

Poor Man's HDR

by Allen Dawson

PROCEDURE:

With the camera on a tripod, take one shot exposed for the highlights, and another for the darks. (Alternatively, one could use one RAW image with a broad range of light exposure, and adjust it twice in RAW, once for darks and a second time for lights, and then open both in Photoshop)

Match zoom of the images (Window > Arrange > Match Zoom), and place the dark image on top of the light image. If a tripod has NOT been used, activate both images by holding the shift key down and clicking on both layers. Then, Edit > Auto Align > Auto. Then click on bottom layer to make it the only active one.

Change the name of the lower layer from "Background" to something else. (Just double click on "background".

With the lower layer activated, hit Ctrl A, Ctrl C, and then Ctrl D. (Select all, copy, deselect)

Activate the upper layer and put a mask on it.

While holding down the Alt key, click on the mask to enlarge it.

With the mask active, hit Ctrl V to copy and then Ctrl D to deselect.

(If it unexpectedly changes to black and white, click on the blue part of the layer's name.)

Make sure the mask is activated (a line will form a box around it if it is active).

Then go to Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur, and apply a variable amount of blur to the mask, which paradoxically will sharpen the image. This typically takes a very heavy blur.

As a final optional step, go to Levels (Ctrl L) and bring the darkness slider (upper left in window) to the right to lighten dark areas that need it, and/or lightness slider (upper right) to the left to darken light areas that may need it.