TURNING GRAY SKIES BLUE
How to get picture-perfect skies every time, p8

GOING HOLLYWOOD
Turn your event images into promotional movie posters, p12

PICTURE-IN-PICTURE
Create a movable Polaroid effect within the same picture, p16

Get More Online at photoshopelementsuser.com
I received an interesting email last month regarding the Digital Darkroom column on selectively bringing focus to certain areas in a photo (in Volume 4 Number 3). In the column, a photo of a person was used, and the reader mentioned how, at first, she didn’t really see a use for the technique because she just likes to photograph flowers. But then she tried the same technique on some flower photos and was amazed at how well it worked...so amazed that she felt compelled to write and tell us. Thanks, Mom! (Just kidding.)

She brought up a great point that I think we could all learn from: Experiment! Even though we try to include other options for a tutorial, it would be impossible to show you every possible application of a technique in this newsletter. For example, in this issue we have our regular tutorial in the Scrapbookers’ Workshop on adding an ethereal touch to your photos. We also have a tutorial on creating a Polaroid effect. So if you’re a photographer, why not read the Scrapbookers’ Workshop and try to apply techniques discussed there to show off your work? Or if you’re into digital scrapbooking, why not try some of the other techniques, like the Polaroid effect, in your scrapbook designs? You’ll be amazed at some of the results you get from taking an idea that was meant for one type of work and applying it to another. And when you’re finished, make sure you swing by the website (www.photoshopelementsuser.com) and share your creations. You never know when your photo will be picked as the image of the week winner. See you next time...
CONTENTS

VOL 4, NO 4

features

08  NOTHING BUT BLUE SKIES AHEAD
Don’t let flat skies take your images hostage; replace them with seamless precision.

step by step

04  DIGITAL DARKROOM: FIXING TOWERS THAT LEAN
See how Matt Kloskowski corrects perspective distortion common to pictures with skyscrapers.

12  NOW SHOWING...
Turn your invitation into a movie poster sensation that’s sure to get five stars.

16  MAGIC PICTURE WITHIN A PICTURE
Add dramatic emphasis to your photo with a movable Polaroid-type frame.

25  SLICE AND DICE YOUR PHOTOS
Transform your image into a faux bulletin board—pins and all.

columns

19  BEGINNERS’ WORKSHOP: SKIMMING OFF THE CREAM OF THE CROP
Larry Becker exposes the “megapixel myth” and outlines valuable cropping guidelines.

28  SCRAPBOOKERS’ WORKSHOP: TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL
Learn how you can add an ethereal touch to your photos.

ESSENTIALS

02  FROM THE EDITOR
22  TIPS & TRICKS
31  ELEMENTS Q & A

Get More Online at photoshopelementsuser.com

YOUR LEARNING DOESN’T STOP HERE!
It continues online, where you get exclusive access to print and video tutorials, discussion forums, downloads, and a personal user gallery. It’s all part of the value-added benefits of being an Adobe Photoshop Elements Techniques newsletter and website subscriber. Wherever you see the symbol at the end of an article, it means there’s additional material for that story at www.photoshopelementsuser.com/subscriber/printextras.php.
Step by Step

Digital Darkroom
BY MATT KLOSKOWSKI

fixing towers that lean

A COMMON PROBLEM WHEN PHOTOGRAPHING BUILDINGS IS PERSPECTIVE DISTORTION WITH TALLER BUILDINGS. WE’VE ALL BEEN THERE…YOU CAPTURE A GREAT SKYLINE ON VACATION, JUST TO COME HOME AND SEE YOUR BUILDINGS LEANING AT AN ANGLE. IT’S ACTUALLY VERY COMMON—SO COMMON, IN FACT, THAT ADOBE ADDED THE CORRECT CAMERA DISTORTION FILTER IN ELEMENTS 5 TO HELP CORRECT IT.

STEP ONE: Open the photo that needs fixing (File>Open). Now go to Filter>Correct Camera Distortion.

[To follow along, download the illustration shown here by navigating to the subscriber area of www.photoshopelementsuser.com.]

STEP TWO: You’ll see the Correct Camera Distortion dialog open. At first glance it has a lot of scary terminology about perspective, angles, and oddly named settings, but don’t let that frighten you away. No complicated math experience is needed here because you do everything visually. First, let’s make the buildings vertical again by dragging the Vertical Perspective slider to the left. (Tip: You can also use the scrubby slider that appears when you hover over the labels in the dialog.) Notice there’s a nice grid over the image to help you see when the side of each building is indeed vertical again.
STEP THREE: Next, adjust the Scale setting to fill in those transparent areas toward the bottom of the photo so it fills the frame again, then click OK to apply the change. Your photo will look much more pleasing overall.

STEP FOUR: Now let’s take a look at another example. This photo suffers from the same problem, but you're going to see that fixing it is a little harder. First, duplicate the photo layer by pressing Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J).

STEP FIVE: With the top layer selected, go to the Correct Camera Distortion filter again. Adjust the Vertical Perspective and watch the leftmost building as it becomes vertical again. As you make this change, you'll see the rightmost building skews too far to the right. So by correcting one building, we’re distorting another. That’s fine though. Go ahead and adjust the setting until the left building looks vertical, then click OK.
STEP SIX: Now the top layer has the left building looking straight, and the bottom layer has the right building looking straight. The first step to fixing this is to select the top layer in the Layers palette and use the Move tool (V) to move the top layer downward so the general position of the buildings on the two layers match. Lowering the Opacity of the top layer in the Layers palette may help you align the buildings.

STEP SEVEN: At this point we’re going to bring out the best of both layers by erasing the area from the top layer that doesn’t look good. So grab the Eraser tool (E) and choose a fairly large brush (we used 300 px). Make sure the top layer in the Layers palette is still selected and start erasing away the crooked areas on the right side.

STEP EIGHT: Be careful not to erase too far inward as you may start to reveal parts of another building. You’ll probably have to experiment a few times here to see how far you can go and still keep the building looking like it should. You may also need to crop outlying areas to avoid duplication of elements in the original photo. (We had to crop out the duplicated building on the bottom-left side of the photo.)

Matt Kloskowski is Education and Curriculum Developer for the National Association of Photoshop Professionals. He has authored or co-authored several books on Photoshop and Illustrator. His latest book is The Photoshop CS2 Speed Clinic from Peachpit Press. Matt also teaches an advanced Photoshop course for www.sessions.edu.
nothing but blue skies ahead

BY SYNDEE HOLT

Bald skies are the common cold of photography. We all deal with them from time to time. However, Photoshop Elements offers a cure for flat skies. Is it cheating? I don’t think so. After all, we all know there was a blue sky that smiled over the subject at one time, right?

Replacing a sky can be easier than you might have imagined, as long as you have a sky library from which you can “check out” a more interesting sky. I personally limit my use of skies to their geographic boundaries. To wit, I only use Italian skies for Italian photos, desert skies for desert photos, and so on—to keep the geographical lighting accurate. However, if you’re doing an artistic rendering, rather than a record of your travels, you can use any sky you wish. In fact, I often take photos with the sky as the subject.

So don’t discard a travel or outdoor photo as unworthy of the family album until you’ve examined the sky. In fact, one of my most-used photos from Italy is a bad photo of Pisa—with a great sky. To keep your skies organized, you’ll need to catalog them by location, time of day, and type of sky (e.g., stormy, bright, clouds, sunset). Make sure to save them in the resolution you normally save your photos because that will be important when you start combining images.

Images that are easiest to add a new sky to are those with clean skylines. Photos that have buildings, rocks, and smooth-sided subjects bumping up against the sky are your best bets. Tree lines can be tricky but are often doable. Once you determine your image is a good candidate, you’ll need to evaluate its environment to select a sky that will offer the best blend.

ADDING A NEW SKY

One of the most common causes of a bald sky is that when we properly expose for our subject matter, the sky becomes too light. Here’s an image of my brother’s trip to Italy that needed an extreme makeover to do its beauty justice. So let’s roll up our sleeves and swap some skies.

[To follow along, download the images shown here by navigating to the subscriber area of www.photoshopelementsuser.com.]

STEP ONE: Open buildings.jpg, then duplicate your image to preserve a copy of it (File>Duplicate). Using the Magic Wand tool (W), select the blank sky area of the image. This should put the “marching ants” entirely around your sky area. If you didn’t capture all of it, hold down your Shift key and add to the selection by clicking on the other areas you want to capture. Put this selection area on its own layer by pressing Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J).
STEP TWO: Open your sky library and select your sky image (sky.jpg if you’re following along with the download). Double-check its resolution to make sure that it matches your target image (Alt-Ctrl-I [Mac: Option-Command-I]). If it doesn’t, uncheck Resample Image at the bottom of the Image Size dialog and change the resolution to match the image you’ll be dropping your sky into, then click OK. Use the Rectangular Marquee tool (M) to select an area of sky. Don’t worry if it isn’t the same size as the target area.

STEP THREE: Use the Move tool (V) to drag this selection onto the target image in the area of the sky. Elements 5 automatically turns on the Free Transform function for the selection, so you can drag the handles to make the sky the size you need to cover the target area (no need to hold down the Shift key to keep proportions constrained). For earlier versions you’ll need to press Ctrl-T (Mac: Command-T) to enable Free Transform and Shift-drag to keep your proportions constrained. Then press Enter (Mac: Return) to commit the changes. Now you should have three layers showing on your Layers palette: the sky as Layer 2, the target sky as Layer 1, and the original image as Background.

STEP FOUR: Now let the magic begin. With Layer 2 selected, press Ctrl-G (Mac: Command-G) to group Layer 2 with Layer 1. Your new sky will drop into the target area you selected. You can still access the Free Transform bounding box by clicking on Layer 2 (Elements 4: press Ctrl-T [Mac: Command-T] to access Free Transform) and use your Move tool to move the sky around in the selected area to get the best effect.

STEP FIVE: We’ll just need to brighten our image up some to match our cheery sky. To add some light and contrast, select the Background layer, then click on the Create Adjustment Layer icon in the Layers palette and select Levels. With Preview checked, drag both the white and black Input Levels sliders toward the center (the white to add lightness and the black to dial back in some contrast). Then click OK.
**ADD SKIES TO TRICKIER SKYLINES**

So what do you do when you have a more complex skyline like a tree-lined ridge? Let’s take a look at another Italian image, this time from my Florence journey (treeline.tif). It had just finished raining and, while the sky had cleared, it hadn’t cleared enough to stay blue when I exposed for the buildings. But the trees are going to make replacing this sky a little more challenging.

**STEP ONE:** Again, duplicate your file first. Then use the Magic Wand tool to select the sky. If you’re using the download, there are quite a few stubborn spots of sky between the tree foliage. To get as much as possible, set the Tolerance to somewhere between 20 and 30 and uncheck Contiguous in the Options Bar, then click on the sky. You’ll end up getting a lot of water and the buildings, but we’ll take care of that in the next step.

**STEP TWO:** Now, choose the Rectangular Marquee tool and Alt-drag (Mac: Option-drag) from just below the tree line in the top-left corner to the bottom-right corner of the photo. Let go of the mouse and then release the Alt (Mac: Option) key. This will deselect all of those areas. Now choose Select>Grow to add one pixel to your selection. Finally, press Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J) to put this selection on its own layer as we did before.

**STEP THREE:** Just for kicks we’ll use the same Italian sky we used in the last image. Who will know? So grab a selection of the sky and drag it over as you did before. Then use Free Transform to size the sky to the target area. Before grouping it, create a copy of it by dragging its layer on top of the Create a New Layer icon.

**STEP SIX:** The buildings are still a little lackluster. Nothing a little saturation can’t fix. Just select your Background layer, click the Create Adjustment Layer icon and choose Hue/Saturation. Bump up the Saturation until the colors look vibrant but not unrealistic. We also increased the Lightness a hair. Then click OK.
Hide this layer for now by clicking on the Eye icon next to its layer in the Layers palette. Now group your first sky with Layer 1 (as you did in Step Four on page 9) to drop it in place.

**STEP FOUR:** But now our water is still reflecting our old drab sky. So let’s add the new sky to the reflection. To start, use the Magic Wand tool to select the area of the reflection we want to replace. Check Contiguous and hold down the Shift key to keep adding to the selection until you have one similar to the one pictured here. This time let’s add a feather to our selection to smooth out any harsh selection lines. Simply go to Select>Feather and enter a small amount (we used 5 px). Now press Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J) to add the selected reflection area to its own layer.

**STEP FIVE:** Toggle the visibility of your copied sky layer on by clicking where the Eye icon was in the Layers palette and drag its layer above Layer 3 (the selection area in the water you just created). With the Layer 2 copy still selected, activate Free Transform to open the bounding box around your sky. Now click-and-drag the top-center control straight down until your sky is completely inverted. Then press Enter (Mac: Return) to commit the change.

**STEP SIX:** Time for more magic. First, move the sky to the bottom of your image to put it in place. Then Ctrl-click (Mac: Command-click) the Layer 3 thumbnail to reload the selection. Once again, group the sky to the selection to put it inside. Press Ctrl-D (Mac: Command-D) to deselect. Reduce the Opacity of this layer until it looks realistic (we used 65%).

Once you start adding skies to your arsenal, you’ll discover images that didn’t quite work before will suddenly hold new potential. There’s just no reason for a flat sky to take the rest of the image hostage with Elements at your disposal. And before you know it, you’ll be taking pictures of skies (to the bewilderment of those around you) just to have more to choose from when a sky underwhelms you. So be adventurous, be creative—and start building a sky library!

Syndee Holt is an independent designer for Jacquard Products, Polyform Products, and Savage Universal. Her work can be found in many arts and craft magazines, as well as on numerous television shows. Check her out on the Web at http://synspage.com.
Creating a Movie Poster

BY MIKE RODRIGUEZ

now showing...

THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF PEOPLE IN THE WORLD: THOSE IN CHARGE OF AN EVENT AND THOSE WHO WILL BE ASKED TO DO IT NEXT YEAR. LIFE’S NUMEROUS AND SPECIAL EVENTS—BE THEY RECITALS, SCHOOL PLAYS, OR ANNIVERSARIES—NEED UNIQUE, SPECIAL INVITATIONS AND ADVERTISEMENTS. WHY NOT WOW YOUR INVITEES WITH A MOVIE POSTER?

To follow along, download the images shown here by navigating to the subscriber area of www.photoshopelementsuser.com. For simplicity’s sake, this tutorial will operate under the assumption that you’re following along with the images used here.

STEP ONE: Open the images you’ll use for your movie poster. (If you’re following along with the downloads, they are silhouette.jpg [the main image], girl.jpg, and keyboard.jpg.) Activate girl.jpg, select the Move tool (V), and Shift-drag the image on top of silhouette.jpg to keep it centered. Resize the girl by dragging (Elements 4: Shift-dragging) one of the corner handles, and position her on the poster as shown here. Press Enter (Mac: Return) to accept your changes and click away from the image to deselect.

STEP TWO: Click the Eye icon next to the Background layer to hide it and go to Edit>Define Pattern. In the dialog, type a name and press OK. In the Layers palette, click the Create Adjustment Layer icon (black and white circle) and select Pattern. The girl should be visible in the drop-down menu in the Pattern Fill dialog. Make sure Link with Layer is selected and press OK. We’re not really going to use a repeating pattern, but using an adjustment layer gives us a layer mask to use in the next step.
STEP THREE: To smooth the transition from the girl's face to the main image, make the Background visible again and hide your middle layer. Press D then X until the Foreground and Background are set to their default colors (black and white, respectively). With the adjustment layer selected, choose the Gradient tool (G) and choose the Foreground to Transparent gradient from the Gradient Picker in the Options Bar. Drag a short line from the right edge of the girl image inward, to fade the edge. (Tip: Hold down the Shift key while dragging to keep your lines perfectly horizontal and perpendicular.) Repeat along the bottom edge. Using the Brush tool (B) and a soft-edged brush, paint with black on the layer mask to blend any remaining edges.

STEP FOUR: Activate the keyboard image and make a selection with the Rectangular Marquee tool (M), leaving some space around your selection and the edge of the image. Then go to Select>Feather, enter a Feather Radius (we used 50 px), and click OK. Press Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J) to copy the selection to its own layer. Ctrl-click (Mac: Command-click) that new layer’s thumbnail in the Layers palette to load it as a selection and choose Edit>Copy. Now activate the silhouette image and choose Edit>Paste. Using the Move tool (V), position the keyboard at the bottom of the poster. You may need to also use Free Transform to fit your image.

STEP FIVE: Let’s make our image a little darker to improve the contrast between it and the text we’ll be adding. With black still set as your Foreground color, target the keyboard layer, click on the Create Adjustment Layer icon, and choose Gradient. This will open the Gradient Fill dialog. Set Gradient to Foreground to Transparent, Style to Linear, Angle to 90°, then click OK. It’s a bit too dark, so lower the Opacity of that layer at the top of the Layers palette until you’re happy with the look (we used 70%).
STEP SIX: Let’s give the poster a sepia quality for a touch of class. First, target the Gradient Fill adjustment layer (top layer) and add a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer. Check Colorize in the lower-right corner of the dialog, choose your desired settings, and click OK. (We set Hue to 47, Saturation to 25, and Lightness to 0.) At this point, the order of your Layers palette should be as shown.

STEP SEVEN: For the rating box, create two new layers at the top of the layer stack by clicking on the Create a New Layer icon. Choose the Rectangular Marquee tool and reset your Feather to 0 px in the Options Bar. Then Shift-drag to create a square selection at the bottom of your image, and stroke the selection by choosing Edit-Stroked (Outline) Selection. (We set the Width to 2 px, Color to white, and Location to Inside.) Draw another rectangle on the other new layer, making it about half as tall and twice as wide, and apply the stroke. Duplicate this layer by pressing Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J), then position the three boxes as shown here using the Move tool.

STEP EIGHT: Ctrl-click (Mac: Command-click) each of your three rectangle layers to target them, then merge them (Layer>Merge Layers). To complete the poster, add your title, the subject(s) of the auspicious occasion, and all other details their adoring fans will need to get to the gala event. All you need now is the popcorn. Enjoy!

Mike Rodriguez holds a master’s degree in Educational Technology and has 15 years of teaching experience. He currently teaches classes in Photoshop Elements, as well as other computer applications.
Step by Step

Digital Editing
BY LESA SNIDER KING

magic picture within a picture

GET READY TO TAKE AN ORDINARY PHOTO AND TRANSFORM IT INTO AN EXTRAORDINARY IMAGE BY PLACING A POLAROID-LIKE FRAME ON TOP OF A GRAYSCALE VERSION OF THE SAME IMAGE. THE REAL MAGIC IS THAT THE COLOR PICTURE BOX WILL BE MOVABLE! YOU’LL ACTUALLY BE ABLE TO MOVE THE COLOR PICTURE BOX ANYWHERE YOU WANT, LEAVING THE GRAYSCALE VERSION OF THE PHOTO IN ITS WAKE. SOUND INTRIGUING? READ ON!

STEP ONE: With the Rectangular Marquee tool (M) selected, drag out a box around part of the image. Don’t worry too much about its size or location because we can change it later. (Tip: You can move your selection on the fly by pressing the Spacebar while dragging.) Next, create a Solid Color adjustment layer by clicking the Create Adjustment Layer icon at the top of the Layers palette and choosing Solid Color from the drop-down menu. Choose a nice charcoal gray from the Color Picker, then click OK.

[To follow along, download the image shown here by navigating to the subscriber area of www.photoshopelementsuser.com.]

STEP TWO: Let’s rotate the box a little. Press Ctrl-T (Mac: Command-T) to invoke the Free Transform bounding box, then drag the bent, double-headed arrow that appears when you hover just outside any of the corner handles. You can also resize the bounding box by dragging any of the handles—or Shift-dragging on a corner handle to keep the proportions of the box constrained. Then press Enter (Mac: Return) to accept the transformation.
STEP THREE: Let's add some depth with a drop shadow. From the Artwork and Effects palette (Window>Artwork and Effects), choose Layer Styles from the left drop-down menu and Drop Shadows from the right. (Elements 4: Open the Styles and Effects palette [Window>Styles and Effects].) Select Soft Edge, then click Apply. Tip: To edit the shadow, just double-click the sunburst icon on its layer (Elements 4: a cursive “ƒ”) to bring up the Style Settings dialog.

STEP FOUR: To make the original image viewable through the picture box, change the layer blend mode to Overlay by choosing it from the pop-up menu in the top-left corner of the Layers palette. Changing a layer’s blend mode changes the way it interacts with the layers beneath it. The Overlay blend mode ignores the color gray, allowing the pixels underneath to show through any gray areas. By using dark gray as a fill color for the picture box earlier, we’ve created a window to the original image below.

STEP FIVE: To emphasize what’s in our frame, we’ll de-emphasize the rest of the photo by draining the color from it. To do this without harming it, choose Hue/Saturation from the Create Adjustment Layer drop-down menu in the Layers palette. Drag the Saturation slider all the way to the left to completely desaturate the image. Next, drag the Lighten slider to the right just a bit to lighten the overall image.
STEP SIX: Now let’s add some color back to just our frame. We’ll use the layer mask of the Color Fill adjustment layer to paint it in. Ctrl-click (Mac: Command-click) the mask to create a selection of the picture box. Now press D then X until the Foreground and Background colors are set to their defaults (black and white, respectively). Then click once on the layer mask of the Hue/Saturation adjustment layer and fill the selection with black by pressing Alt-Backspace (Mac: Option-Delete).

STEP SEVEN: A picture within a picture just wouldn’t be complete without a frame. So we’ll use the selection we already have and apply a thick stroke to it. First, create a new layer for the frame by clicking the Create a New Layer icon in the Layers palette. With the new layer selected, go to Edit>Stroke (Outline) Selection. In the Stroke dialog, set the Width to 20 px, Color to white, and Location to Inside, then click OK. Press Ctrl-D (PC: Command-D) to deselect. Now a white border should appear around the picture box.

STEP EIGHT: The super cool thing about this effect is that we can move the picture box, and therefore the color area, wherever we want—even to other images. Just Ctrl-click (Mac: Command-click) each of the three new layers in the Layers panel to select them all (everything except the Background layer), and press V to select the Move tool. Mouse over to the document and move the picture box wherever you want. Smile with smug satisfaction as the color moves right along with it. ☺️
One of the things people look for when buying a digital camera is how many megapixels it can capture. The novice is led to believe that more megapixels intrinsically translates to better pictures. However, this isn’t necessarily true because most experts agree that a high-quality 5-megapixel sensor trumps a lower quality 10-megapixel sensor every time.

Just a quick Web search of the ubiquitous phrase “megapixel myth” will yield tens of thousands of articles arguing that once you get over a certain number of megapixels (usually 5 or 6), anything higher is generally overkill. It makes for larger file sizes, fills up your memory card quicker, causes delays in image capture, and slows the downloading and uploading of your pictures to a sludge. What matters more than megapixels, say many photography gurus, is the quality of the image sensor and the lens.

I would tend to agree with the general consensus. I’ve found that once you’re shooting with a 5- or 6-megapixel camera, it makes more sense to invest in a higher quality image sensor and lens to capture the best possible image. The one key advantage of having a higher megapixel camera is that when you need to crop a photo in Photoshop Elements, you’ll have more resolution to work with, allowing for tighter crops.

To find out just how much resolution you have to play with in your image, go to Image>Resize>Image Size (Alt-Ctrl-I [Mac: Option-Command-I]). If your images are destined for the printer, you’ll want to set Resolution to somewhere between 200–300 ppi. However, if they’ll mostly be viewed on a monitor, you’re safe with a Resolution of 72 ppi.

...you can improve your finished photos by cropping them with a more artistic eye.
To ensure a crisp printed photograph, turn off Resample Image, set the Resolution to 300 ppi, and look at your Width and Height values. This will give you a rough idea of how much room you have to play with before you crop. For example, if you just want to print a 5x3 photo at 300 ppi of an image with the dimensions shown on the previous page, you could safely crop about half of it away without compromising quality.

But enough about megapixels and sensors. Let’s get back to the cool stuff: composition (the arrangement of visual elements in a shot). If you’re not especially skilled at composition and have sufficient resolution in your image, you can improve your finished photos by cropping them with a more artistic eye.

**RULE OF THIRDS**
A good rule to follow when planning a composition is the rule of thirds, which suggests that you divide your picture into thirds, both horizontally and vertically (resulting in nine equal sections). The idea is to align your subject either at one of the four points formed by the intersecting lines or along the lines. Many photographers believe that this creates much more interest than simply centering the subject in the photo.

To superimpose these guidelines over your image in Photoshop Elements, you can employ a grid. To do this, first choose Grid from the View menu to see your grid. Then, unless you enjoy counting lines and dividing them by three, I suggest you change your Grid Preferences (Ctrl-K [Mac: Command-K]). In the Preferences dialog, choose Grid from the top drop-down menu. Next, set Gridline Every to 33.33% to have it divide your image into thirds. Then choose a color for your gridlines from the color swatch (we set ours to red). Finally, set Subdivisions to 1, then click OK.

Now let’s look at how you’d actually use these. Start by looking through your collections for high-res images where the main subject that you want to focus on is centered. Open one of these images in Elements and click-and-drag out your cropping border using the Crop tool (C). (Alternatively, you can use the images shown here by navigating to the subscriber area of www.photoshopelementsuser.com.)

Click inside the cropping border and drag it around your image until the subject of your picture is approximately aligned at an area where two lines intersect.
would intersect. At this point, you’ll need to make your best guess because you’ll have to imagine that the area inside your cropping border is divided according to the rule of thirds. (Note: For landscape photos, it’s recommended to align the horizon either along the top or bottom horizontal line in the grid.)

After you commit the crop, look at the newly cropped image using the grid. You may need to use the Undo function (Ctrl-Z [Mac: Command-Z]) and try again a few times before you get your image just right, but you’ll get the hang of it. And over time you’ll learn to resist the temptation to center your compositions in the camera, so you can avoid having to crop them later in Photoshop Elements.

**RULE BREAKING**

Another thing to keep in mind is cropping doesn’t always need to maintain the proportions of the original image. As you find features you want to accentuate, you may decide to transform a landscape-oriented image into a tall, slim image or zoom into one particular aspect of it.

Finally, if you have several images—none of which stand on their own very well—consider cropping them similarly and combining them into a single composition. While most people would only do this with similar images (e.g., all landscapes, all buildings, etc.), it sometimes pays to mix things up. Just try to come up with one thing they all have in common, such as they all have a central element that’s a circle, they were all taken in New Orleans, or they all have vivid primary colors. And if the colors don’t seem to blend well, try converting them to black and white.

If you weren’t already in the habit of cropping to improve your compositions, you’ll probably find that these little tips will bring back all kinds of images you had written off. Happy cropping!

Try cropping several images with similar subjects to the same dimensions and combine them into a single composition.

*All images by Larry Becker unless otherwise noted.*
Some Quick and Helpful Tips

1. If you have a series of separate type layers and you want to select (activate) them all in one fell swoop, click on one layer and then choose Select>Similar Layers. All the type layers will be selected.

2. If you’re using a very small brush size or have your Caps Lock key turned on (to change to the Precise Cursor), you may occasionally lose track of your cursor in your document. One simple solution is to press-and-hold the Spacebar. This will temporarily change your cursor into the Hand tool (H), which should be much easier to spot. Once you’ve found your place, let go of the Spacebar to continue with your current tool.

3. Sometimes the default brush cursor display doesn’t give a very accurate preview of how large the brush really is. In this example we have a 90-pixel brush with the Mode set to Dissolve (from the Options Bar). Compare the regular brush cursor (left), with the paint that’s actually applied (right); there’s a significant difference in overall size.

4. Using this little trick, you can sample color outside an Elements file. With the Eyedropper tool (I) selected, click-and-hold on a color in your current document. That color will appear as the Foreground color. Without letting go of the mouse, move the Eyedropper over another open document or browser window and then let go of the mouse to choose a color. Depending on the setup of your computer, you can sample colors this way from your desktop, a website, or another program.

5. Katrin Eismann shared this technique in a Photoshop tips column and like many, it’s easily transferable to Photoshop Elements. If your photo has a
noticeable color cast (like this image that was unknowingly shot with the wrong White Balance setting), try this method to fix the problem.

[To follow along, download the image shown here by navigating to the subscriber area of www.photoshopelements-user.com.]

Press Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J) to duplicate the Background layer. From the Filter menu choose Blur>Average, and the duplicated layer should turn a solid color.

Press Ctrl-L (Mac: Command-L) to bring up the Levels dialog. Select the Set Gray Point eyedropper and click anywhere on the colored layer (which will turn the layer gray), then click OK.

Now delete the copied layer by dragging it on top of the Trash icon in the Layers palette, then press Alt-Ctrl-L (Mac: Option-Command-L) to reopen the Levels dialog with your previous settings. Just click OK and the color cast should be removed.

If you’ve changed a setting in the Preferences dialog and now you want to go back and change it, here’s a quick shortcut to jump directly back to the same Preference area (as opposed to the main Preferences dialog). Instead of pressing Ctrl-K (Mac: Command-K) to bring up the Preferences dialog, use Alt-Ctrl-K (Mac: Option-Command-K).

The default transparency grid is white and light gray, which can be a challenge if you’re trying to work with white objects or text on a transparent background. You can change how your transparency displays by going to Edit>Preferences>Transparency (Mac: Photoshop Elements>Preferences>Transparency). To set your Grid Size, simply choose a size from the drop-down menu. And for your Grid Colors, choose either a set from its drop-down menu, or click on the color swatches to open the Color Picker and customize your own colors.

All images by Dave Cross unless otherwise noted.
slice and dice your photos

BEFORE THE DAYS OF PANORAMIC TECHNOLOGY, IF YOU WANTED TO SHOW THE BIG PICTURE, YOU HAD TO TAKE MULTIPLE PHOTOS AND THEN TRY TO PASTE THEM TOGETHER THE BEST YOU COULD. NOW, WITH THE BENEFITS OF PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS, WE CAN TAKE ONE BIG PHOTO AND REVERSE THE PROCESS TO CREATE AN EYE-CATCHING BULLETIN BOARD EFFECT.

STEP ONE: Open the image you want to use for the tutorial. A large scenic image will work best. Double-click the Background layer, then click OK when the New Layer dialog pops up. This will make the layer editable. We’re going to increase the canvas by 2” all around to give us some room to work. To do this, go to Image>Resize>Canvas Size. In the Canvas Size dialog, check Relative and set both the Width and Height to 2”, then click OK. Alt-click (Mac: Option-click) the Create a New Layer icon in the Layers palette to be able to create and name the layer in one swoop. Name this layer “Template” and click OK.

[To follow along, download the image shown here by navigating to the subscriber area of www.photoshopelementsuser.com.]

STEP TWO: Press D to set your Foreground and Background colors to their defaults (black and white, respectively). With the Rectangular Marquee tool (M) selected, set the Mode in the Options Bar to Fixed Size and set both the Width and Height to 4”. Select your Template layer, then click once on the image to create a selection and press Ctrl-Backspace (Mac: Command-Delete) to fill it with the Background color. We used white but it doesn’t matter which color you use, as long as it contrasts well with your image. Press Ctrl-D (Mac: Command-D) to deselect. Lower the Opacity of the Template layer in the Layers palette so you can see your image beneath (we set ours to 55%).
**STEP THREE:** With the Move tool (V) selected, position the Template square in the top-left corner of the image, leaving about a 1" border. (If necessary, resize your white square by holding the Shift key and dragging one of the corner handles.) Turning on the Grid (View>Grid) will make placing the template easier and more precise. You may want to change your Grid preferences to set your gridlines an inch apart. If so, go to Edit>Preferences>Grid (Mac: Photoshop Elements>Preferences>Grid) and set them as shown here.

**STEP FOUR:** With the image layer (Layer 0) active, Ctrl-click (Mac: Command-click) on the Template layer thumbnail to create a selection and press Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J) to create your first photo. Rename this layer Photo 1 by double-clicking on it in the Layers palette. Select the Template layer and use the Move tool (V) to slide the square to the right. Press-and-hold the Shift key while you drag to keep the Template square lined up horizontally to Photo 1. In Photoshop Elements 5, use the rotation handle to rotate the Template square to the right or left. (Elements 4 users will need to press Ctrl-T [Mac: Command-T] to use the Free Transform tool to rotate the Template.) Press Enter (Mac: Return) or click the checkmark to commit the rotation.

**STEP FIVE:** Repeat Step Four until you’ve sliced up your image. Toggling the visibility of Layer 0 will give you a better idea of the photo placements as you create them. With the Photo 1 layer active, open the Artwork and Effects palette (Window>Artwork and Effects). Click the middle icon and choose Layer Styles and Drop Shadows from the left and right drop-down menus. Double-click the Soft Edge effect to apply it to Photo 1. (Elements 4: These are in the Styles and Effects palette.) To copy this style to your other photo layers, simply Alt-drag (Mac: Option-drag) the layer style icon from one layer to another in the Layers palette.
STEP SIX: Turn off the visibility for Layer 0 and the Template layer, as well as the Grid (View>Grid). Next, select Layer 0, click the Create A New Layer icon, and fill it with a background color of your choice (we used white). With the Photo 1 layer selected, Alt-click (Mac: Option-click) the Create a New Layer icon and name it Frame 1. While the Frame 1 layer is still active, Ctrl-click (Mac: Command-click) the Photo 1 thumbnail to make a selection. Next, choose Edit>Stroke (Outline) Selection and adjust the settings as you please, then click OK. (We set Width to 15 px, Color to white, and Location to Inside.) Repeat this step for each photo layer.

STEP SEVEN: Once you have everything in place, you can rearrange the photos to vary the overlap. Simply select a photo layer and Shift-click its corresponding frame layer, then drag them together up or down in the palette. You can also add some sky writing to touch off your photo. Select the Text tool (T), set your formatting in the Options Bar, and enter your text. To get the effect seen here, change the blend mode to Dissolve and lower the Opacity to about 90% in the Layers palette. Create a new layer above the Text layer, then select a round, hard-edged brush from the Brush Picker (we used the Hard Round 13 pixels brush from the Default Brushes) and paint connecting brush stokes between the words. Change the blend mode of the brush strokes to Dissolve as well and lower the Opacity to about 90%.

pin it up

A bulletin board just wouldn’t be complete without pins to hold them up. To learn how to add these pins and shadows, navigate to the subscriber area of the website and click on Tutorials.
Sometimes a snapshot just doesn’t do a precious moment justice. That’s where Photoshop Elements can bridge the gap between the data recorded in your digital image and the emotion of the moment. In this tutorial you’ll learn how you can add an ethereal touch to your photo and make it all your own by means of a brush you create with your own words.

STEP ONE: Open the image you’ll be working with, then duplicate the Background layer two times by pressing Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J) twice. Hide your Background layer by clicking on the Eye icon next to it in the Layers palette. Change the blend mode of the top duplicated layer (Layer 1 copy) to Soft Light in the Layers palette.

STEP TWO: Select your middle layer (Layer 1) and go to Enhance>Adjust Color>Remove Color. Duplicate this layer two times. Select the first copy (Layer 1 copy 2) and apply a Gaussian Blur by choosing Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur (we used 10 px for our high-res photo). Next, highlight the second copy (Layer 1 copy 3) and apply a stronger Gaussian Blur, then change its blend mode to Screen.

STEP THREE: Our image is now a little too washed out, so we’ll add some contrast back in. First, select your top layer and go to Enhance>Adjust Lighting>Shadows/Highlights. In the Shadows/Highlights dialog, set Lighten Shadows to 0%, Darken Highlights to 0%, Midtone Contrast to 100%, and click OK. Next, go to Enhance>Adjust Lighting>Brightness/Contrast and bump up both the Brightness and Contrast (we set both to 30). Finally, add one last Gaussian Blur to perfect a soft, dreamy effect. Select your top image, then Shift-select the layer just above the Background layer and choose Merge Visible from the More menu.
STEP FOUR: Now we’ll make some brushes out of text that best describes our photo. For this photo, words like peaceful, heavenly, and sleepy eyes seemed most apropos. Open a new document (File>NEW>Blank File) and set Background Contents to Transparent in the New dialog. Press D to set your Foreground and Background colors to their default (black and white, respectively). Next, select the Type tool (T) from the Toolbox and pick an appropriate font family, style, and size from the Options Bar. Type out a word or phrase that describes your photo.

STEP FIVE: Time to transform this text into a brush. With the Rectangular Marquee tool (M) selected, make a selection around the word you just typed. Go to Edit>Define Brush from Selection. In the Brush Name dialog, choose a name for your brush and click OK. Then deselect (Ctrl-D [Mac: Command-D]) to get rid of the marching ants. Repeat these steps for each new word or phrase you type. When you’re finished go to Edit>Preset Manager to see all the brushes you just made. To save them as a set, Ctrl-click (Mac: Command-click) on each brush, then click the Save Set button. In the Save dialog that pops open, name your set and click Save.

STEP SIX: Now let’s create a matte we can paint on. First, create another new file but make it larger than your photo (by adding to its Width and Height) and set its Resolution and Color Mode to match your image in the New dialog. Next, set Background Contents to Background Color, then click OK. Click on the Background swatch in the Toolbox and select a color from your photo by clicking with the Eyedropper anywhere on the image. With the sample color loaded into your swatch, press Ctrl-Backspace (Mac: Command-Delete) to fill your document with the Background color. Select the Rectangular Marquee tool, create a selection inside your document for the interior matte, then put it on its own layer (Ctrl-J [Mac: Command-J]). Ctrl-click (Mac: Command-click) on the new layer’s thumbnail to load it as a selection, and fill it with a different color sampled from the image, then deselect.
STEP SEVEN: With this layer still active, let’s add a drop shadow. In the Artwork and Effects palette (Window>Artwork and Effects or Elements 4: Window>Styles and Effects), click on the middle icon. Choose Layer Styles from the first drop-down menu and Drop Shadows from the second, then double-click the Soft Edge drop shadow to apply. If you want to give your inner matte a dreamy, floating effect, double-click on the layer style icon to the right of the layer’s name. In the Style Settings dialog, bump up the Size (Elements 5 only) until the shadow appears all the way around the matte. You can also move the Distance and the Opacity sliders to the left for a nice soft shadow.

STEP EIGHT: Now it’s time to put it all together. First, create a new layer in your matte image by clicking the Create a New Layer icon in the Layers palette. Next, select the Brush tool (B) and click-and-hold the Brush Picker’s down-facing arrow in the Options Bar. Choose Load Brushes from the flyout menu, click on your set from the Load menu, then click Load. Now click randomly to apply the brushes around your matte. You can modify your brush settings in a multiplicity of ways from the Options Bar and even change its color between applications by changing the Foreground color. (Note: To restrict your brushes to just the inner matte, Ctrl-click [Mac: Command-click] on the inner matte’s thumbnail to select it.) To bring it home, just drag your dreamy photo onto your matte with the Move tool (V), arrange it using Free Transform (Ctrl-T [Mac: Command-T]), and add embellishments ad infinitum.

Suzanne is a Photoshop Elements Techniques Gallery member with a passion for pictures. She loves learning all she can about Photoshop Elements and applying that knowledge to create lasting memories for her family.

All images by Suzanne Hillyer unless otherwise noted.
**Q & A**

**Elements Q&A**

By Mike Rodriguez

Answers to frequently asked Adobe Photoshop Elements questions

---

**HOW CAN I DRAW A GRADIENT IN TWO DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS ON THE MASK OF AN ADJUSTMENT LAYER?**

The solution is short and simple, but it sure can cause a lot of frustration if you don’t know the answer (not that it’s ever happened to me, of course...). The trick is to use the Foreground to Transparent gradient in the Gradient Picker. Simply set your Foreground color (usually black if you’re working with a layer mask). Then, using the Gradient tool (G), draw your gradient in the desired direction. To add to it, draw another gradient in a different direction. This will also work on a regular layer, as well a layer mask. To constrain your gradient in 45° increments, hold down Shift while dragging.

---

**IS IT BETTER TO HAVE THE AUTO SELECT LAYER CHECKBOX IN THE OPTIONS BAR OF THE MOVE TOOL (V) CHECKED OR UNCHECKED?**

It’s a matter of personal preference. When the Auto Select Layer box is checked, clicking on pixels within a layer with the Move tool (V) will target that layer. Many find this handier than manually targeting the layer in the Layers palette. If this option is unchecked, your active layer won’t change, regardless of where you click inside your image. Instead, you’ll need to target the layer by highlighting it in the Layers palette or Ctrl-clicking (Mac: Command-clicking) pixels within the image. This is helpful when you’re working with very small objects or objects that are close in proximity. Additionally, the Move tool will only target layers with an opacity of 50% or higher. So if you click on anything with less than 50% opacity, you’ll inadvertently select the layer beneath. So, which is better? The classic Elements answer applies: It depends.

---

**HOW DO I PAINT A DOTTED LINE USING THE PAINT BRUSH?**

Select the Brush tool (B) and choose a brush from the Brush Picker. On the right side of the Options Bar, press-and-hold the brush icon next to More Options. This will open the Additional Brush Options window. Increasing the Spacing slider will put more space between each brush “stroke.” You may need to increase the Spacing significantly if using a non-round brush.

---

If you have a Photoshop Elements question you’d like to see in this column, send it to mrodriguez@photoshopelementsuser.com. If your question just can’t wait, visit our Photoshop Elements forum at www.photoshopelementsuser.com/forum to get answers from other members. (But still feel free to send your question along for publishing.)