer that looks nice and natural. For my image, it's about 50 percent.

Here's where things get interesting. In the bottom of your Layers pallet there's a little icon that looks like a file folder. Click on that to create a new group. Double click the group where it says Group 1 and name it "Bridal Skin."

It's important that you follow this section very carefully. Select the Skin Detail layer, and drag and drop it on the new group that you just created called Bridal Skin. Once the Skin Detail layer is in the new group, only then should you select the Skin Blur layer and drag and then drop it into the Bridal Skin group.
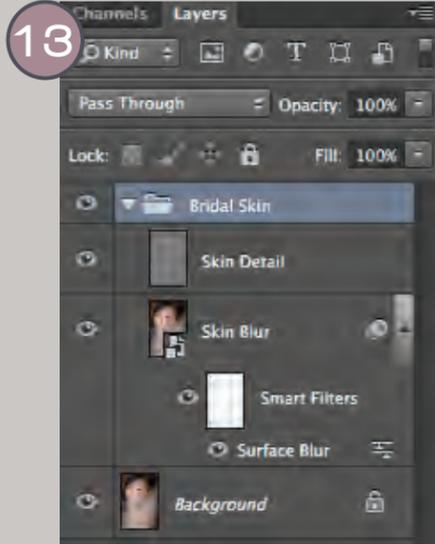


**13** 

The reason for this is that the Skin Detail layer must rest above the Skin Blur layer in the Layers pallet for the skin detail to show. (If this doesn't happen on its own, and you see that the Skin Blur layer is resting above the Skin Detail layer, you can select the Skin Detail layer and instead of dragging and dropping it into its proper order in the group, select the layer itself and then press Command ] (PC: Control ]) to correct the order of the layers in the group. This is what your Layer pallet should look like:

**14** Most of the older actions would stop there, but here's where the power of Photoshop CS6 really shines: I want to create a mask on the Bridal Skin group so the effects of the layers are only shown where there is skin tone in the image, so I will select the background layer then go up to the Select menu and choose Select>Color Range.



**15** 

Once I'm in the Color Range dialogue box, I can choose Skin Tones from the select dropdown menu. Then I will check the Detect Faces box, use a fuzziness of 30 and press OK.

CS5 Note: If you're using CS5, here's where your action will deviate: Skin Tones isn't an option in CS5, so you'll need to select Highlights instead.
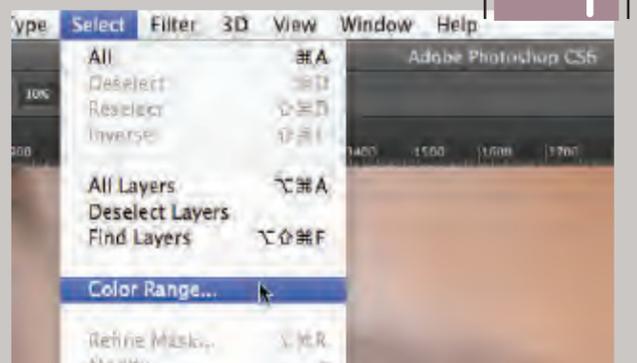
**16** You'll see the marching ants appear and they should be selecting a good portion of the skin tones in your image. Then select the Bridal Skin Group layer in your Layers pallet and click the mask button in the bottom of the Layers pallet.
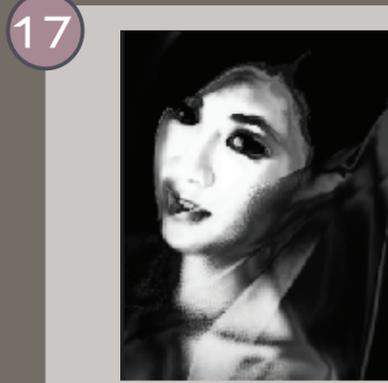


**17** 

This is what your mask will look like. You can preview your mask by clicking on your mask icon in the Layers pallet while holding down your Option or Alt key.

**18**

**17**
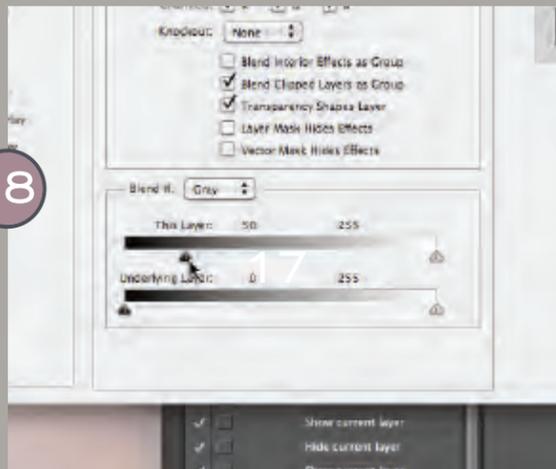
One last step when doing skin smoothing work is to make sure the blur that I applied to the layer called Skin Blur doesn't apply to areas of the face that are darker, like shadow areas (for example, the crease where the bottom of her nose meets the skin above her upper lip).

So for my last step, I will double click the Skin Blur layer, which will reveal the Layer Style dialogue box, and I will pull the black triangle underneath the words "This Layer" from 0 to 50. If the majority of your clients have darker skin tones, you might choose to keep this a little bit lower than 50; maybe 30. You can find this in the Blend If box in the bottom of the dialogue box, and then press OK.

Remember, this needs to be an average for most of your work, since we are creating an action. You can always come back and change that value later if you are running it on an image where your client has much lighter or much darker skin.

**19**
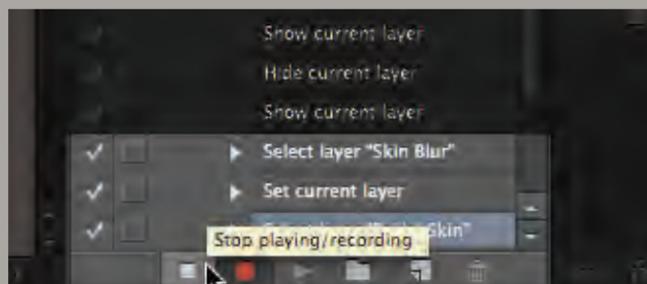
NOW you can press the Stop button in the bottom of the Actions pallet to stop the action from recording.

**20**

Voila! Your action has been created! Now you can run this on any portrait of a bride that you'd like. You can even create two or three different versions. For example, you could create one light-smoothing, one medium-smoothing and one high-smoothing action depending on how much of the effect you want to see. Also, if you think you have lost too much detail in the skin, you can always duplicate the Skin Detail layer, ultimately doubling the effect. Or you can decrease the opacity if the Skin Blur layer even more.

Here's a zoomed-in image showing the before and after of what this action was able to achieve on this image. Not bad what you'll be able to get from one click of the mouse! Enjoy! ■

learn more!
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APERTURE
SOCIETY

BY
Salvatore Cincotta

aimed to help photographers save on services, software, & gear.

only at www.BehindTheShutter.com

IT ALL STARTS WITH A

blog

WITH SKIP COHEN

by Skip Cohen

Let's clarify the title of this month's article. "It" doesn't all start with a blog, because if you haven't learned the ingredients to the craft then no blog in the world is going to help your marketing efforts or build your business.

So, I'm assuming you're doing a few things, starting with everything you can do to be the very best photographer on planet earth! Can you get by being only average? Of course you can, but why would you want to?

Second, I'm assuming you're paying attention to developing a marketing plan. The thing is, anybody can land their first customer. The challenge is getting that first one to come back and then land the second, third and fourth.

Now let's talk about a blog. The big difference between your blog and your website is simple. Your site is where you sell your services and products–your blog is where you open up your heart. A really good blog is all about giving back, sharing and helping other people.

When I started to get into social media and my blog four years ago I was told by a few members of my own family I was too old for this stuff. I was too old to be on Facebook and Twitter. Well, like so many challenges in my life, my most favorite quote of all time applies:

"I do it because I can. I can because I want to. I want to because you said I couldn't!"

And here I am, now on my third blog and all along the way, every day has been a learning experience. So, let's take what I've learned and observed and get you on the right track.

## +What do you want to accomplish?

It might well be the most important ingredient of a good blog. You need to understand your own motivation. You need to have a plan. So many photographers start their blog because they just want to throw their opinions out there. They think a blog allows them to be heard. Well, while that's partially true, every opinion has to be relevant to the audience you're trying to attract.

## +How often do you intend to post?

Consistency is one of the most important ingredients in having a successful blog. My definition of "successful" is drawing the traffic you'd like to have and the right audience. My suggestion for photographers is to blog no less than twice a week, and make it the same two days every week. If you can do more, go for it, but two days a week is the minimum.

## +What's your topic and who's your target?

Stay on point! Don't get caught up in irrelevant topics and remember your audience. I've seen a lot of posts that hit on issues that are personal to the author and have absolutely no relevance to the readership.

Here's a prime example: A young woman wanting to be a family and children's photographer did a post about her drunken binge over the weekend with her girlfriends at a local bar when their favorite band was in town. While it was hysterical to read, it was more appropriate for a college crowd than mothers wanting to hire a photographer for a family portrait.

## +Are you an expert on the subject?

It's okay to put your opinions out there, but if you're not an expert then don't tread in water too deep. A great blog can help build your reputation, but being weak in a topic you claim is your area of expertise is BS also known as "branding suicide!"

## +Know Your Audience!

Ed Foreman, a terrific marketing and motivational consultant from Texas spoke to a group of us at Polaroid years ago. He put out a line that's stayed with me all these years,
*"If I can see the world through my client's eyes, then I can sell my client what my client buys!"*

## *Now modify that for your blog:*

"If I can see the world through my reader's eyes, then I can sell my client what my readership buys!"

You've got to see the world through their eyes and understand their challenges, what they're most interested in reading about and where they need the most help.

### +The 4 Basic Ingredients for Success:

Have great content

Be easily understood

Work to build loyalty

Allow comments

Of the four, to me, being easily understood is the most important. Be concise with short sentences and stay on topic with each theme. Remember to proofread your work, because mistakes in spelling and grammar only challenge your credibility. And stay away from Tweet lingo and abbreviations. Just remember your overall goal is to build blog loyalty and interest.

There's so much I could write about on just this one topic, but let's hit on a couple of direct questions that come up all the time.

"A really good blog is all about **giving back** **sharing &** **helping other people.**"

### +When is it most effective to post?

I've repeatedly Googled this question and have found every possible answer. First I found an expert who said Tuesdays and Wednesdays between 9:30 and 11:00 EST. Another one said Thursdays and Fridays between 2:00 and 4:00 EST. Well, everybody has an opinion and here are the only things I could see people agreeing on.

It depends on your target audience, and Mondays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays are typically lower traffic days on blogs. Lastly, post in the morning and tweet in the afternoon.

### +How long should a blog post be?

In general 200–1,500 words, but the high end is very sensitive to the strength of the topic. People are looking for short, concise and high-impact posts to read. While I've gotten away with long posts, in general they only get the traffic if it's a really helpful series of concepts or a hot topic. People are willing to invest a lot of time in a blog post if there's a lot of helpful content, otherwise they'll read a paragraph or two and move on.

### +How do I reduce bounce rates?

Bounce rates, for anyone who doesn't understand them, are simply people who weren't on your blog or site long enough to pay attention to anything. They walked into the "store" looking for one thing and decided it was time to leave within seconds and just turned around and walked out.

Want to lower your bounce rate? First, deliver what you promised. Give your blogs some zip. Make your blog look good and always try to include a supportive image or illustration. Limit the number of links you have to ads and make following your blog an experience.

Last on the list is a quote from a Seth Godin video I watched a while back:

"Life is too short to do something you're not passionate about!"

A really good blog is all about passion. It takes time, dedication and work. It's no different than your images. A blog allows you to open up and share your heart with your readers. **It's about your personality and how you see the world. Be yourself,** but be the best you can be.

My buddy, Levi Sim, has a great line, "Act as if your grandmother's watching you!" Well, I'm modifying that statement:

"Write as if your grandmother is reading everything you write!" ■

"Life is too short to do something you're not **passionate** about!"

blog

( SELLING *in a*
DIGITAL
WORLD )
with Kristy Dickerson

© Kristy Dickerson

# One question I think every photographer gets asked by clients is, "Do I get the disk of images?"

by Kristy Dickerson

One question I think every photographer gets asked by clients is, "Do I get the disk of images?" I know this is a highly debated topic. There are photographers who give away their images and there are photographers who charge a premium for their services and still don't have to "sell" that they will give the images to the consumer.

Photographers who started their photography careers with film seem to have a harder time with this concept, and understandably so. Clients prior to the digital revolution would charge a commission for the session, but the bulk of sales would be on the back end with print orders. Now, clients demand digital images, and prints are hard to sell for most photographers. Photographers have to evolve to meet consumer demands, but on the other hand it has become harder for photographers to be profitable.

## What is my philosophy & what can I do?

Every client of mine will have a copy their images, not full resolution but high. I have three collections and the top two include a copy of the images. The bottom collection I typically use as a bargaining tool. I never come down in price. I think the minute a photographer comes down in price it devalues them and their service. What if I walked into Louis Vuitton and told them my disposable income is lower this month. Do you think they would say, "Okay we will sell you this bag for less?" They won't! If they did, the value of LV bags would decline. It is the same for offering our service. Never discount. You can offer a gift voucher but discounts will kill your brand.

Why do I sell clients their digital images? I understand from the consumer's perspective the importance of having the digital images. I have young kids and from a personal perspective, I want a copy of any images of my family. Notice also that I said "sell" them images, not "give" them images. Here is where a huge mistake for a lot of photographers occurs; their prices are not high enough. Before the digital revolution, sales would come on the back end. Now the sale is on the front end. Photographers need to know their fixed monthly expense and variable expenses. I have said it before and I will say it again. To run a photography business you have to be a business owner first and a photographer second. Once you know your expenses you can properly price yourself to make a profit. You have to work backwards to figure out your cost rather than just setting a price hoping to attract buyers.

So we have established that selling the digital images should be an option. For the record this is not right for every photographer and business model, but in general, with technology changes this is where business has forced us to evolve.

Why do I sell clients their digital images?
I understand from the consumer's perspective
the importance of having the digital images.

© Kristy Dickerson

So we have established that selling the digital images should be an option. For the record this is not right for every photographer and business model, but in general, with technology changes this is where business has forced us to evolve.

This leads us to the next question, how do I get the images to the client?
*You have four options:*

**+(1)** The original disk. The pro is that they actually get a physical item. You can add branding and packaging and most users know exactly what to do with a disk. But the cons are the durability and reliability of the disk. Since it is a product you are selling you will have to charge and remit sales tax in most states. The cost of a branded disk is around $25 and after shipping you are probably looking at $30. The biggest con with disks is that they are going away and will continue to do so. Computers are being made with no disk drive and the majority of software is now apps or downloads eliminating the need for a disk. I think the disk drive will eventually go the way of the floppy drive. Does anyone remember a floppy drive?

**+(2)** Flash drive is another option. Flash drives are pretty inexpensive, but if you go the branded route you are looking at about 20–30 per drive depending on the quantity you order and the finished material. I don't see flash drives going away anywhere in the near future but typically if you go the branded route you are looking at $700 to $1,000 out of pocket upfront.

**+(3)** You can use a service like Dropbox. There are many cloud service providers where you can pay a yearly fee to store files in a folder in their cloud. Personally, I use Dropbox for all my documents and organization. You drop the images in your Dropbox and then share the folder. The cost is relatively inexpensive. The only con is there is no experience that goes with that delivery method.

**+(4)** An option that is rather new, and I am currently using is PASS, which is a cloud-based gallery like Dropbox, but it is built for photographers. Which means it is branded and they are working on updates to gear it more toward photographers. Images can be uploaded to the cloud and will be out there for 30 days for free. You can pay a fee to have them published for a year for $29. You can track the views and they are working on giving clients the ability to make print orders. They have an iPhone/iPad app so clients can have their galleries at their fingertips wherever they are. There is a Facebook share option as well, so when they share your branding will go with those images. You only pay a fee when you actually need a gallery and just did a job–in others words it is better for cash flow.

all images © Kristy Dickerson
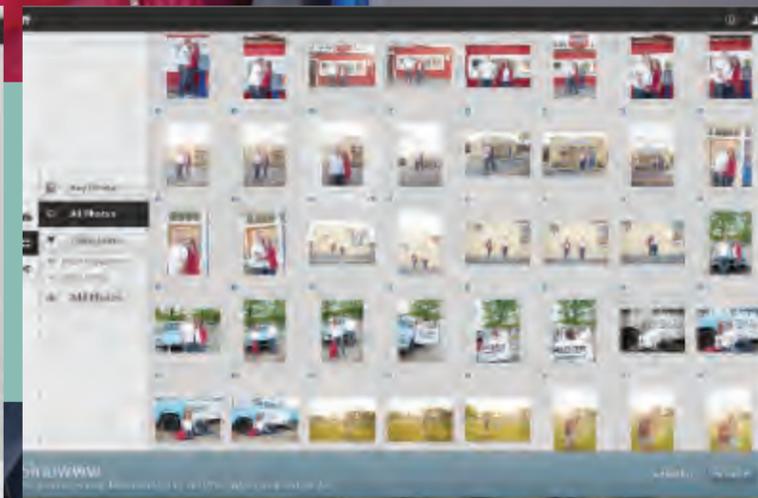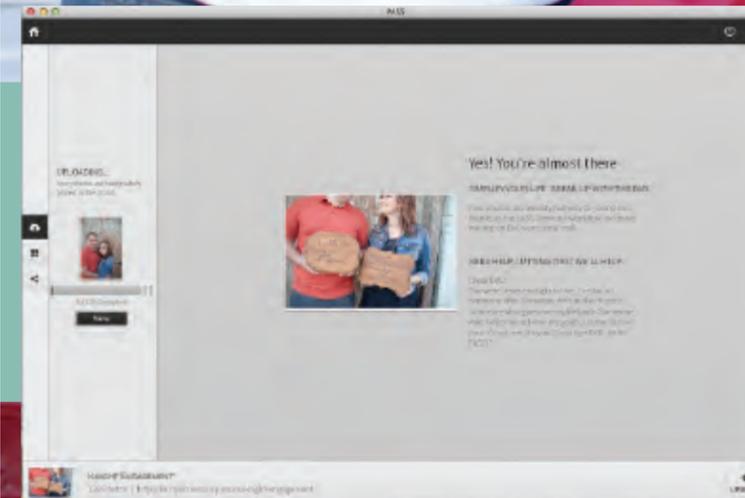
There are many other companies that offer services for proofing and digital delivery. Some do both and some do one or the other. I know this is a highly debated topic on the rights of digital images and I know a lot of people will disagree with me. The bottom line is our industry is evolving like every other industry. You have to be open to change and constantly looking for providers that solve the needs of your business. I am sure there are other delivery methods but everyone's needs are unique. You can look at your services and expenses, and decide what works best for your business model. Never stop learning!

Does all this mean you can't sell images? Absolutely not! In order to maximize print sales here are a few suggestions that I need to do more often myself:

*Meet in person.* Schedule a gallery revealing or just schedule a meeting right when they get back from the honeymoon. Use this time to show them their images, which brings me to my next point….

*Display images.* They won't buy what they can't see. Have impact images that make a statement displayed to show clients what can be done with your images. Make sure to have display albums as well!

*Go big or go home.* Make sure the images you have on display are big! Again they will buy what they can see.

I try to have a couple ideas for gallery wraps or designs ready to show. You can do this in Photoshop. They are visual and you need to show them.

For that day only offer them 20 percent off. This is when they are excited about the images and emotionally connected. Anything that is ordered that day gets a discount.

Have an example of a 16"x20" from your lab and show them an example of a 16"x20" from a local non-professional lab. When they ask, "Why can't I just print these at the local Wal-Mart?" This is what you turn to…gets them every time.

Our industry is evolving. If we can raise the standards across the board and educate clients I believe our industry as a whole can continue to stay alive. So many people say in five years professional photography will be almost gone. I highly disagree but in order to survive you have to operate as a business and raise standards.

Let me end on this note–learn, absorb and then apply advice to your business. I am not saying digital delivery is right for all photography businesses; it is just what works for me. ■

© Kristy Dickerson

## Our industry is evolving.
### If we can **raise the standards** across the board **& educate clients** I believe our industry as a whole can continue to stay alive.

learn more!
Check out this video.

SHUTTER
behindtheshutter.com

EDITOR
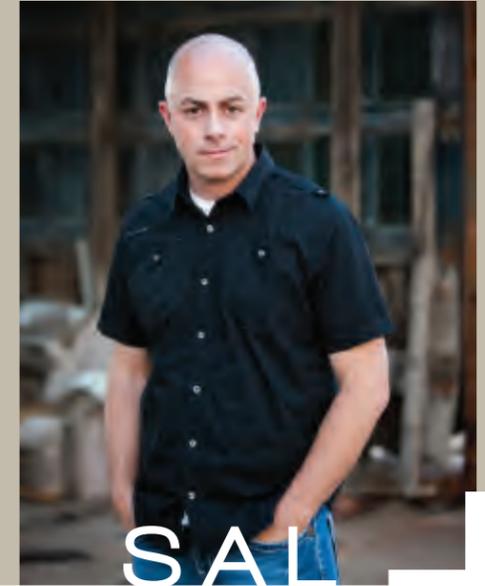
SAL +
CINCOTTA

www.SalCincotta.com

**LOCATION:** O'Fallon, IL

**PASSION:** Weddings & Seniors

Sal was exposed to photography at a very early age and has been in love with our craft ever since. He can still recall the smell of the chemicals in his aunt's makeshift dark room in the basement. However, a career in photography would elude him for over 20 years.

Graduating from one of the top 25 business schools in the country, Sal pursued a corporate career with his photography becoming more of a hobby. In 2007, he left corporate to pursue his dream of a career in photography and has never looked back.

Today, Sal Cincotta and his wife Taylor own and operate a very successful studio in the St. Louis metro area. Salvatore Cincotta Photography, Salvatore Cincotta Films, and BehindtheShutter.com.

Focused on wedding and senior portraiture, Sal has had the opportunity to shoot for corporate clients like Nordstrom's and the St. Louis Cardinals to elite sports celebrities and the White House, photographing President Obama.

**FEATURED ARTICLES**

Q&A with Sal Cincotta

©Vanessa Joy

# ROB
## ADAMS

www.RobAdamsFilms.com

**LOCATION:** Freehold, New Jersey

**PASSION:** Weddings

"Wedding films are my life. It's all about the the story-telling. The art of seeing action, drama and beauty unfold and then harnessing the emotion of it all and the making it come to life on screen...that's why I do this."

Rob Adams began his video career in television over 15 years ago. Four years after that he merged into the wedding industry and eventually started his own business in 2006. Recently, Rob filmed and directed his first full-length feature film that was premiered at Robert DeNiro's personal screening room in New York City.

Because Rob is on the cutting edge of the DSLR video revolution, his business has grown rapidly over the past few years and his passion for finding new creative ventures in the field has as well. His main goal, along with making sure that every product that leaves his studio is amazing, is to teach other wedding film-makers how to bring their work to the next level. Speaking around the world at venues such as creativeLIVE, WPPI, Imaging USA and more, he wants to see each and every film-maker learn about the little things that make filming and editing go from "good" to "the best in your market."

**FEATURED ARTICLES**
Video Lighting 101

# IT ALL STARTS WITH A

## blog
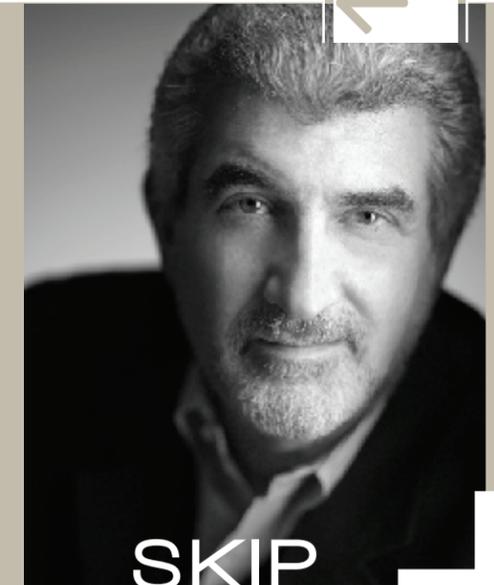
WITH SKIP COHEN

## SKIP
### COHEN

www.SkipsPhotoNetwork.com

**LOCATION:** Sarasota, Florida

Skip Cohen is President/Founder of Marketing Essentials International, a marketing consulting firm specializing in projects dedicated to photography, primarily photographic education. (www.mei500.com)

He is also the founder of Skip's Summer School (www.mei500.com), the founder of the Akron Photo Series (www.AkronPhotoSeries.com ), and the co-founder of GhostRighters (www.GhostRighters.com), a content resource for professional photographers needing help with editorial content, web re-design and marketing. His blogs, SkipsPhotoNetwork.com and PhotoResourceHub.com, are read by thousands of professional and aspiring photographers. On May 21, MEI launched PhotoResourceHub.com a new content site for professional photographers with video, podcasts, blog posts and an ongoing calendar of industry events.

He has been a recipient of ADL's Torch of Liberty Award and Foto Imagen Magazine's Man of the Year Award and in 2001 he received PPA's Legacy Award for his work in support of PPA Charities. His images have been published in a long list of photographic trade magazines, including: *Rangefinder, Shutterbug, Foto Imagen, Studio Photography and Design, Petersen's Photographic* and *The Hasselblad Forum.* He's also competed in print completion in both WPPI and PPA's national conventions.

In addition, he has written six books on photography: "The Art of Wedding Photography", "The Art of the Digital Wedding" and "The Art of People Photography" with Bambi Cantrell: Don Blair's "Guide to Posing and Lighting Body Parts" and "Wedding Photography from the Heart", co-authored with celebrity wedding photographer Joe Buissink. Book number six, "GoingPro", co-authored with Scott Bourne, was released by Random House in October 2011 and remains on the photography book best seller list at Amazon.

## FEATURED ARTICLES

It All Starts With a Blog

# MICHAEL
## CORSENTINO

www.CorsentinoPhotography.com

**LOCATION:** Petaluma, California

**PASSION:** Lifestyle Photography

Michael Corsentino is an award-winning, contemporary wedding and portrait photographer. He is an American Photo 2013 Top 10 Wedding Photographers nominee, Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Lightroom expert, Capture One Pro Certified Professional, author, contributing writer for Photoshop User Magazine, Shutter Magazine and Resource Magazine, speaker and international workshop leader.

Based in Northern California, Michael has been shooting digitally since 1999. His love affair with the magic and science of photography is more passionate today than ever. Stylish, dramatic, edgy and modern images set Michael's photography apart. His award-winning photojournalism, fashion and editorial styles have made him an in-demand portrait and destination-wedding photographer. Passionate about education, Michael loves to share his lighting and posing secrets, post-processing techniques, time-saving workflow strategies and shooting philosophy at workshops and speaking engagements.

**FEATURED ARTICLES**
Let's Get Low

# DAVE +
## CROSS
www.DCross.com

**LOCATION:** Tampa, Florida

**PASSION:** Photoshop

Dave Cross has been helping photographers and creative professionals get the most out of Adobe software for over 25 years. He has a Bachelor of Education, is an Adobe Certified Instructor, and is a Certified Technical Trainer. Dave has taught at Photoshop World, the Texas School of Photography, the Santa Fe Workshops, and Imaging USA. He runs the Dave Cross Workshops in his own studio/workshop in Tampa, Fla. He is well-known for his engaging style, humor and ability to make complex topics easy to understand. In 2009 Dave was inducted into the Photoshop Hall of Fame.

**FEATURED ARTICLES**
Adding Texture to Your Photos

©Dave Cross

# KRISTY
## DICKERSON

**LOCATION:**  Atlanta, Georgia

**PASSION:**  Weddings & Engagements

Kristy Dickerson is the founder and CEO of Fisheye Connect (www.fisheyeconnect.com), professional laundry sorter, CFO of multitasking, wedding photographer, mom of two, and a wife who is never wrong… never. Upon earning her degree in finance and business management, she started her photography business after the birth her first son. As if she didn't already have enough on her plate, in June 2010, Kristy launched Fisheye Connect for other photographers, like herself, looking for quality education. Fisheye Connect allows aspiring photographers to connect with photography industry experts by location, instructor or interest. It is a searchable database for photography workshops/events, along with services that help instructors manage the marketing and financial aspects of their businesses. Merging Kristy's business sense with her passion, Fisheye Connect has become a thriving community of photographers learning and growing together.

## FEATURED ARTICLES

Selling In a Digital World

# VANESSA
## JOY

www.VanessaJoy.com

**LOCATION:** Freehold, New Jersey

**PASSION:** Weddings

14 Years of photography, eight years of shooting weddings, three years of business ownership (not to mention five college degrees)

Vanessa is a trilingual (English, Spanish and a bit of French), award-winning photographer, living with her husband, Rob Adams, in the great state of New Jersey. She has studied photography since 1998 and has spent most of her life running a successful wedding photography studio that shoots 35 weddings a year (at a premium price). In her first three years of business, Vanessa achieved honors such as: 20+ publications in print magazines (including three cover photos and interviews in *PDN* and *Rangefinder*), a Grand Imaging Award from PPA and a second-place wedding Image Award from WPPI.

Vanessa enjoys speaking across the country at venues such as CreativeLIVE, Clickin Moms, WPPI, Imaging USA, PPA-related conventions and personal workshops. She is recognized for her talent and even more for her business sense. Vanessa's clients love working with her, and industry peers enjoy learning from her generous, informative and open-book style of teaching.

## FEATURED ARTICLES
Hiring and Training Staff Pt 2

© Vanessa Joy

# + KRISTIN
## KORPOS

www.NiftyKnowledgeRocks.com

**LOCATION:** Boston, MA

**PASSION:** Business

Kristin Korpos is the founder of Nifty Knowledge Rocks, which provides business, legal and tax information to photographers. She is an attorney licensed to practice in New Jersey, and holds a Masters in Business Administration as well as a Masters in Accounting.

In 2009, while trying to find a creative balance to her corporate career, Kristin started a photography business in the Boston area (www.kristinkorpos.com). She quickly became a much sought-after wedding photographer whose work has most recently been featured in *Rangefinder*.

With the success of her own photography business, Kristin has become passionate about empowering other photogpreneurs with the knowledge necessary to run healthy, legitimate, successful businesses. Through the NKR podcast, videos, and blog, photographers can gain knowledge on a variety of topics. Other resources, including contracts, legal forms and sales tax guides are available in the Nifty Knowledge Rocks Shop (www.niftyknowledgerocksshop.com).

## FEATURED ARTICLE

Sales Tax

©Kristin Korpos
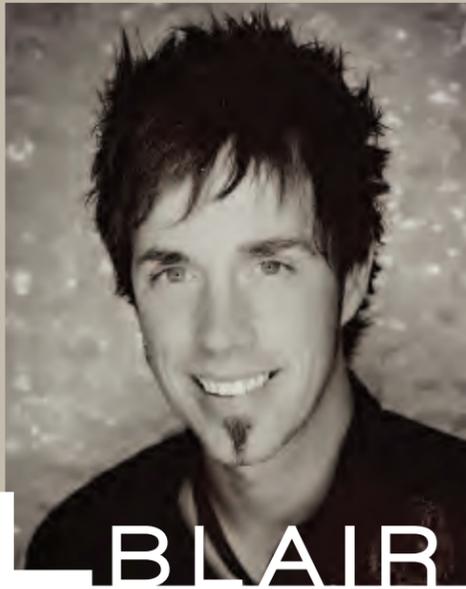
# BLAIR
## PHILLIPS

**LOCATION:** Landis, North Carolina

**PASSION:**
Seniors, Babies, Families & Weddings

Blair's team includes four employees plus Blair, who photographs 20 to 30 weddings and 500 studio sessions per year. Blair has a passion to teach photographers how to express themselves in ways they can't find with traditional training. He speaks to and teaches thousands of photographers and digital artists each year at national conventions and expos including WPPI, Imaging USA, SYNC Seniors, and various PPA conventions.

Blair and Suzanne's "eclectic elegance" style and positive energy educate and inspire photographers, while allowing them to stay true to themselves. This young team pushes the envelope daily with creativity and positive inspiration. As a side note, after 10 years of marriage, Blair and Suzanne welcomed Ava Blair Phillips into the world on August 3, 2011.

**FEATURED ARTICLE**

Time For a Checkup

# KRISTINA
## SHERK

**LOCATION:** North Bethesda

**PASSION:**
Photoshop

Great photo retouchers are ghost artists. The viewer rarely has any idea of the amount of work that goes into making the final picture after the photographer has clicked the shutter. And that is the way it's supposed to be.

Kristina studied digital art and photography at Elon University in North Carolina and then interned for D.C.-based photographer, John Harrington, where she learned the business behind the art. Since she was a photographer before she started retouching nine years ago, she understands her role as a retoucher, as well as the aim and vision of the photographers. In other words, "she speaks camera," and makes certain always to stay within their photography style. Her clients hail from all over the world and include National Public Radio, Sports Illustrated, Time, Inc., XM Satellite Radio, onOne Software, Cotton Inc. and Hasselblad USA.

**FEATURED ARTICLE**
Edit Faster-Bridal Skin Retouching

# LAURIN
## THIENES

www.EvolveEdits.com

**LOCATION:** Portland, Oregon

**PASSION:**
Weddings & Engagements

Laurin Thienes was 17 when he photographed his first wedding – 20 rolls of Porta400VC. Never looking back he went on to study photography with some of the most well-known photography studios in Oregon as well as leaving the state to study still photography at Brooks Institute in Santa Barbara, CA. Upon returning to Portland, Laurin was the studio manager of Holland Studios, a high-end, high volume wedding photography studio photographing over 250 weddings per year. After his departure from Holland Studios, he has continued to work as a contract and freelance photographer, having work published in *Grace Ormond*, *Men's Style,* and *Rangefinder*. Most recently, Laurin is the co-founder of Evolve, a premier wedding and portrait post-production service in Portland, OR. Outside of photography, Laurin also likes to cook, travel, and spend time with his wife and young daughter.

**FEATURED ARTICLE**

The Importance of a Team

© Laurin Thienes

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