

Workflow

by Ken Lapham

<<http://pdgrafx.com/board.html>>

Although everyone develops their own workflow after working with digital image files for a while, there are certain required steps that must be a part of that workflow and they should be done in a certain sequence. I'll share a few steps from my routine and hope you may find something useful in them.

My good friend Charles Nardone has graciously allowed me to use one of his images for this little tutorial.

The first step in editing any image is to review it on your monitor. (Don't ever delete a picture in your camera .The tiny LCD is simply not large enough to give you a adequately detailed image.)



The first thing, of course, is to decide if it is a "keeper". If it is I will try to determine the C.O.I., (center of interest), from which I will base my cropping. Some photographers start with the C.O.I. and work outwards until they arrive at the most pleasant composition. but I use the following procedure:

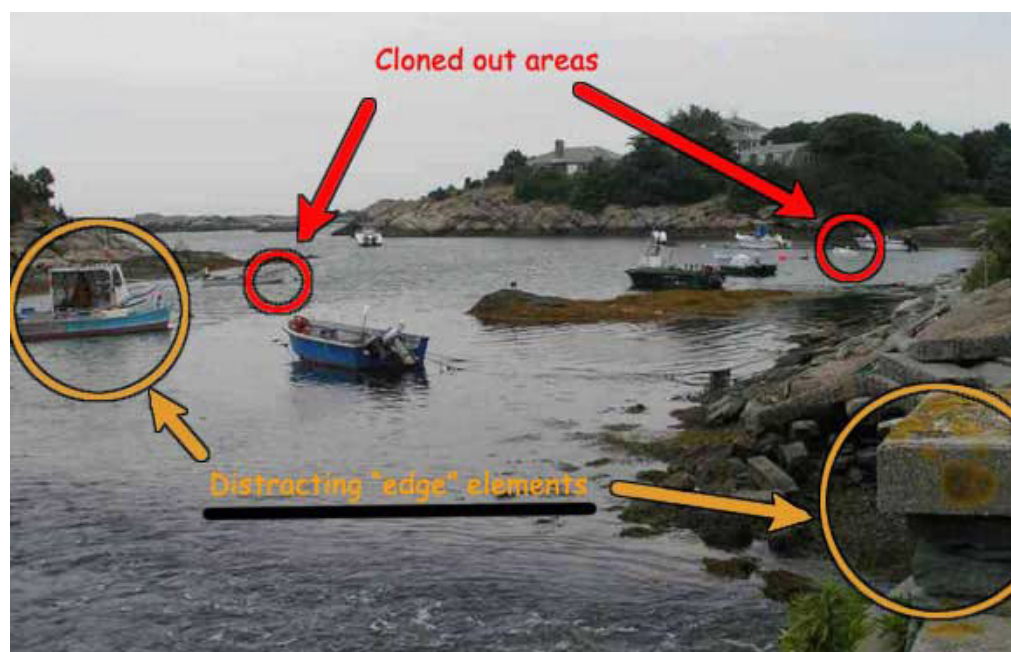
- (1) With the crop tool draw a boundary box to cover the area where you estimate the final crop will be.
- (2) Use the mouse to move the box around and also use the corner control points on the crop box to make it larger or smaller.

While doing this you have to keep a few things in mind. Watch the edges and avoid any distracting elements like tree branches, parts of people, cars, etc. A lot of these things can be fixed after the crop using the clone tool if need be.

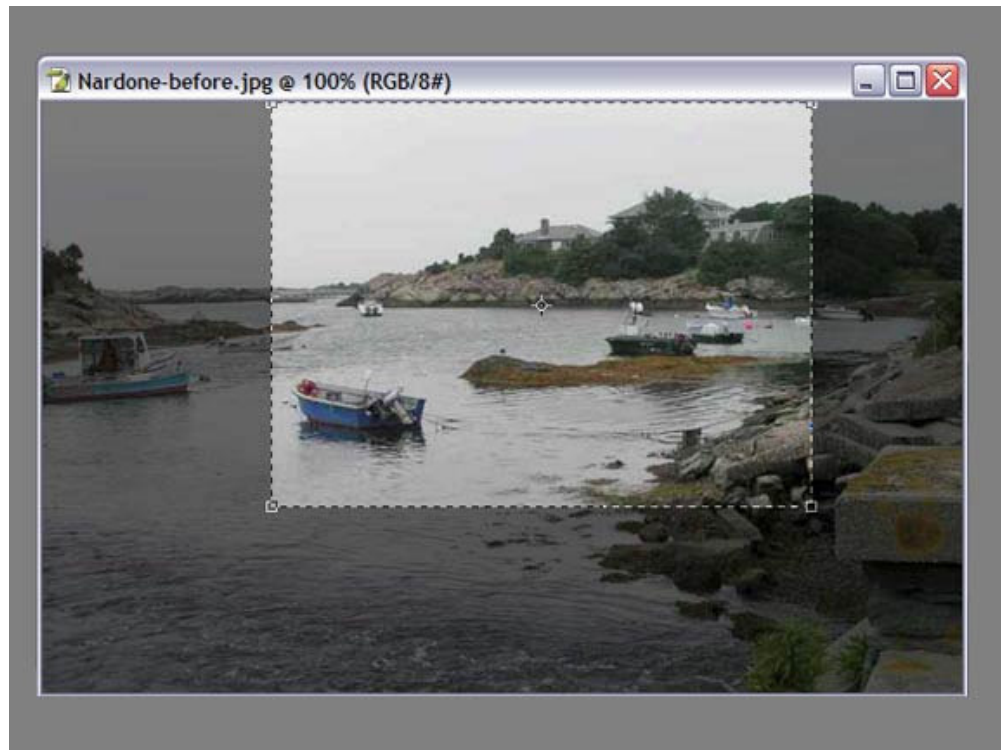
Every interesting picture should have at least one *C.O.I.* There can be more than one if they are carefully balanced. The *C.O.I.* does not have to be a "thing", but can be an interesting interplay of shadow and light, a pleasant combination of terrain lines, or any attractive element that draws the eye

Cropping is an art. It requires time, a lot of experimentation, and at least a modicum of artistic talent. I've only got the first two so I have to substitute a lot more of the second to make up for the lack of the third! It can make or break an image and is well worth the time spent perfecting the technique.

Finally, don't forget that many times there is more than one possible crop in a given image. (See the *P.I.P.* section on the *HOME* page of this website.)



The illustration above shows a few of the distracting elements as well as two areas that had to be cloned out of the final crop. See below.



Okay, now we have established our final composition and it is now time to optimize it. I'm not going to go through the various color correction steps, sharpening, density, or contrast issues. Each of those are a tutorial unto themselves.

But I am going to show you what I think is the most important techniques you can use to bring an image to it's fullest potential. The idea is to make sure that it contains a complete range of tonal values from full white to full black.

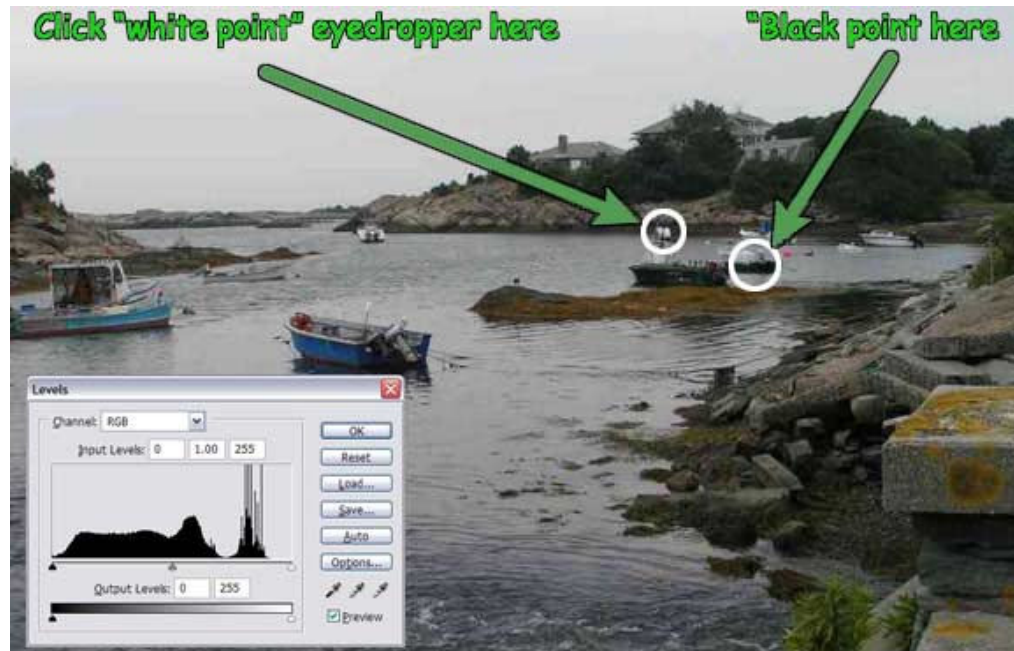
One of the main reasons for the tremendous appeal of Ansel Adams work is that he developed darkroom procedures to insure that his prints achieved that goal.

The way we will duplicate Mr. Adams efforts with our computer magic is by the use of the "LEVELS" tool. This tool will be found in virtually every true graphics program. The

"Histogram" associated with the levels tool is a visual representation of the extent of the tonal values contained in your image. If the little "mountain range" does not extend the whole way to either side of the box containing it, it means that you presently do not have a complete range of tones. If it doesn't stretch to the left you are missing dark tones, and if it is short to the right, (as in this example - see below), you are missing light tones. That explains why the picture appears muddy and washed out. It is the lack of contrast due to shortage of the lighter tones

Now, how do we fix that? Fortunately It is very easy, It is called "setting the white and black points". Just follow these steps:

- (1) You will notice three eyedroppers in the levels dialogue box. We will be using two of those to make our corrections. The one on the right is the white point one. Click on it and find the lightest area on the image. I've used the area as shown on the example below. Click there, (you may have to magnify the image somewhat to make it easier to hit the white spot.) When you click it note what happens to your picture and the "Histogram" in the levels tool window.
- (2) Now do the same thing with the left eyedropper which is the black point setter, but click it on the hull of the boat as shown. Note again the changes to the picture and the "Histogram". The little mountain range should now extend the whole way across and you have a full range of tones from dark to light, and a much better contrast!

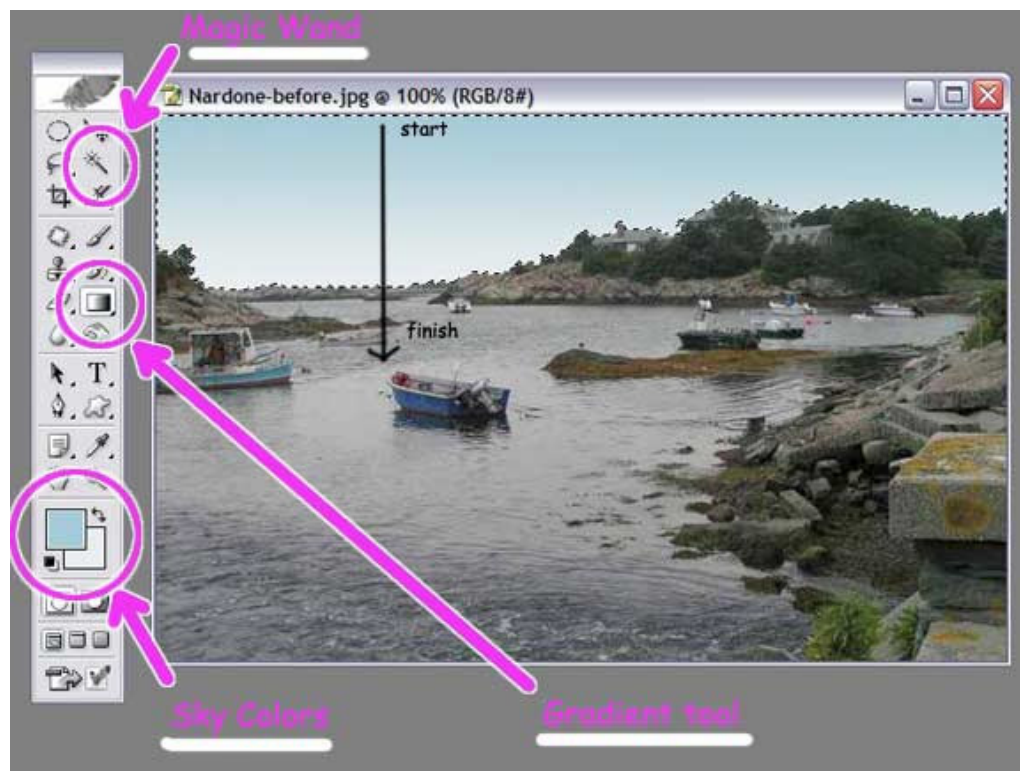


Although we haven't talked about it, the middle eyedropper in the levels dialogue box is used to set the "neutral gray" point in the image. If it is possible to determine where there should be neutral gray such as a concrete pavement, cement block wall, the shadow under someone's brow, etc., you can simply click there with the middle eyedropper and completely correct all the other tones with one step without having to use the white or black eyedroppers!

Play around with the middle one, you can't hurt anything, and the more you do it the better you become at identifying the neutral gray areas.

In some cases the "auto" button in the levels box will do an adequate job, but learning to set the white and black points will be worth the effort in the long run.

Now let's talk about the sky. In order to perk it up somewhat you can use an easy method without having to insert a brand new sky taken from another picture. In this case we don't want the sky to have a strong impact in the image so we will just add a little color with the use of the "gradient" tool.



The first step is to choose two sky colors in the colorpicker to use for the gradient. You then make a selection of the sky. In this case it was very easily accomplished with the "magic wand" tool. You then make sure that the gradient tool bar options are set correctly and draw a vertical line starting at the top of the picture and extending downward to a point somewhere in the middle of the picture.

The length of the stroke will determine the division of color in the gradient that you draw. Play around with it by drawing the stroke to several different lengths. You can't hurt anything.

Well that's about it. Keep your composition simple. In almost all cases only one C.O.I. If there is a lot going on in the scene, take two pictures instead of one. Or make two crops and create two pictures from the single capture. With today's high resolution cameras that is certainly easily done.



Don't forget to have some fun with your completed picture. There are thousands of free "actions" that are yours for the taking! They require only one mouse click and they do all the work.

Workflow

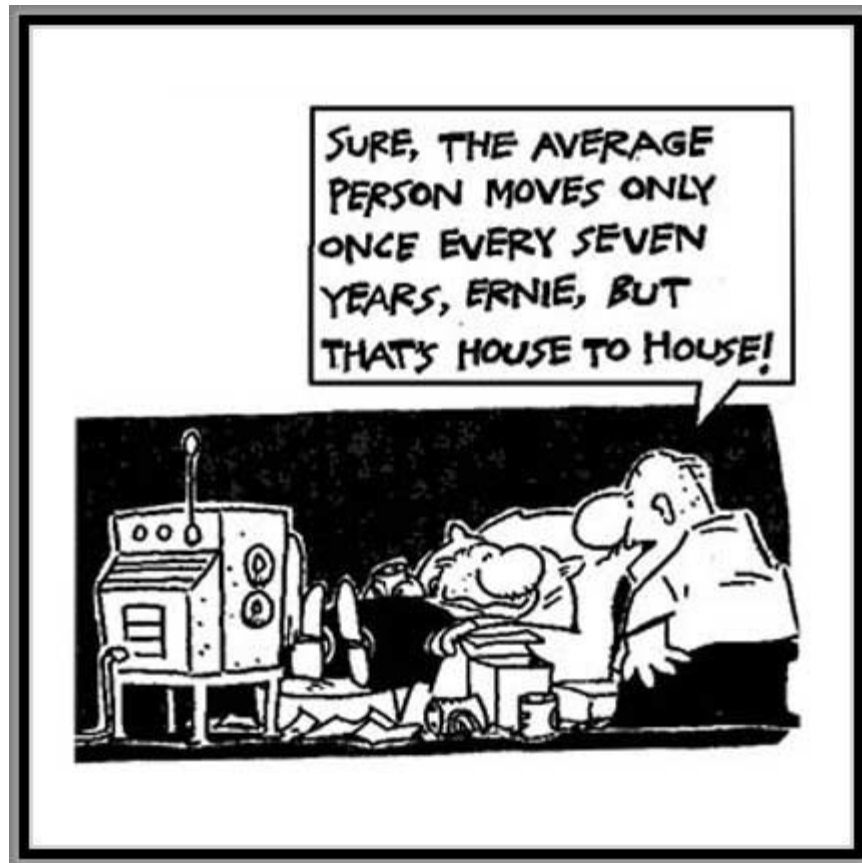
Below are a few variations of the finished image.







Don't hesitate to contact me if you run into a problem or have a question.



Copyright (c) 2004 PD Grafix. All rights reserved.