CONTENTS

4 Windows 8
10 For the Love of Birds: Arthur Morris
26 Sampling Colors in Photoshop
30 Keeping Level
35 StickyAlbums
40 Before & After in Lightroom
44 Photoshop CS6 Preferences
57 Gifts for the Photographer
64 Identifying People in Photoshop Elements
70 Compact Camera Revival
From the Editor

I always enjoy the opportunity to learn from other photographers, gaining new insights, new techniques, and new perspectives. This is part of why I enjoy featuring interviews with great photographers whenever possible in *Pixology* magazine.

This month, I’m happy to feature an interview with my friend Arthur Morris, an excellent photographer and teacher. In fact, all of my best bird photographs were captured while co-leading Instructional Photo Tours with Arthur, including the burrowing owl image featured on the cover of the September 2012 issue of *Pixology*.

In addition, you’ll find lots of other content in this issue. In fact, this is by far the largest issue of *Pixology* to date. And more great issues will follow as well!

As always, I welcome your thoughts via email at tim@timgrey.com.

Thank you,

Tim Grey
Editor
A Photographer’s Perspective on Windows 8

By Tim Grey

Windows 8 represents a dramatic change in how you interact with your computer, and is a significant departure from many of the key Windows experiences many users have become accustomed to.
This latest version of Windows—released about 27 years from the original launch of Windows 1.0—is built specifically for a touch-screen experience, with a focus on mobile devices. In fact, Microsoft has launched their own tablet, the Microsoft Surface, which makes full use of the capabilities of Windows 8.

There are two basic lenses through which to evaluate Windows 8. The first is as a typical computer user, and the second is as a photographer running specialized applications such as Photoshop and Lightroom.

One of the key things to keep in mind with any operating system is that once you’re working within a specific application the operating system itself fades mostly into the background. This is especially true with applications from Adobe and other software makers with a focus on photographers. Such applications often use non-standard interface elements, and generally allow you to run in a full-screen mode where you likely couldn’t tell at a quick glance which operating system you are even using.

What that translates to is that from my perspective you don’t need to think about Windows 8 so much as a photographer, but rather as a computer user in general. And from that perspective, things are very different with Windows 8, and sometimes challenging and frustrating.

The Start Screen replaces the Start Menu in Windows 8, and accounts for the vast majority of the change in user experience for this latest version of Windows.
Start Button Becomes a Screen

The Start Button with Windows 95, and provided a much-improved method of launching applications and accessing key features compared to the previous Program Manager. In Windows 8, the Start Button and related menu is effectively replaced by the Start Screen.

In many respects the Start Screen creates a more pleasant experience than using the Start Menu. To begin with, the Start Screen takes up the whole screen, so there is more real estate available. Live tiles representing applications can display dynamic information, such as news headlines or the latest weather. You can scroll through the available applications, and even adjust the size and arrangement of the individual tiles.

The new Charm Bar provides access to additional options, such as search, sharing, devices, and settings. You can access the Charm Bar by moving your mouse to one of the right corners of the display, by pressing Windows+C on the keyboard, or by dragging inward from the right edge on a touchscreen.

There’s no question that the Start Screen takes a little bit of getting used to, especially if you’re working with Windows 8 on a “normal” computer with a typical keyboard and mouse.

Touch versus Mouse

It doesn’t take very much time to realize that Windows 8 seems to have been designed with a tablet computer in mind first, with desktop and laptop computers as a secondary focus. The gestures you can use on a touchscreen seem intuitive and sensible, while at times you may find that particular activities are a bit clunky with a keyboard and mouse approach.

That said, with just a little bit of time, and especially if you learn some basic keyboard shortcuts, you’ll find that Windows 8 isn’t as bad as some reviewers have made it sound.

That said, there are tremendous benefits to having a multi-touch enabled experience when using Windows 8. Therefore, you may want to give some serious consideration to purchasing an accessory touchpad that supports multi-touch to use as a complement to or replacement for your mouse. A good example is the Logitech Touchpad T650 (http://amzn.to/SjwUsw).

Two Experiences in One

After exploring Windows 8 for a little while, you start to realize there are effectively two experiences encapsulated into one. You have the Start Page experience, and then the Desktop experience. The Start Page is actually fun to view and explore, and applications that run as actual Windows 8 applications will launch full-screen and behave in a manner that is well-suited to the Start Screen.

Other applications, which includes most applications you’re likely using, will launch in the “old” desktop environment, which will look familiar to anyone who has used a relatively recent version of Windows.

These two experiences really feel like two completely different operating systems working together, and sometimes that can be a little frustrating. For example, there are a variety of settings available via the Charm Bar.
on the Start Screen, but a completely different set of options available on the older Control Panel, available in the Desktop.

I think one of the best things you can do to improve your initial experience with Windows 8 is to maintain a little bit of perspective, and to think of the Start Screen as an advanced version of the Start Menu, rather than something completely different (even though it is very different).

For example, one of the things I have heard with some frequency among users who are new to Windows 8 is that they don’t like that the Start Button has “disappeared”. True, the button is no longer found on the taskbar, but you can still have a similar experience by moving your mouse to the bottom-left corner of the screen to display an icon for the Start Button, and then clicking to bring up the Start Screen.

I also highly recommend making use of the Windows key if your keyboard is so equipped. Simply press the Windows key to switch between the Desktop display and the Start Screen, depending on which screen you’re currently working in.

**Performance Improvements**

While much of the focus on Windows 8 involves the changes to the user experience and interface of the Start Screen, there are also some noticeable performance improvements in Windows 8.

Starting Windows 8 was considerably faster in my testing. The interface also
seems snappier compared to prior versions of Windows, and overall testing shows that most operations are as fast or faster than previous versions. In many cases applications will also run a little faster due to changes to the operating system.

**Application Compatibility**

I have to give Microsoft a lot of credit for continuing to make big efforts on the backward-compatibility front over the years. Microsoft claims that any application that ran under Windows 7 will run under Windows 8. I certainly haven’t seen any exceptions to that myself, though there are reports of certain applications not behaving properly under Windows 8. Fortunately, I’ve not personally experienced nor seen any significant reports of the applications used by most photographers having any problems under Windows 8.

**Upgrading**

While many users will likely start using Windows 8 because it is installed on a new computer they’ve purchased, you can most certainly upgrade an existing computer to Windows 8 as well, provided it meets the system requirements. You can even upgrade via a download version of Windows 8 through the Microsoft website. Before contemplating an upgrade, however, I recommend using the Upgrade Assistant to confirm your computer meets the requirements of Windows 8, and so you’ll get information on any possible compatibility issues. You can find the Windows 8 Upgrade Assistant here:

http://bit.ly/Win8UpgradeAssistant

Key applications in Windows 8 fill the screen with a simple interface that seems ideally designed for a tablet computer, but also ensures a clutter-free experience on any computer.
Try Before You Buy

There are things I really enjoy about Windows 8, and things that I find a bit annoying about it, especially on an existing computer platform as opposed to a tablet device. There's no question that it can take some time to get comfortable with the new Start Screen and some of the other dramatic interface changes in Windows.

As a result, this is an operating system update that I strongly encourage you to test out before you make the switch. The challenge, of course, is that it will take more than just a few minutes of playing around with Windows 8 to get a sense of how comfortable you'll be with the various changes. Therefore, if at all possible I encourage you to make an extended visit to a friend or computer store where you can try out Windows 8, preferably with a little bit of guidance from someone who has already become comfortable with the new interface.

Overall I find Windows 8 to be fun to use, and it certainly doesn't get in the way of key imaging applications such as Photoshop and Lightroom. I do find some of the interface changes and user-experience options to be less than ideal when using a keyboard and mouse, but with a little bit of time those frustrations fade as you learn how to make use of the many keyboard shortcuts and other options available for getting around.

And of course, if you switch to a touchpad or display that supports multi-touch, I think you’ll find you actually enjoy all of the new capabilities of Windows 8 much more once you’re familiar with all the new capabilities.

Windows 8 System Requirements

The basic computer system requirements for Windows 8 are as follows:

- 1 GHz Processor
- 1 GB RAM
- 20GB Hard Drive Space
- Display Adapter Supporting Microsoft DirectX 9

There are a variety of smaller details you’ll want to pay attention to, especially when it comes to certain special features. You can find a detailed list of system requirements for Windows 8 on the Microsoft website here:

http://bit.ly/Vv9P5s

Windows 8 can be purchased as part of a new computer, or via upgrade from a variety of sources, including a download option directly from Microsoft for $39.99.
I first met Arthur Morris when we were both speaking at an event in Portland, Oregon, and I’ve been happy to call him a friend ever since. I’ve always been impressed by his photography, found him incredibly willing to share his knowledge, and enjoyed his great stories and fun personality. In my mind he is quite likely the best bird photographer in the world.

I give Artie credit for helping me capture all of my favorite bird photos. Each of those favorites was captured during one of his Instructional Photo Tours (IPTs). He had been kind enough to invite me along as a co-leader, and in the process I also became a co-learner along with the other attendees.
Artie has many accolades, being a Canon Explorer of Light, a world-renowned photographer, a much sought-after educator, and more. He has many fans, and he makes himself very accessible to those photographers. Just before Thanksgiving, the day before Artie was getting ready to head to Bosque del Apache to lead another great field photography workshop, we were able to spend some time on the phone. I’m very pleased to share that interview here, so you too can get to know Arthur Morris a little bit better.

What got you into photography in the first place?

Well, I was a bird-watcher for six or seven years, starting in about ‘76 or ‘77—I don’t even remember. And then I had seen some photographs and programs by these two guys, Thomas H. Davis, Jr., and this old Eastern European guy, older man at the time for me, Tony Manzoni. Before then I just had an AE-1 and a 50mm lens and I had taken a few pictures of my kids, you know a couple of rolls of print film. But not much interest in photography.

And then after seven years of birding I was like, “What am I doing?”. I had seen most of the birds of New York state, it’s getting boring. So, I asked around and ended up buying the Canon 400 f/4.5 FD manual focus lens. Went out, took some pictures, got the film back and said, “Oh, that’s nice, what are those spots on the film?. Oh, those are the birds.”

Then I started crawling in the mud, and the rest is pretty much history, and it’s been an amazing history.
Obviously you’re known first and foremost as a bird photographer, but I’ve seen plenty of amazing landscapes and bears and other photographic images from you. What is it that brought you to birds in the first place? Obviously bird watching, but why birds?

Well, I guess it goes back to my main interest when I first started birding, I mean really when I first started birding, I had gone out once or twice, I had gotten a field guide by Richard Pough, because I had seen a skimmer skimming in a little pond when I came back from fishing, and I thought that was pretty cool. And then I went to Jamaica Bay once or twice. Went in the spring with my family once. That was pretty good but it didn’t stick.

Then in August I went back and in the log I saw that there was an American Kestrel sighted and I looked in the book and I said, “Oh, that’s BS. A blue and orange falcon in New York City? What are they, on drugs?”

Then of course I went out for a walk and I saw the bird, and I wanted to get closer to blindly I followed it and the next thing I know some horn is honking. “Hey, you’re not allowed over there. That part of the refuge is closed. If you want to get close to the birds and have freedom then go across the street to the east pond.”

So the next morning I went out to the south flats of the east pond, which became one of my soul places. And there was this beautiful sort of cinnamon buff colored bird with a long bill that was curved up and had a pink base to the bill, and in the meantime behind me there’s like a hundred thousand cars and trucks going by on Cross Bay Boulevard, right in front of me probably fifty yards past the end of the pond is the A train and the C train, taking like a million people a day into the city, and overhead of course are jets going in and out of Kennedy. I’m going, “This is crazy, nobody knows this bird is here”.

And it’s so beautiful. So my first interest was in shorebirds, and they pretty much epitomize the reasons I like the birds. They’re beautifully handsome, they have interesting plumage sequences that you can study and learn, and learn to identify. It’s actually easier to identify
them as to if they’re juveniles or adults or winter plumage than it is as to the species. And then they fly ridiculous distances. And I mean ridiculous.

The pectoral sandpiper breeds for the most part in central Siberia, flies across North America on an angle, hits the east coast and goes down to Argentina for our winters, and then repeats it in the spring, comes back up. And there’s others. The American golden plover—they rival the flights of the Arctic tern, which goes to Africa and South America.

So, you know, the interesting plumages and the ability to fly a zillion miles. When I first started going out on the east pond, I saw two Sanderlings, and they had a bunch of little colored bands on them. And each one had a band that had a tab on it, and the band with the tab, which is called a leg flag, is from Argentina. So number one, these birds were banded in Argentina, and now they’re in New York City, in Queens. Number two, what the hell are they doing flying together? It’s obvious that they were banded together, and then they made their way to this little patch of the east pond together. So totally insane.

Well that ties in with one of the great mantras in photography, which has always been to know your subject. But with birds it seems like this is a huge undertaking. There’s so many species, with varying behaviors, migration patterns, and more. How important is it to really understand the birds you’re
photographing beyond just being able to identify the species?

Well, for me being a birder—at that time it was called bird-watching—but being a bird-watcher or a birder, was a huge advantage. Within a couple of years I said, “Hey, you give me somebody who’s a pretty good birder and I can teach them photography in five minutes.” If you have a great photographer who wants to become a bird photographer, that transition is far more difficult. So knowing your subject, as with anything that you photograph, is a huge advantage. And just being able to anticipate behaviors, and knowing where the birds are.

I mean, when I go to Trinidad or someplace new—right now I’m planning an exploratory trip to Nepal in the spring—I’m not going to know the birds. And I’ll make it a point to learn the birds I photograph, and then I’ll know that species, but just knowing the birds in general, it’s a huge help.

I often tell other photographers that you are probably the most knowledgeable on photographic exposure of any photographer I know. Does that come from intuition, years of experience, careful study, or something else? In other words, is there hope that all photographers can learn to master exposure?

Well, let’s go back to the beginning. One of the things I’m most proud of is that I’ve taken only one course on nature photography. It was eight Tuesday nights given by my friend Milton Heiberg from New York City Audubon. It was in February of 1984, eight Tuesday nights for two hours. And I didn’t know anything about exposure.

Of course we were using film and Milton is still a good friend to this day. He lives down here in Orlando and I see him every once in a while. And I remember getting on my knees on the floor and begging him to teach me exposure. He was a professional commercial photographer. Nature was for fun. And when he photographed a Campbell’s soup can or a Doubleday book, he got the right exposure.

But he could not at the time teach me how to get the right exposure. So I read a lot, and I struggled, and, you know, John Shaw’s book, *Nature Photographer’s Complete Guide to Professional Field Techniques* (http://amzn.to/TFw2vB). That gave a decent basis, but it was much too simplified, assuming that the whole picture was always one tonality. But it got me started a little bit, and of course trial and error helped.

And then the big turnaround for me: I’d been studying for probably eight years or so, and two pretty well known nature photographers, John and Barbara Gerlach, did some writing for I think *Nature Photography* magazine, and I saw an ad for their exposure document. So I sent them whatever, twenty or thirty bucks,
and I got this Rexograph paper—how much have things changed today with digital and PDFs and MP4 videos and the like?

Anyway, I got the thing and I started studying it, and I quickly realized two things. Number one, at the time they weren’t very good writers. I had a handle on what they were talking about, but it wasn’t explained clearly. And number two, they had this diagram, which I reproduced with credit in the original *The Art of Bird Photography*. And once I saw that, and I realized that, hey, if you spot meter a white and you open up one-and-a-third stops, or you spot meter a middle tone and close down one stop, you wind up with the correct level of exposure for brilliant whites. Once that hit me it was just one of those “ah ha” moments.

So my best advice for folks is... Well, today with digital it’s not so necessary. Take a picture, if you have ten seconds with the bird or subject you’ve got to get the exposure right every time. Expose so the histogram has data in the fifth box going all the way almost to clipping. So with digital it’s far more simplified.

But what I tell folks is, hey, there’s those once in a lifetime moments, those BBC moments, that backlight for ten seconds, you have to have a good idea if you need to be plus two or minus one, or else you risk blowing the picture. So take the time to study exposure theory.

And a zillion folks have said it, that the best treatment of exposure theory is in the original *The Art of Bird Photography*. So I’m proud of that. And then we simplified things in the CD book, but the principles are the same.

So I generally have a pretty good idea, and film and digital the exposures are the same
thing. So if you have a dark subject that dominates the frame and then some whites you need to underexpose, and if you have whiteout conditions and no sun you need to go at least two stops over. Those principles don’t change. But it’s almost criminal how easy it is today for people who are starting with digital.

But sometimes it’s not so easy, and you don’t have multiple opportunities, or at least for any specific photo at any given time, and I think one of the most challenging examples of that would be birds in flight. What sort of tips can you offer for achieving greater success when photographing birds in flight?

Well, we start with the tip that I give for all kinds of bird photography, which is in general point your shadow at the bird. You want the bird within fifteen degrees of your shadow. In other words you want the sun behind you, and you don’t want to be photographing a bird that’s way to your left or right.

Secondly, you want to make sure to have your limit range switch set on the far focus so the lens doesn’t waste time hunting, and generally, with most lenses, its a great idea to pre-focus manually.
We were on the ship, for example, in South Georgia and when we did the crossings back and forth to the Falklands, if most of the birds were sixty feet out from the ship, I'd tell people to just pre-focus on the water under the birds. Then when you lift the camera and get the bird in the frame, the system doesn't have far to search.

And as far as exposure, you generally for flight want to, if you have one predominant subject... Say we're at Bosque where I'm heading tomorrow, Bosque del Apache in New Mexico. Your primary subject is snow geese, the white ones. So it might be a sunny morning and if its really clear and its 8:30, we're going to wind up at something very close to a two-thousandth at f/8 in manual mode. And as long as the bird is roughly in that 15-degree arc, 30 degrees all together, fifteen degrees on either side of the sun angle, where you're shadow's pointing, you're going to get a pretty good exposure without any blown highlights.

The other thing that folks don't realize is that you always want to photograph—not always but 99-percent of the best flight photographs are having the birds flying parallel to your position, slightly toward you, or right at you. So, you don't want to be working with a west wind in the morning or an east wind in the evening when the birds are flying away from you.

Once in a while—I just posted one on the blog yesterday of an Inca tern—we had wind against sun. We were stuck on a rock, the light was behind us, so there wasn't much light, but all the birds were flying and landing away from us into a west wind. So those conditions can be really tough, and if we had an east wind that morning we would have all been famous.
You talk about bird photographers out in the field, and it’s funny to me sometimes how readily they stand out with their extreme telephoto lenses, big tripods, Better Beamers attached to flashes... All that gear costs money, of course, and so one of the things I hear a lot from photographers who are interested in bird photography is whether it is even possible to do good bird photography on a budget.

Oh, without a doubt. In today’s blog post we talked about the Sigma 50-500. One of my students, Clements van der Werf, used that a lot in South Georgia, especially in bad conditions, and he made amazing photographs. I mean, you’re going to need to spend at least a grand getting a used 400mm, even a used 70-200mm, depending on where you live.

And we’re doing a B&H Photo Event Space presentation in December, and one of the segments I’m doing is about choosing and using lenses for bird and nature photography. And one of the big lessons is, hey the 800 with a teleconverter is often the worst lens to have in your hand. It works great for my style of “clean, tight, and graphic”, but when the bird flaps its wings or two birds start fighting, I’m often too tight. So I try to always have an intermediate telephoto on my shoulder, a 70-200, or the 300 f/2.8, which is killer.

It is on the blog, but on the third day of this huge ship to the southern oceans, I tripped on the rock on perfectly clear ground and I fell and smashed a brand new 500mm II, $10,500, and I smashed my brand new 1DX, about $7,000. So for the rest of the trip I was using the 300mm. And a lot of days it was just great. I even went without a tripod, even though we had some fairly low light. And it can be really enjoyable just going down, even when I’m going down to Fort DeSoto, say, I think, were you there with me?

Yes, I was there.

Sometimes I just take a short zoom and go out and say, “Let’s see what I can do”. And I’ll often create new and different pictures. So there’s tons of opportunities no matter where you live or using shorter focal length lenses and making great pictures—I call them birdscapes.

Do you ever feel like you’ve photographed a particular bird species so much that you already
have enough photos of that species and you just don’t need to photograph it anymore?

That actually makes me chuckle...

I’ve been to San Diego a zillion times. I know you were there guest co-leading also. But when I get to San Diego—my mom used to live there. She lived there from ’70 till about 2004, and I would go out every year. And every year I would get to her house, and as soon as I get in the house she would say,

“What are you doing tomorrow?”

Ma, you know what I’m doing tomorrow.

“No, what are you doing tomorrow?”

Ma, I’m going to La Jolla.

“And what are you gonna do when you get to La Jolla?”

Ma, you know what I’m gonna do when I get to La Jolla. I’m gonna photograph pelicans, just like I’ve been doing for the last fifteen years.

She’d say, “Don’t you have enough pictures of pelicans already?”

So, the answer to that is, no. I mean, if its snow geese, or great blue heron, or brown pelicans, probably the three most photographed species in my files, the next time I go out, you know, on Tuesday morning when I get up to photograph snow geese I’ll be as excited as I was the first day.

You know, I’m not a storyteller with the camera, I’m more of a one shot person, looking for some beautiful pose or some
amazing light or some new perspective, something that nobody’s done before. So that hope is always there, even if you photograph the same bird a hundred thousand times, the next frame might be the BBC prize.

Speaking of that unique photo as it were, over the years you’ve incorporated a pretty wide variety of creative approaches, including a variety of in-camera blur effects, for example. How do you dream up these techniques, and how important do you think it is that photographers explore these sorts of possibilities?

It’s one of the things I love most about digital. I jokingly say, “Hey, at the end of film it cost me 38 cents to push the button.” Do you really think you ought to be shooting 500 blurs at 38 cents a pop? I mean we made some good blurs with film, but it was really difficult and really expensive.

Now with digital you’re free to do anything. So, slow shutter speeds they were first... That was my digital epiphany, when I wound up switching for good from film to digital. It actually happened at Bosque. I made some pictures and I didn’t realize when I took them that I was at a sixth of a second. And for years I had been telling people, “Oh, don’t take a blur slower than a 15th of a second.” So this whole thing with digital where you, the learning aspects, you see the shutter speed you see the aperture you see the ISO you see the picture, it’s just incredible.

So once that happened you can start pushing the envelope, and now, it’s funny you mention it, with the new—most folks will know that I’ve been a Canon Explorer of Light for 15, 17, 18 years now—but the new 5D Mark III, oh my God. I had a 1DX and I just ordered a second one to bring to Bosque since I smashed the first one I bought, but the 5D Mark III has two features that are just too much fun.

In-camera HDR, you know I love HDR but, man, having to bring the three or the five or the seven images into either Photomatix or HDR Efex Pro, that’s a pain. Here you go, bang, bang, bang, and you get a 61 megapixel JPEG, and my favorite setting is Art Vivid.

They give you a bunch of presets, most of them are terrible. Natural is nice, Art Standard’s OK, but I love Art Vivid. Then I just desaturate it a little, lighten it a little. We had one on the ship, in South Georgia, and just from seeing the image on the laptop, they had a fundraiser to raise money for the rat
eradication problem in South Georgia, and this three-frame HDR Art Vivid image of a bunch of cute penguins by a stream with snow-covered mountains and snow in the background went for $750. So that was exciting.

Then the other feature I love is the multiple exposure. And of course my good friend Denise Ippolito turned me on to that. She uses it with flowers, I use it a lot with big groups of birds where you move the camera, and there’s so much more experimentation to do with those features and with everything else digital. Heck, after you spend your ten or twenty grand on lenses and another ten or fifteen grand on cameras and get a four thousand dollar laptop and a couple of thousand dollars worth of software, and $500 worth of CompactFlash cards, digital’s free.

So once you’re out there you might as well push the damn button.

Denise and I did an eBook, the Guide to Pleasing Blurs, and one of the things we emphasized is that once you’re in a blur situation take a lot of pictures. It doesn’t cost you anything more once you’re there and you’re setup. And the funniest part is that often times the first one is the best. It’s funny, that’s pretty much a rule in photography. You see a macro subject, you setup, you take one, maybe there’s something you can move, or move this around, and then you get the pictures back, you can take a hundred and the first one’s the best.
Well, speaking of going through those exposures, I’ve had the opportunity on more than one occasion to watch you sort through images, and I have to admit it scares me. I’ve seen you delete images that are better than the best bird photos I’ve ever taken in my life. Can you share a little bit of your philosophy when it comes to deciding which images to keep and why you throw away what I would consider perfectly good images?

What I do, well, I just got back from this amazing trip to South Georgia and the Falkland Islands. More than three weeks, probably 18 to 20 photographic sessions, and some of them we were out in the field photographing for twelve hours. I captured—I don’t know—probably four or five thousand images. And I try to edit every picture every day.

And my rules for editing are... And when I say editing I mean not image optimization I mean sorting the images. On the first edit, the first time I go through the pictures, I may get down from 800 pictures from one day down to about 200 images. At the same time I’ll go through a second edit, and in the second edit my guideline is if you’re not thrilled delete it. And then on the way home I generally take another look, and my general rule is if you don’t love it or if it doesn’t fulfill some educational purpose, delete it.

So I wound up from the entire trip with about 950 images that I kept. And I only optimize about 70 images, which is quite low. Usually when I get home from a trip like that I have around 250 optimized.

You have a blog at birdsasart-blog.com, and there’s a huge amount of content there, with more just about every day. I swear it seems that you must spend more time writing for the blog than you do taking photos. How much time are you spending on the blog and what will readers find there?

Well, as I like to say, “the blog is the bomb.” Today is Sunday, I’ve just been home less than a week and I’m getting ready to fly away again tomorrow, and of course I didn’t have Internet access on the ship, so I prepared a post for every other day while I was away. We
have a tremendous readership and we don’t want to lose them.

Then I did a bunch of blog posts, pretty much every day, every day and a half. And just to give you an idea we also have the Birds as Art bulletins, which are quite a great marketing and exposure tool, they’re free. And everything, the blog and the bulletins, all contain what I call the images with our legendary Birds as Art educational captions.

You always read in a magazine, you know, this picture f/16 at an 8th of a second. And for years I’ve said that doesn’t tell anybody anything. So from the first picture that I ever published online I made it a point to tell people how I metered and how I compensated. So just in looking at the blog or the bulletin, looking at the pictures, and seeing the exposure compensations, folks can get a huge idea of how to get better with exposure.

But just for an example, I’ve been getting up early, I generally am an early riser, I get to bed early, sometimes as early as 8:30 or 9. And I’m up at four, sometimes 3:30, it’s always by 5. So on Saturday, which was yesterday, I started working on a bulletin and ten hours later I finished the bulletin.

And today I did not the longest blog post but not the shortest—it featured images that other folks took on an incredible snowy day at a place called Cooper Bay when I punked out. I was tired and I didn’t go, and that blog post took me about five and a half hours.

You look at John Shaw, who’s a famous nature photographer, and he’s quiet and unassuming, and you look at me and I’ve got somewhat of a big mouth, I’m from New York. I’ve mellowed a ton and I’m much more at peace than I used to be five, ten years ago, but I like being the center of attention. My dad never had much nice to say about me so I’m still trying to make up for that.

But the thing is that I enjoy the sharing. Don’t get me wrong. I enjoy being the center of attention. And I enjoy what notoriety I have in the field. But in the long run it pays off. I mean, fifteen years ago, twenty, when I first got online, I started answering emails from everybody. Now if you send an email to most top pros you get a form response from their staff. So and so is in the field, he can’t, blah, blah, blah.

I’ve answered everyone individually for twenty years. And people go, “What’s wrong with you? That’s insane!”

It all goes back to answering the email questions, you know, doing the stuff on the blog, doing the stuff on the bulletin. It is
marketing for things like *Digital Basics*. But the information there is huge, and we update it for free. And now we’ve just started a new gig, I’m emulating my friend Tim Grey a little bit. Denise and I have always talked about apps, and then learned that each one costs a couple thousand to do, even if it’s not too complex. I don’t know how to do it, so that hasn’t worked. And then when I got involved in this “24 Hour Photoshop” thing, I got Camtasia, and started doing screen capture Photoshop tutorials.

So we just released our first one the other day, King Penguin Image Clean-up, and I pretty much paid for Camtasia in just a couple days, so that’s like a brand new market and it’s going to be pretty much limitless. And the strategy will be to post a before and after picture on the blog, basically give people an idea of what we did, it’s all in *Digital Basics*, but as you very well know people just fly by seeing what you’re doing at the computer, seeing the step-by-step. So the screen capture videos are something new and exciting for us.

And speaking of watching what you’re doing, I’ve had the personal privilege of joining you on a few of your Instructional Photo Tours, your IPTs, and in fact, all of my best
bird photographs were captured on one of your trips. Can you give readers a sense of what they can expect if they decide to join you on one of your IPTs?

Well, I fly to Bosque tomorrow, and then Tuesday morning Denise and I will wake up early and head out and do a scouting run just to see where the birds are in the morning.

We’ll meet the group Tuesday evening where we’ll each do an introductory slide program, give them an idea of what they’ll be photographing. Then we get up the next day at about 4:30, leave the hotel at 5:30, photograph for a couple of hours, come back for lunch at about 11am. Then by about 12pm we’ll be starting Photoshop sessions. We’ll do that for an hour or an hour and a half, we have a bunch of great co-leaders including Denise Ippolito, Mike Hannisian, and my friend Jim Heupel, who’s a really good landscape photographer, and he’ll do a session on Lightroom during the day.

Then just multiply that by seven with the exception of Thursday when we’ll photograph and then go up to Albuquerque for a wonderful buffet at the Crown Plaza.

Usually at the end of the first full day of the tour we do a critiquing session where folks are invited to bring five or six of their best natural history images, and we give them an honest critique. And one of the things that we try to do each trip is to have me edit the day folder. So if I take 400 pictures just I go through them in BreezeBrowser and show them how to use the checkmarks for keepers and that’s a tremendous activity that folks just love.

What I’d like to do one day is an eBook with series of from two to ten images, and ask folks which ones do you keep and why. And then have them click through to the answer page and talk about head angle and all the little factors. You might take twenty or thirty pictures, and almost invariably if you take thirty images of the same bird in the same position, one image is going to stand out as being clearly best.

I just did this one day... A lot of times I’ll do it at lunch and the people would be gathered around behind me. So then we started doing it on a projector, and people just groove on it. So I don’t know when I’ll have time to get to that eBook, but probably not this week...

Well, it sounds like you’re very busy but having lots of fun.

Yeah, the whole trip has been... If anybody would have told me where I’d be in 2001, and how well I’d be doing, I wouldn’t have believed it at all. I would have said “You’re on drugs.”

Learn More From Arthur Morris
Website: www.BirdsAsArt.com
Blog: www.BirdsAsArt-Blog.com
In a variety of situations it is helpful to be able to sample a specific color from a photo you’re working on in Photoshop. For example, when performing image cleanup work I’ll often paint over an area that has some degree of color problem, using the Brush tool and the Color blend mode on a separate layer to change only the color of a specific area without affecting the texture. I’ll also often use a color from within the image as the color I use for text when adding words to a photo, and of course there are many other examples of situations where you would want to sample a color from the photo.
On the surface, sampling a color in Photoshop is quite simple. All you need to do is choose the Eyedropper tool, and then click on the image to sample a specific color. But as with so many things in Photoshop, there are of course some additional options.

First off, there are a couple of ways you can access the Eyedropper tool. Using your mouse, you can simply click the button for the Eyedropper tool from the toolbox. You can also press the letter I on the keyboard to switch to the Eyedropper tool.

But there's another helpful trick that can speed up the process of sampling a color from your image. If you're using any of the painting tools, such as the Brush or Pencil tool, you can simply hold the Alt key on Windows or the Option key on Macintosh to temporarily access the Eyedropper tool. Holding the Alt/Option key, you can simply click in the image to sample a color, and then release the Alt/Option key to return to using the drawing tool you were working with.

With recent versions of Photoshop you can also simply press and hold the I key on the keyboard to activate the eyedropper tool temporarily, regardless of which tool is currently being used. However, my preference is to use the Alt/Option key in conjunction with one of the drawing tools in this context, because there are a variety of situations where the I key on the keyboard won't achieve the expected result. For example, if a text box is active then pressing I will be treated as typing in that box, not a keyboard shortcut.

There are several settings that affect the behavior of the Eyedropper tool, and those are found on the Options bar.

The first setting on the Options bar for the Eyedropper tool is the Sample Size. By default, when you click on the image with the Eyedropper tool, the foreground color is set to the exact color of the single pixel directly below your mouse pointer. However, you can also average out the values of several pixels. The options for averaging pixel values for the Eyedropper tool range from “3 by 3 Average”, which averages the values of nine pixels centered around the pixel you click on, all the way up to the “101 by 101 Average” option, which averages the values of a total of 10,201 pixels. In most cases I set the Sample Size setting to “3 by 3 Average”, mostly just to average out any random variation in pixel values.

The next setting on the Options bar is the Sample popup, which allows you to determine which layers will actually be taken into account when sampling a color from the image.
In virtually all cases I set the Sample option to All Layers. In other words, I want to sample a color from the image based on the effect of all layers, and without the need to select a specific layer from the Layers panel in order to sample a color found on that layer.

At times, such as when working with a composite image, you may want restrict the Eyedropper tool to only sample specific layers. Options include the ability to sample only the current layer, the current layer and all layers below it, or all layers in the image. In addition, you can specify that you want to sample all layers or the current layer and layers below, but ignoring the effect of adjustment layers.

The final setting on the Options bar is the “Show Sampling Ring” checkbox. With this option turned on, provided you have the “Use Graphics Processor” checkbox turned on in the Performance section of the Preferences dialog.

With the “Show Sampling Ring” checkbox turned on, whenever you have the mouse button down when using the Eyedropper tool, a ring will appear around your mouse pointer. The outer ring is middle gray, and the inner ring is split into top and bottom halves. The top half shows the current color below your mouse pointer, and the bottom half shows the previously selected color (the current foreground color). This sampling ring can be very helpful in evaluating whether you have your mouse positioned correctly to select the desired color, so I recommend having this setting turned on.

The Eyedropper tool is, of course, intended for sampling a color from within the image you are currently working on. However, it is also possible to sample any color you can see on your computer display, even if it isn’t a color seen within Photoshop. To do so, start off by making sure the color you want to sample is visible on the screen. Then click and hold the mouse on the image. Keep the mouse button held down, and drag the mouse to the location of the color you want to sample. When you release the mouse, the color below the mouse, regardless of where on the display the mouse is located, will be set as the current foreground color.

*The Hue Strip (left) and Hue Wheel (right) versions of the HUD Color Picker provide an intuitive on-screen method of selecting any color, without being limited to only the colors found within the current photo.*
At times you may want to set a foreground color that can’t be found within the image. The Color Picker is the common solution to this issue, which can be accessed by clicking the foreground (or background) color swatch at the bottom of the toolbox.

However, there is also another helpful option if you have the “Use Graphics Processor” option turned on in the Performance section of the Preferences dialog box. That additional option is the HUD Color Picker, which first appeared in Photoshop with the CS5 version.

To activate the HUD Color Picker on Windows, hold the Shift and Alt keys and right-click and drag (keep the mouse button down) on the image. On Macintosh hold the Control+Option+Command keys, and click and drag on the image. Once the HUD Color Picker appears over your image, you can release the keys on the keyboard, but you need to keep the mouse button down until you’re ready to finalize your color selection.

The HUD Color Picker can be displayed as a color wheel or as a hue strip, with each offered at various sizes. You can choose your preferred option on the General page of the Preferences dialog.

To select a color with the HUD Color Picker, simply move the mouse around. Start by selecting a hue from either the wheel or the strip, depending on which option you’ve selected for the HUD Color Picker. Then drag to the box where you can adjust the brightness on the vertical axis and the saturation on the horizontal axis. When the desired color is inside the selection ring, simply release the mouse button and that color will be selected as the foreground color.

As always seems to be the case in Photoshop, there are more than a few ways you can sample a color, whether from within an image, or by choosing any color of the rainbow. I suppose it should come as no surprise that a simple little tool like the Eyedropper, along with the various other color-picking options, would provide so many options and offer so much utility.
Almost without fail, if I hear photographers talking about getting the camera level, they’re talking about photographing a composite panorama. That makes perfect sense, of course, because keeping the camera level through the full range of captures in a panoramic image is critically important to having the composite panorama go together smoothly with the highest quality possible.

However, keeping the camera level can be important to many photographic scenarios beyond the composite panorama. Whenever there is a subject that consists of a strong horizontal or vertical element, a level camera can be important, if not critical.
To be sure, you can always crop and rotate the image after the capture to correct for a crooked horizon or other alignment problem. But it is generally much better to ensure a level shot in the camera to avoid the additional work processing the image after the fact, and also to avoid the degradation that occurs when you rotate an image by an arbitrary number of degrees. That degradation isn’t generally significant, but when it comes to optimal image quality, every little thing you can do helps add up to the best image possible.

Another area where I’ve noticed some very significant issues for photographers relates to video. An increasing number of photographers are starting to capture video with their digital SLR cameras, either to supplement the presentation of their still images or as a whole new creative outlet.

I’ve seen more than a few video clips featuring a crooked horizon, and that’s not something that is particularly easy to correct after the capture.

The bottom line is that in many cases it is either critical, helpful, or just sensible to ensure the camera is properly leveled before you press the shutter release. The question is, how will you go about leveling your camera in the course of your photography?

**The “Eyeball” Approach**

I imagine the majority of photographers, the majority of the time, use the simple “eyeball” approach to achieving a properly-leveled photograph. In other words, they just look through the viewfinder, adjust based on a visual review of what they see, and capture the image.

Admittedly, this is the approach I use on a very regular basis. But I don’t simply look through the viewfinder at the subject without any additional feedback to help me align a horizontal or vertical line in the scene relative to my framing.

When you look through the viewfinder, you have a variety of references available to help you determine whether a horizontal or vertical line in the scene is aligned accurately.

To begin with, you can certainly use the outer bounds of the viewfinder display to help evaluate whether the camera is properly leveled. This can be a little tricky, but it can be done.

Taking things a small step further, most cameras will, by default, display focus points as small rectangles, and possibly additional lines that can be helpful in ensuring proper alignment.

Even better, with many digital SLR cameras you can also enable a grid display within the viewfinder, which can be particularly helpful.

**Leveling the Tripod**

When you want to be somewhat precise about getting the camera perfectly level, especially for situations where you’ll be panning across a scene, the first step is to ensure that the platform you’re using to mount your camera is perfectly leveled before you press the shutter release. The question is, how will you go about leveling your camera in the course of your photography?

Of course, the most important thing to keep in mind is that just because you’ve leveled your tripod doesn’t mean your camera is level. Especially when using a ballhead to mount your camera to a tripod, a level tripod base is only a basic starting point, and the camera itself still needs to be adjusted to ensure a level image.

But having said that, it can still be incredibly helpful to have the tripod level first. With some tripods this is remarkably easy, especially if you have a leveling base included as part of your tripod setup.
At the end of the day, the ultimate goal is to get the camera level. But if the tripod is level, that provides you with a great starting point. Achieving a level platform for your tripod involves key components: measurement and adjustment.

The first requirement for getting the tripod platform level is to have a way to measure when you have achieved that level platform. For many tripods, this is a non-issue, because a bubble level is built into the tripod itself.

If your tripod (or leveling base) doesn’t include a bubble level, you can still make use of a bubble level in order to level the tripod. And this is a step I do recommend taking, even if you will be separately leveling the camera, because a level platform gives you a much better starting point.

If your tripod doesn’t include a bubble level, you can simply use a standard bubble level resting on the tripod to use as the basis of any necessary adjustments. The key is to use a portion of the tripod that is actually level to begin with, and to somehow manage to adjust the tripod while not causing the bubble level to fall to the ground.

If you’re using a typical tripod, achieving a level platform will likely involve adjusting the length of one or more leg extensions until the bubble level shows the tripod is providing a level platform. If you have a leveling base included with your tripod, this process is much easier, since you can simply adjust the base until the bubble level indicates a perfectly level platform.
What is arguably the most important thing to keep in mind when adjusting the tripod (or the camera) to achieve a level image is that you need to evaluate more than one axis. If the bubble level you’re using to evaluate your results is a circular bubble level, this is relatively straightforward. Simply ensure that the bubble is in the center of the circle on the level, and you have a level platform.

If the level you’re using is not a circular bubble level, that means each individual bubble only indicates a single axis. Therefore, you’ll likely need to rotate the bubble level around the platform of the tripod to ensure a truly level result.

**Camera Bubble Level**

Regardless of whether you’ve already leveled the tripod (or other platform) you’re using to support your camera, it is still important to ensure that the camera itself is leveled properly. One of the very common methods of ensuring the camera is level is with a bubble level, very often via a hotshoe-mounted accessory bubble level.

With a two-axis bubble level, you can determine whether the camera is level both left-to-right and front-to-back. In most cases you’ll want to center the bubble in the left-to-right axis, so that the horizon is straight. At times you may also want to align the camera on the front-to-back axis, but this obviously means the camera won’t be tipped up or down at all, which isn’t always ideal for a given photo.

For composite panoramas or other scenarios (such as video) where you’ll be panning across the scene, it is important to ensure the camera is level through the full range that you will be panning during capture.

**On-Camera Level**

An accessory bubble level that would mount in the camera hotshoe used to be an item I would always have in my camera bag. And yet, today I don’t need this bubble level at all. That’s because my digital SLR includes an electronic level built into the camera. At any time I can activate this leveling feature on the LCD display on the back of my camera, and determine very easily when I have achieved proper leveling for the camera.

With most cameras offering this electronic level feature, in addition to marks indicating how close to level the camera is, the color of the leveling lines also changes to indicate red when the camera is not level, and green when the camera is level.

It is important to keep in mind that while you probably want the camera level left to right to ensure a straight horizon, you may not always want front-to-back leveling, since that means the camera can’t be tipped up or down at all.

It is also important to evaluate the level display through the full range of motion if you will be panning during capture.

One of the great things about the electronic leveling display is that you can also evaluate if the camera is consistently leveled through the full range of a pan, which is especially helpful for situations where you want to have the camera tilted up or down, and want to maintain a consistent tilt through the full pan.
When Not to Level

It seems to me that most photographers don’t check to ensure each image (or video) is level before capture, simply doing their best to evaluate the scene through the viewfinder. So in general, I think it is a good idea to get in the habit of using the built-in leveling feature of your camera (if your camera is so equipped) or to make use of an small and inexpensive bubble level accessory.

That said, there are certainly situations where you don’t want the camera to be level. At times you may need to align the camera to the subject to ensure the best aesthetic result, regardless of whether the camera is truly level. In other situations you may want to specifically avoid leveling the camera for creative effect.

The key is to remember to think about ensuring a shot is level, and to make a deliberate decision about whether you want the shot to be perfectly level, and whether you want to align for both the left-to-right axis and the front-to back axis. By being more thoughtful and careful about leveling the camera, you’ll have less work to do after the capture, and will have greater confidence that horizontal and vertical lines in your images are properly aligned.
There are many reasons photographers need or want to share their images, whether with paying clients or just friends and family. And of course, with the growing popularity of mobile devices, in many cases it might make sense to share via a mobile platform.

One option that provides an interesting method of sharing images on an iPhone or iPad is StickyAlbums. I spent some time testing out the process of creating and sharing photos using this service. While this solution is—for the most part—limited to devices running Apple’s iOS operating system, the albums you create with StickyAlbums can also be viewed with a web browser on virtually any computer or mobile device. And because the images included in a StickyAlbum are cached to the device, the photos can later be viewed even without an Internet connection.
First Steps

One of the nice elements of StickyAlbums is that you can customize your albums with branding graphics. These include both a banner graphic that appears over the top of the thumbnail display for your album, as well as an icon that serves as a shortcut to the album on the desktop of an iOS mobile device such as an iPhone or iPad. In addition, you can create custom graphics that display while the album is initially loading.

Of course, you do need to create those graphics, and unfortunately you need to create them essentially from scratch. There is no option to have StickyAlbums automatically create a basic logo graphic based on text you enter, for example, nor are there default graphics that will appear in the absence of your own graphics.

The banner graphic that appears across the top of the thumbnail display for your gallery must be sized to 300 pixels wide by 75 pixels tall. The result can be saved as a JPEG image, but I recommend saving the original—especially if you’ve included text layers with the graphic—as a layered Photoshop PSD or TIFF image so you can easily change the graphic later if desired.

The icon representing the album on the desktop for iOS mobile devices needs to be sized to 114 by 114 pixels square, which doesn’t provide for a tremendous amount of detail or information, but the ability to customize this graphic does create for a very professional experience for those who access your albums.

Finally, the “loading” screens provide you with another opportunity for branding during the time that the album is being loaded by the viewer’s device. The resolution should match the Retina Display of the newer devices, which is 2048 pixels by 1496 pixels. You’ll want to have both horizontal and vertical versions of the loading screen, however, so you’ll also need one created at 1496 pixels by 2048 pixels.

In theory you may find that you want to customize some or all of these graphics for each album you create, so they are tailored to the client you are sharing the album with, for example. However, because there isn’t an automated process for creating these graphics, you may very well find that you prefer to create simple branding graphics that can be used for all of the albums you create for StickyAlbums.

Preparing the Photos

The photos you add to a StickyAlbum should be saved as JPEG images, and must have a file size of less than one megabyte and pixel dimensions no larger than 2048 by 1600 pixels. If you are using Lightroom to manage your images, you can simply create a Export preset based on these specifications so that you only need to select images and then export using that preset. With Photoshop you can use the Image Processor, which is generally easiest to access via Adobe Bridge on the Tools > Photoshop submenu.

Both horizontal and vertical images can be used in an album, and you will be able to customize the square thumbnails for the images during the process of creating the actual album.

Creating a StickyAlbum

With the graphics and images prepared, you’re ready to create the actual
StickyAlbum. This process is performed through a “wizard” interface, where you’re taken step-by-step through the various tasks that need to be performed.

The first step is to identify basic information for your StickyAlbum. This includes specifying a website address that users will be taken to if they click on the logo at the top of the gallery thumbnail display, a name of up to ten characters to display below the icon shortcut to the album, a name for your album that is for your reference and will not be used as part of the album itself, a subject line for the email you can use for sharing, as well as your email address and phone number so clients can contact you when they want to purchase images included in an album.

If you opt for a Professional plan you can also add password protection for your album at this step.

Next, you’ll be able to upload the images to be included in the album. While there isn’t any real limit to how many images you can include in an album, it is strongly recommended that you limit yourself to no more than about 30 images, since those images need to pre-load and thus can take a little bit of time, especially on a mobile device using a cellular Internet connection.
Once you’ve uploaded the images, the next step is to manage those images, and this provides you with a variety of ways to adjust the presentation of the album thumbnails. You can drag the rectangular images within the square frame of the thumbnail to determine how the image is actually presented in thumbnail form, and even adjust the overall crop if you want to change the relative size of the area being displayed. You can also drag images around to change the order in which the photos will appear. A single image can also be identified as the representative photo if you choose to share the album on Facebook.

There’s even a relatively new option to embed a video or custom link within the album, so you can, for example, feature a promotional video being hosted through another website such as YouTube or Vimeo.

The next step is to identify and upload the graphics that will be used as the logo at the top of the album, the icon representing the album on the user’s mobile device, and the “loading” graphics that will be presented initially to the user. During this step you can also customize the overall colors used for the album display.

With all of these tasks completed, you can confirm that you’d like to create your StickyAlbum, and the album will be live, hosted through the StickyAlbums website.

At this point you’ll be provided with a direct link to your album, sample text that can be copied and pasted into an email to send to your clients, and options for sharing the album on Facebook and other social networks.
When you’re ready to make another StickyAlbum, I strongly recommend using an existing album as a starting point, as that will save you considerable time in terms of identifying and loading the logo graphics, for example. You can edit, duplicate, or delete an existing album, and of course you can always start from scratch creating a new album.

**Sharing a StickyAlbum**

To share your StickyAlbum, you can copy and paste the provided sample email text into an email you send to your clients. You can also craft your own email to clients, of course, simply copying and pasting the website address for your album into that email.

When someone follows the link to your StickyAlbum on their iOS mobile device, they will be prompted to create a desktop shortcut for the album. The images will pre-load onto the device, and they can then scroll through the thumbnails, tap on a thumbnail to view an image, and even swipe across an image to go to the previous or next image.

And if a client doesn’t have an iOS mobile device, they can also view the gallery of images with any web browser. In fact, if you view the gallery on a computer-based browser, the display will mimic the appearance on an iOS device, complete with a border that creates something of an illusion that you are viewing the album on an iPhone.

You can view a sample StickyAlbum I’ve created by going here:

http://moblalbum.com/y038vFujAT/gallery/25110

**Worth Exploring**

StickyAlbums provide a very good solution to sharing images in a unique and memorable way, represents a useful option for photographers who want to be able to share images with clients. You can one free StickyAlbum featuring twelve images hosted for one month simply by visiting the StickyAlbums website (www.stickyalbums.com).

If you decide that StickyAlbums is a solution that makes sense for you in terms of sharing your images, you can get a Starter plan for $21 per month with unlimited albums and images, or a Professional plan for $189 per year that includes additional features such as the ability to password protect individual albums.

Overall I found the process of creating an album with StickyAlbums to be slightly more cumbersome than it probably needed to be, but the result was an album that was easy to share and fun to explore.
When I’m teaching photographers to optimize the appearance of their images in Lightroom, one of the things I try to emphasize—and offer periodic reminders about—is the ability to see a before and after version of the image you’re working on. And Lightroom offers a variety of options when it comes to viewing an image with and without the adjustments applied.

There are many advantages of being able to see a before and after view of your image, but to me the greatest benefit is being able to gain perspective on the adjustments you’ve applied. Sometimes you may get caught up in the image, feeling that the adjustments are working out really well. Then you switch between the before and after views, and you suddenly realize that the adjustments you’ve applied are far too strong. Periodically evaluating the current state of the image its original state can be very helpful in terms of producing the best result possible.

To begin with, all of the sections of adjustment controls on the right panel in Lightroom’s Develop module include a toggle switch to the left of the section heading that allows you to turn off or on all of the adjustments in that section. For example, if you’ve applied a variety of...
adjustments using the controls in the Lens Corrections section, you can click the toggle switch to the left of the Lens Corrections heading to turn off the effect of those adjustments, and then click again to enable the adjustments. This provides a very basic before and after view of the image, focused on a specific set of adjustments.

It can also be helpful, of course, to see a global before and after view that takes into account all of the adjustments you have applied to an image. These include both basic before and after views, as well as an option for a split view of the image.

To switch between a before view and after view for the full image based on all adjustments, you can simply press the backslash key (\). Press the backslash key once and the image switches to the before view, which is based on the default interpretation of the image with no adjustments applied. Press backslash again and you’re taken back to the after view. This option provides a very quick method of evaluating the overall adjustments you’ve applied to the image.

At times you may actually prefer to see the before and after versions of the image at the same time, and Lightroom provides you with four options to accomplish this. These include showing both the before and after view side-by-side or one on top of the other, as well as split views with the image split between before and after displays along the horizontal or vertical center of the image.

On the menu you’ll find these view options by choosing View > Before / After and then selecting the specific view you’d like to enable.

Among the more basic of the comparative before and after views in Lightroom is the ability to view both versions of the image at the same time, either one above the other or side-by-side.
You can also use keyboard shortcuts. For a left/right comparison view press Y on the keyboard. For a top/down view press Alt+Y on Windows or Option+Y on Macintosh. To toggle the split screen view on or off press Shift+Y.

If you don’t have the toolbar displayed below the image area, you can press T on the keyboard to make the toolbar visible. The before and after view options can be accessed via a button toward the left side of that toolbar. If the control isn’t available, click the popup menu button at the far right of the toolbar and choose Before/After from that menu.

If you simply click on the before and after view button, Lightroom will cycle between the four view options. However, you can also click the popup arrow at the right of this button to bring up a popup menu where you can select any of the view options. To switch back to the normal view of the image you can click the button at the far left of the toolbar, or simply press D on your keyboard to access the Develop module’s loupe view for your image.

As you switch between the various before and after view options, you may notice that the current zoom setting is maintained. The zoom setting operates independent of the preview image display setting, and so as you switch between the views the zoom remains as you’ve set it.

While it isn’t possible to move the line that divides the before and after views when you’re using one of the split view options, you can move the image back and forth to achieve a similar effect. The first step is to zoom the image so that it can be panned. In most cases

The split view for the before and after display allows you to see a single image divided into halves, with the top or left half showing the before version of the image, and the bottom or right half showing the after version.
that means you’ll want to switch to the 1:1 zoom setting, or a higher zoom setting if you want to examine specific areas of the photo.

Once zoomed in on the image and with one of the split view options enabled, you can simply click and drag on the image to move the image using the Hand tool. As you do so, the image will move but the dividing line between the before and after displays will remain fixed. As a result, you can drag the image to determine whether a particular portion of the image appears in the before or after section of the split view.

If you just want to quickly take a close look while taking advantage of the split view for the before and after versions of the image, you can start with the zoom setting at Fit, so that you can see the entire image. Then click on the area of the image you want to get a closer look at, but keep the mouse button held down. With the mouse button held down, simply drag the mouse, and you’ll be moving the zoomed image around. Release the mouse and the image will return to the Fit zoom setting.

The various view options for the before and after displays of your photos in Lightroom provide tremendous flexibility as you evaluate the image. Besides knowing how to use these features, of course, it is important to actually put them to use, so you can better evaluate the effect of the adjustments you’re applying to your photos.
Whenever a new version of Photoshop is released, photographers are naturally interested in finding out what all the new features are. Upon upgrading to the new version, to focus tends to shift toward learning all those new features. What sometimes gets forgotten along the way are the potential changes to the various options available in Preferences for Photoshop. So, presented here, screen-by-screen, are my preferred settings for Preferences, as well as some commentary about some of the more important options available.

The Preferences dialog can be accessed by choosing Photoshop > Preferences on Macintosh or Edit > Preferences on Windows, and then choosing the particular section of the Preferences dialog you’d like to start with. You can also simply press Command+K on Macintosh or Ctrl+K on Windows to bring up the Preferences dialog. Once the Preferences dialog is up, you can navigate among the various pages of settings using the list on the left side of the dialog.
The HUD Color Picker can be a very helpful tool for selecting a color, provided you can remember how to access it. On Windows hold Shift+Alt and right-click on the image. On Macintosh hold Control+Option+Command and click on the image. In Preferences you can choose whether you want a color wheel or hue strip for the color picker, as well as the size of the control.

I prefer to keep the Export Clipboard option turned off, which helps avoid excessive use of memory. The only drawback is that with this option turned off you can’t copy pixels from Photoshop and paste them into another application. But how often do you do that anyway?

Most of the other settings on the General page are relatively straightforward and self-explanatory. And of course, most of these settings are really a matter of personal preference. For example, if you’re using floating windows for your images you can have Photoshop automatically resize those windows as you resize the image, but I personally find that behavior quite annoying. Of course, these days I rarely use floating windows in Photoshop anyway, so this setting isn’t critical.
The Appearance page of the Preferences dialog really relates to personal preference in terms of how the Photoshop interface is presented and how certain controls behave. As such, there really isn’t a single right answer about any of the options here.

The option to “Auto-Collapse Iconic Panels” relates to panels you have docked as small icons rather than full panels, and with this option turned on, after having clicked on the icon (button) to bring up the panel, any other click within Photoshop (but outside the panel) will cause the panel to collapse back to an icon.

I recommend keeping the “Open Documents as Tabs” checkbox turned on, so that images will open into tabs rather than as floating windows. I realize that for photographers who are accustomed to floating windows the tabs can take some getting used to, but I think you’ll find they really do provide a more efficient way of working with multiple images.

While in theory you may prefer to have the “Show Channels in Color” checkbox turned on so that the display of channels provides a sense of how the colors are blended in the image, in reality this just makes it more difficult to see the contents of the channel, especially for the blue channel.

If you’re just getting started using Photoshop, the “Show Tool Tips” option can be very helpful. But once you know your way around, you may find these small banners to be distracting.
Most of the settings on the File Handling page of the Preferences dialog are relatively straightforward, and relate to how files you open and save and processed.

The “Save As to Original Folder” checkbox will cause the default folder where an image will be saved to be the same folder as the original file. This can be especially helpful for situations where you have opened and possibly saved multiple images and you want all saved copies to be placed in the same folder as the image it is derived from.

I also prefer to have the “Save in Background” option turned on, in large part so that even while an image is being saved I can still access other features in Photoshop. For example, I can continue to apply adjustments even while a large image is being saved in the background.

If you’re using Adobe Photoshop Lightroom to manage your images, or if you think there’s any chance you will in the future, I strongly encourage you to have the “Maximize PSD and PSB File Compatibility” option set to Always. Because Lightroom is not able to interpret the layers contained within Photoshop PSD and PSB files, you can’t import these types of files unless the Maximize Compatibility option is on for those files.
As a general rule of thumb, I recommend setting the Memory Usage option to 80%, and not higher. With an extremely high setting, the operating system may not be able to allocate enough memory, and the system may become unstable. Lower values of course mean Photoshop won’t have as much memory available, which can negatively impact performance.

If you have multiple internal physical hard drives, you can configure the additional drives as additional scratch disks. If that is the case, I recommend moving a hard drive other than the hard drive your operating system is installed on.

For the sake of being able to go back to correct mistakes that may have been made more than a few steps ago, I recommend raising the History States setting higher than the default value of 20. I set mine to 100, because it is quite rare that I need to go that far back with an image. But you can set the value as high as 1,000.

Increasing the Cache Levels setting can help ensure the image and histogram are refreshed more quickly, but I don’t consider this to be a significant issue for most situations.

I highly recommend keeping the “Use Graphics Processor” checkbox turned on to help improve overall performance and to enable some helpful features. The only reason I would ever turn this option off is if I suspected it was causing stability issues, and in that event I would first try to update display adapter drivers.
In some ways the settings on the Cursors page of Preferences are an extension of the Interface page, except that the settings here relate specifically to the cursors used for the various tools.

I prefer to use the Normal Brush Tip option for the Painting Cursors, which affect tools such as the Brush tool and the Spot Healing Brush, for example. This allows you to see the general size of the brush. The Full Size Brush Top option shows a larger brush that indicates the size of the brush with feathering included. While this is helpful in concept, I actually find that it makes it more difficult to be precise in terms of the actual effect of the brush settings.

I also prefer to turn on the “Show Crosshair in Brush Tip” checkbox, which makes it easier to determine the center of the area you’ll be painting. This option is especially helpful when you’re working with a particularly large brush size.

For the Other Cursors section I recommend the Precise option, which shows a “target” for the tool, rather than the Standard option that presents an iconic representation of which tool you’re using. With the Standard option I find it can be particularly challenging to keep track of exactly where the tool will take effect.
The Transparency and Gamut page of the Preferences dialog is one where I always leave the settings at their default values.

For photographic images under normal circumstances you're not likely to have transparency, which represents an absence of fully opaque pixels. Those pixels are shown with a grid pattern, and you can change the size and color of that grid.

You can also change the color for the Gamut Warning display. But since out-of-gamut colors are most likely to be highly saturated colors, the default gray color will generally stand out well when you turn on the gamut warning feature.
On the Units & Rulers page of the Preferences dialog, you can set the unit of measure for the rulers display as desired, which for most photographers will mean choosing either Inches or Centimeters.

If you use text in the context of your images, you’ll mostly likely want to use the Points option for Type in the Units section.

The Column Size section relates to page layout default settings that don’t generally apply to photographers working with photographic images. They relate to the size and spacing for multiple columns of text.

The New Document Preset Resolutions are obviously the default resolution settings for new documents you create in Photoshop.

However, the Screen Resolution setting also determines the size images are presented at when you choose the Print Size option from the View menu. If you divide the number of pixels across on your screen with the number of inches wide your display is, you’ll have a pixels per inch value you can enter here.
The Guides, Grid & Slices page of the Preferences dialog relates to the display of the interface features that share these names. The settings are very self-explanatory, but I find the default settings to be perfectly fine. So, not much to concern yourself with here, unless you tend to use one or more of these features on a regular basis and have a strong opinion about how they should be displayed.
Generally speaking, the “Additional Plug-Ins Folder” option shouldn’t be needed. Most plug-ins will be installed to the default folder, and thus will be readily available within Photoshop. While this option does provide a way to access plug-ins that were only installed for a previous version of Photoshop, I recommend that a better approach is to re-install those plug-ins, rather then activate a separate folder.

The checkbox in the Filters section determines whether you want the menu structure under the Filter menu to match the organization of filters in the Filter Gallery. I generally leave this option turned off so that I can keep my Filter menu a little more tidy, and because when I’m using artistic filters I almost always access the Filter Gallery from the Filter menu so that I can work in a more efficient manner.

The Extension Panels relate to extensions that are available for download from a variety of sources. The first option allow you to determine whether you want those extensions to be able to connect to the Internet, which enables you to restrict extensions if you have any online security concerns. The second option determines whether you want the panels associated with those extensions to be loaded when you launch Photoshop, which you’ll generally want to have turned on if you actually want to access your extensions.
As the name implies, the Type page of the Preferences dialog relates to the use of text in your images within Photoshop.

I prefer to have the “Use Smart Quotes” checkbox turned on so that quotation marks will appear “curly” and oriented in the correct direction, rather than simple straight quotation marks.

Otherwise the default settings are perfectly fine for the vast majority of users, and especially for photographers who don't tend to work with fonts as much as other users.
The 3D section of the Preferences dialog relate to the 3D features of Photoshop Extended, and thus aren't applicable to the standard version of Photoshop. And of course, the 3D tools aren’t generally applicable to a “normal” photographic image in any event.
The Camera Raw Preferences dialog can be accessed by clicking the Camera Raw Preferences button in the File Compatibility section of the File Handling page of the Preferences dialog, or by choosing Camera Raw from the Preferences sub-menu.

I strongly recommend setting the “Save image settings in” option to the “Sidecar .xmp files” option so that the settings for each RAW capture will be saved alongside those images, and also so those settings will be available to other applications such as Adobe Photoshop Lightroom.

I generally leave the “Apply sharpening to” option to “All images”. If you then prefer not to apply sharpening to some or all images, you can either adjust the specific sharpening settings for an image or save new default settings within Adobe Camera Raw that don’t include any sharpening.

I don’t like having an automatic tonal adjustment applied to my images, but I do like having an automatic grayscale mix applied when I convert an image to black and white within Adobe Camera Raw.

The “Make defaults” settings allow you to save individual default conversion settings specific to camera serial number or ISO setting, so that custom settings can be used based on how the image was captured.

For most photographers the default cache settings are perfectly fine, but if you tend to go back and re-process RAW captures and have plenty of hard drive space available, you can increase the size of the cache.

I don’t utilize DNG for my RAW captures, so for me the DNG File Handling section isn’t critical. If you use DNG files, you may want to turn on the “Update embedded JPEG previews” checkbox so the preview embedded in your DNG files will be updated based on Adobe Camera Raw adjustments.

The final group of settings relates to the use of Adobe Camera Raw for JPEG and TIFF images, enabling you to determine when files of these types will be opened via Adobe Camera Raw rather than directly in to Photoshop.
As the holidays approach, you may find that family and friends are trying to figure out what to buy you as a gift. Or perhaps you’re trying to come up with ideas for a gift to give another photographer friend. Even better, perhaps you’re looking to purchase a little extra something for yourself. Whatever the reason, presented here are some of my favorite inexpensive holiday gift ideas for the photographer (even if you’re buying the gift for yourself).
The MTX Multi-Tool from Really Right Stuff is one of those clever items that makes you wonder why someone didn’t think of this sooner. Besides offering great utility with ten bits and a tiny hex key, this tool is also convenient. The bits you want quick access to can be stowed within the handle of the tool, and the tool itself can be stowed inside compatible center columns, or be mounted between the Pocket ‘Pod and a ballhead. This may well be the only tool you need in your camera bag.

Pocket ‘Pod (TFA-01), Really Right Stuff, $98

The Pocket ‘Pod from Really Right Stuff has become my new favorite travel companion. For those many situations where a standard tripod is just too big, but you want to have a nice sturdy platform for your camera, the Pocket ‘Pod is a great solution. You can attach it directly to your camera or to an existing ballhead, or spend a bit more for the BH-25 mini ballhead to create a self-contained travel tripod. The leg tension is adjustable, and I recommend setting them relatively tight to ensure a snug leg that doesn’t shift unless you want it to.
Adorama Microfiber Cloth, Adorama, $1.95
http://amzn.to/UcBCql

I can’t emphasize enough just how much I put microfiber cloths to use for my eyeglasses, lenses, and other delicate components. This one has become my personal favorite, and I don’t feel complete unless I have one (or more) in my camera bag and elsewhere.

Rocket Air Blaster, Giottos, $9.95
http://amzn.to/T0nUWk

The Rocket Air Blaster represents the best first line of defense for cleaning your image sensor or other delicate components, helping to ensure that grit and dust have been completely blown away before you take on more delicate cleaning techniques.

LensPen, Parkside Optical, $19.99 (But available for under $6!)
http://amzn.to/102NNL1

Many photographers are familiar with the LensPen as a great product for cleaning lens elements. But what you might not realize is that this product is also an incredible “final touch” cleaning tool for your camera’s image sensor. I never clean my sensor without using this product.

You can also view a video illustrating the process of cleaning your sensor with the LensPen here: http://bit.ly/Rmgxx3
Raw Steel Card Reader, Hoodman USA, $49.95
http://amzn.to/QhBXdh

Until recently I wasn’t even aware that Hoodman produced a digital media card reader, but I’m sure glad I know now! The Raw Steel UDMA Reader is a rugged device that offers extremely fast performance when downloading from UDMA-compliant digital media cards.

1000X 16GB CompactFlash Card, Lexar Professional, $76.95
http://amzn.to/WpuyGR

Speed isn’t critical for all photographers, but when it is, you’ll want to make use of one of the latest UDMA-compliant cards. I prefer to use slightly smaller cards so I don’t have all of my important photos on a single card, so this Lexar Professional unit is a perfect fit at a great price.
Adobe Photoshop Elements 11, Adobe, $99
But currently on Amazon for $49.99
http://amzn.to/UWIdIY

If you’d like to have most of the features of Photoshop without the relatively high price of Photoshop, then Photoshop Elements is worth a look. Version 11 sports a remarkably clean and efficient interface that makes working with this surprisingly powerful tool very enjoyable.

Lightroom 4 Upgrade, Adobe, $79
http://amzn.to/T8vjty

I consider Lightroom 4 to be a very worthwhile upgrade from prior versions, in large part because of the new Map module that makes it remarkably easy to add and view location information for your photos. But there are many other great features as well.

If you’ve not purchased a prior version of Lightroom, the full version lists for only $149, but is currently available for $99 on Amazon here:
http://amzn.to/MH5jwo
I’ve long been a fan of the various software offerings from Nik Software, but with the recent release of version 2, HDR Efex Pro has become my highly-preferred choice for assembling and tone-mapping high dynamic range images.

HDR Efex Pro 2, Nik Software (Recently Acquired by Google),
$99.95 New, $49.95 Upgrade
http://www.niksoftware.com/hdrefexpro

Save an extra 15% on this or other Nik Software products by entering timgrey in the Coupon Code field during checkout!

This recommendation certainly represents a case of blatant self-promotion, but I really do feel that these videos represent an excellent value. To me the best way to learn is with a hands-on workshop. But the next best thing is a video training course, and with the help of video2brain I’ve produced more than a few titles on a wide range of topics of interest to photographers. Free sample lessons for each course can be viewed through the video2brain website.

Tim Grey Video Training Courses, video2brain,
Most Titles around #34.99
http://bit.ly/MasterColor
Lens Exchange 100AW, Lowepro, $44.95
http://amzn.to/SCE37c

If you like to travel light but still want the ability to quickly and safely change lenses on the go, the Lens Exchange bag provides a great solution. A larger model is available to accommodate lenses with focal lengths up to 200mm, but I find this smaller version aimed at shorter focal length lenses to be a perfect match when I’m exploring areas on foot.

Cable Release, Various Manufacturers, Starting at Around $10
http://amzn.to/V7sgNy

I’m not foolish enough to recommend a specific model of cable release, since each photographer will need to choose a release compatible with their brand of camera. But there are many too choose from, including a variety of devices with advanced features such as an interval timer function. A cable release is a highly-recommended accessory that can improve the quality and convenience of your photography.
If you’re using Adobe Photoshop Elements to manage, optimize, and share your images, and if you ever photograph friends, family, or other people, you may want to take a look at the capability to tag people in photos being managed by the Elements Organizer. The process is quick and easy, and it makes it remarkably easy to find photos of specific people later.
The first step is to select the photos you want to tag as including specific people, or make sure no images are selected if you want to process all of the photos that are currently displayed. To deselect all photos simply click in the empty space that surrounds one of the photos. You can also, of course, narrow the range of images to be processed by selecting a particular folder, for example, or by selecting individual images in the Organizer.

Once you’ve selected the photos you would like to process, click the Add People button on the toolbar at the bottom of the Elements Organizer. The photos will be analyzed to determine automatically which ones contain people, and then the People Recognition dialog will appear with thumbnails of just the faces found within the photos.

If you are using Facebook to stay in contact with friends and colleagues, you can also import your Facebook friends list into Elements, so that you can streamline the process of identifying the names of people who appear in your photos.
To import your Facebook friends, click the “Download/Update Facebook friends’ list to name people” button at the bottom-left of the People Recognition dialog.

You’ll be prompted to sign in to your Facebook account if you aren’t already signed in, and then your contact list will be imported into the Elements Organizer. Names will then appear in a list when you type names for the people who appear in your photos.

Below each of the thumbnails in the People Recognition dialog will be a “Who is this?” label. To identify the person featured in the photo, start by clicking on that label. A field will appear where you can type the name of the person shown in the thumbnail.

If you imported your contacts from Facebook, those will appear in a popup list once you start typing. Facebook contacts are identified by a small Facebook logo to the left of the person’s name in that popup list. If the name of the person featured in the current photo appears on that list, you can simply click on the name to tag the photo with the name.

If the name you’re typing doesn’t appear on the popup list, you can simply finish typing the full name and then press Enter/Return on the keyboard to assign the name to the photo. All new names you add will appear in on the popup list in the future, with a small thumbnail image of the person indicating they are Elements contacts rather than Facebook contacts.

You can then continue adding names to the other photos included in the People Recognition dialog. If any of the photos don’t actually contain people, or they contain people you don’t want to tag (such as strangers who just happened to appear in an image) you can move your mouse over that photo and click the “X” at the top-right corner of the thumbnail. That photo will then be excluded from people recognition.

Once you’ve either excluded or added a name to all of the photos shown in the People Recognition dialog, you can click Save to save the tags for the current image. You may then be presented with additional images, which you can process in the same way. Continue until there are no more images to be identified.

If there is ambiguity about a photo, Elements may prompt you to identify whether the photo contains a person at all. And in some cases there will be photos identified as containing people even though they don’t. But overall I have found that the Elements Organizer does a very good job of identifying which images actually contain people.

Once you’ve finished the process of tagging people in photos, you can naturally locate photos based on those people tags. You could certainly use the Find option or the Advanced Search feature, but in most cases the simplest way to browse photos based on who is contained in the images is to use the People option in the Organizer.
When you click on the People header at the top-center of the Organizer, you’ll see what appears to be a stack of snapshots, with the name of the person below each stack and one of the faces from a tagged photo as the representation of the stack.

If you hover your mouse over the stack of photos for a person and move the mouse left or right (without clicking the mouse button), you can scroll through the faces for each of the tagged photos. If you find a photo of a person you like better than the current representation for the stack of tagged photos you can change which photos is used. Move the mouse left or right until the desired photo is shown, and then right-click and choose “Assign as Profile Picture” from the popup menu that appears.

From the same popup menu when you right-click on one of the people you can also choose the Rename option if you need to correct the spelling of one of the names. You can also

As you start typing the name of the person who appears in a photo, a popup will appear listing any matching names from your Elements contacts, as well as your Facebook friends list if you have imported your Facebook contacts into Elements.
choose “Remove this person” from the popup menu if you want to remove the tag for that person. Choosing this option will remove the name tag from all photos of that person, and will remove the name tag from the Organizer, but will not remove the actual photos.

To view all of the photos tagged as including a particular person, simply double-click on the stack representing the person whose photos you want to view. To return to the view of people, click the Back button, or click the toggle that allows you to choose between Faces and Photos, both of which can be found at the top-left of the image display area.

In addition to tagging photos as including specific people, you can identify people as belonging to specific groups. When you are viewing the stacks of photos in the People view, you can toggle the display between...
People and Group using the control at the top-left of the photo display area.

When you switch to the Group view option, the stacks of photos will be arranged in groups. Initially, all of the photos will appear in the Ungrouped group. But you can add stacks to groups, and of course create new groups as well.

To create a new group, click the green plus button at the top of the Groups panel on the right side of the Organizer window and choose Add Group from the popup menu. Type a name for the new group, and select an option from the Group popup if you would like to have sub-groups. For example, you could have a Family group, and then inside of that group place an Immediate Family group and an Extended Family group.

Once you’ve created the groups you’d like to use for organizing the people in your photos, you can add a person to a group by dragging their stack and dropping it on the desired group. You can add a person to multiple groups by dragging to each group individually, and you can also assign multiple people to a single group at once by selecting multiple people and dragging one of the selected people to the desired group.

Groups allow you to further organize your photos based not only on the people contained within each photo, but also the group to which each person belongs.
Compact Camera Revival?

By Tim Grey

When digital cameras first became available, I anticipated a very long transition from film to digital. And I was very wrong.

Not only did photographers adopt digital cameras very quickly, but a variety of different segments of digital cameras developed to address the different needs of different types of photographers. There are digital SLRs aimed at entry-level, serious amateur, and professional photographers. And there are compact cameras aimed at all varieties of people, including non-photographers who are focused not on creating images but simply on preserving memories.

Then came the cellular telephone. Well, actually, the cellular telephone came before the digital camera. But about ten years ago a camera was first added as a feature of a mobile phone, and today you’d have a difficult time finding a mobile phone without a camera.
When digital cameras first became available, I anticipated a very long transition from film to digital. And I was very wrong.

Not only did photographers adopt digital cameras very quickly, but a variety of different segments of digital cameras developed to address the different needs of different types of photographers. There are digital SLRs aimed at entry-level, serious amateur, and professional photographers. And there are compact cameras aimed at all varieties of people, including non-photographers who are focused not on creating images but simply on preserving memories.

Then came the cellular telephone. Well, actually, the cellular telephone came before the digital camera. But about ten years ago a camera was first added as a feature of a mobile phone, and today you’d have a difficult time finding a mobile phone without a camera.

More significantly, over time the camera built into many mobile phones became quite capable. Today’s popular iPhone 5 features an 8-megapixel camera, and the Nokia 808 PureView features a 41-megapixel sensor paired with Carl Zeiss optics.

While mobile phone cameras have their own limitations when it comes to image quality, most of today’s best phones offer very good quality images under good lighting conditions, and generally acceptable images under low lighting, with many even including a built-in flash.

One of the obvious benefits of a mobile phone with a camera is that many of us always have our mobile phone with us, and therefore we always have at least that camera available. As the quality has improved in mobile phone cameras, an increasing number of people are using their mobile phones as a casual camera, rather than a dedicated compact camera.

The result is that sales of compact cameras have been going down, and there is much speculation that the continued popularity of mobile phones for photography may lead to the end of compact digital cameras altogether.

I’ve been thinking about this a lot lately, as I am using fewer cameras than I used to, and have been struggling with the decision about putting a compact digital camera back into my camera bag.

Like many other photographers, I play different roles in photography at different times. In many situations I look at photography as an artistic or documentary pursuit, utilizing my digital SLR.

In other situations I’m just capturing a moment, preserving a memory, or taking an image of something funny or interesting to share with someone. For those types of situations—or when I simply don’t have my digital SLR with me—I depend upon a decidedly non-professional camera. That used to mean a compact digital camera, until I broke mine. And it wasn’t the first time a compact digital camera that met its demise at my hands.

I planned to replace my compact digital camera, but didn’t know which model I wanted to get. So while I pondered that decision, I started using my iPhone to capture images when I wasn’t using my digital SLR.

Before long, I got in the habit of using my iPhone, and was perfectly happy with the quality in the context of the types of images I chose to capture with the phone instead of my SLR. That didn’t help speed up my decision-making process about a compact camera, and now it has been a couple of years since I’ve owned a compact camera.

Based on my conversations with many other photographers, my situation seems to be somewhat typical. And yet, I’m beginning
to wonder if there might be a revival in the popularity of compact digital cameras.

As an avid photographer, I naturally am always interested in having more toys disguised as tools. So I’ve still been wanting to get a compact digital camera. You might say I was looking for an excuse to buy a camera I didn’t really need.

My focus was on trying to be sure I was buying a camera that offered something my iPhone couldn’t give me. After all, if there wasn’t a significant benefit to the compact digital camera, I would just end up using my iPhone as my casual camera, because it is pretty much always with me to begin with.

As I explored various options, it struck me that there were a couple of features that a mobile phone would have a difficult time matching without compromise: durability and waterproofing.

To be sure, there are many durable and even waterproof case options for many mobile phones. So in theory, the right case can effectively eliminate the need for a compact camera. And it is important to keep in mind that a phone is a lifestyle device, while a camera is simply a photographic device.

I think many people would prefer to keep their mobile phone as compact and lightweight as possible. And they’d prefer not to have the hassle of having a bulky case to shockproof their phone, or the bother of swapping the camera into a waterproof case when the situation warrants it.

Furthermore, those mobile phones that are shockproof and/or waterproof are generally a bit more bulky, and therefore lose some of their appeal as mobile phones.

So my feeling, which could be completely misguided and wrong, is that there’s still hope for compact digital cameras that offer features that either aren’t available for or reduce the desirability of mobile phones. That won’t lead to increased sales of compact cameras, but it could translate into a smaller but still viable market.

But another thought makes me wonder if we actually might see—given a little time—a significant increase in compact digital camera sales. And I think that growth might be because of, not in spite of, the widespread prevalence of mobile phone cameras.

I wonder if all those cameras of increasingly high quality built into the phones in the hands of so many people worldwide might lead to an increased interest in photography that goes beyond the capabilities of mobile phone cameras.

In other words, just as compact digital cameras have contributed to sales of digital SLR cameras, and photographers with an entry-level digital SLR tend to want to upgrade to a more advanced model over time, I wonder if using a mobile phone to capture images will lead to an increased number of people who go from being a mobile phone user who happens to capture photographs sometimes, to photographers who want a more capable device dedicated to their newfound hobby.

Time will tell, of course. And I could be wrong yet again. But as I find myself continuing to contemplate having a dedicated compact camera for situations where pulling out the SLR seems like overkill but using my iPhone seems inadequate, I can’t help but think we may just see some growth in compact camera sales in the near future, and perhaps significant growth in photography as well.

I for one think it would be great if both of those things happened.
Pixology magazine is published electronically on a monthly basis. For more information, visit www.pixologymag.com

Copyright © 2012 by Tim Grey. All Rights Reserved.

To contact the publisher:
Tim Grey
328 8th Avenue #132
New York, NY 10001
www.timgrey.com
tim@timgrey.com

About Tim Grey
Tim Grey is regarded as one of the top educators in digital photography and imaging, offering clear guidance on complex subjects through his writing and speaking.

Tim has authored more than a dozen books and hundreds of magazine articles on digital imaging for photographers, and has produced over a dozen video training titles on a wide variety of subjects. He publishes the Ask Tim Grey email newsletter in addition to Pixology magazine. Tim teaches through workshops, seminars, and appearances at major events around the world.

For more information:
www.timgrey.com

Every attempt has been made throughout this magazine to distinguish proprietary trademarks from descriptive terms by following the capitalization style used by the manufacturer and marking those marks as either a trademark or registered trademark. All trademarks and registered trademarks included in this book are the property of their respective owners.

The publisher has made best efforts to prepare this magazine, but makes no representation or warranties of any kind with regard to the completeness or accuracy of the contents herein and accept no liability of any kind including but not limited to performance, merchantability, fitness for any particular purpose, or any losses or damages of any kind caused or alleged to be caused directly or indirectly from this magazine.
Parting Shot