Bringing Out The Best Of Your Image

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Sometimes people see images on the internet and they often wonder how the photographer got their image to the final point.   I have been asked to do a tutorial on how I got this image from the starting image on the left to the finished result on the right.

So I am going to take you through the stages of what was required to put this image together.

I started by taking the original image into Digital Photo Professional, which is a Raw Converter programme for Canon cameras. I then made nine exposures all at different increments to have the lightest and the darkest all the way through the nine images. You can see the nine images above.

I then took the images into a HDR programme called PhotoMatix. PhotoMatix takes the best from the nine exposures and merges them into one image.

So you can see on the left is the before image and on the right is the resulting image after HDR. You can see all the detail that was originally hidden within the shadows. You can see there is a lot more depth and detail in the clouds.

From here I start working the image in different steps to get it to the final result. I firstly start my standard editing. I don't do any individual editing on the exposures until they are formed into one, otherwise it can throw out the lining up of detail.

I firstly do a Shadow/Highlight on the image. And you can see the difference just in the clouds. On this layer I also do any spot editing, like sensor spot removal and cloning out of small distracting elements. I then added a curves and Levels layer with only slight adjustments on both those layers.

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From there I perform a series of layers that include Gaussian Blur and blend modes like Multiply to give the image a more velvety feel.

I then added a Gaussian Blur layer on Screen Mode at a reduced opacity and masked out the areas I didn't want the Gaussian Blur to affect. This has brought more detail out in the shadow areas.

I then merged all the layers into another new layer and used Dodge and Burn in 5% increments to enhance select areas.

On top of that layer stack I added a Selective Colour Adjustment Layer as well as a Hue & Saturation Adjustment Layer to control the colour intensities.

I like working with brown tones so I added a Color Fill layer using a brown tone. I switch the blend mode to Hue which doesn't colorize the entire image but instead allows some hue to show through from the original image.

I duplicated that Color Fill layer but changed the Blend Mode to Soft Light which adds more intensity to the image.

A Levels Adjustment Layer was added to the stack which with the mask I was able to concentrate on select areas like the foreground grass.

I merged all the layers into a new image and worked with it in the Duotone mode which darkened the entire image but still had a hint of brown. I pasted that image onto the original stack, changed the Blend Mode to Multiply, reduced the opacity and masked out specific areas.

Many people are familiar with the Draganizer action which gives quite a grungy feel to an image. I used this action over the entire image and then pasted it back onto the layer stack. Again I masked out the areas I didn't want affected by this layer, dropped the opacity and changed the Blend Mode to Darker Colour.

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few select applications of Unsharp Mask can then be applied to another merged layer to enhance crispness where you need it. Dodge and Burn was then applied to select areas. Gaussian Blur was again added onto a new merged layer and set to screen mode at a very low opacity which helps to reduce any noise that may have been enhanced in previous layers.

From there I resized and sharpened the image according to what I was going to use it for. And that's it. Hopefully this tutorial gives you some hints to how you can bring out the best in your images.