Quick Holiday Projects!
Make your own custom cards and personalized candy-bar wrappers

WORD ART
Dress up your photo creations with some typographic flair

TOOL TIPS
Everything you ever wanted to know about the Lasso tools

SIMPLY DIGITAL
Change your point of view and energize your photos
From the Editor
BY RICK LEPAGE

We are blessed to have some wonderful writers working with us on the newsletter, people like Matt, Diana, Mike, Lesa, Wendy and Nancy. They all do a great job of coming up with new projects and techniques that help broaden our skills in ways that are both understandable and fun. With this issue, we’re adding yet another name to the list: Jeff Carlson. I’ve known and worked with Jeff for years, but I hadn’t realized that he was an Elements expert until I came across his Visual Quickstart Guide to Photoshop Elements by chance in a bookstore. The book is a model of clarity and is an excellent primer for getting up to speed with Elements: I highly recommend it, and I’m overjoyed that Jeff will be writing for us.

Jeff’s first piece for us is part of a new series we’re calling “Tool Tips,” which will take an in-depth look at the Elements toolbox. Each article will focus on a specific set of tools, covering options and tips for working with them, as well as when to use one tool over another. In this issue, Jeff showcases the three Lasso tools, which are the foundation of selections in Elements.

With all of the tutorials we publish, keeping track of them is a daunting task, and a searchable index is on our long list of additions to the Web site. One of our intrepid subscribers and forum regulars, Bruce Wagner, took it upon himself to build his own index, which includes every article from Photoshop Elements Techniques since its inaugural issue in 2004. Bruce has graciously agreed to let us post it for download in the Subscriber Extras area on our Web site. As a caveat, Bruce asked me to say that “it is not perfect in any way...but not too bad of a reference.” I disagree—I’d say that he did a darn good job. Thanks, Bruce!

Until next time,

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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 Web site subscriber. And don’t forget to look in the Extras section online for free downloads and sample photos for many of the stories in each issue at www.photoshopelementsuser.com/subscriber/printextras.php.
enhancing the sun’s rays

I came back from a recent trip with lots of photos of sunrises and sunsets. Here’s a technique I came up with to enhance the sun’s rays in those photos and give them an extra bit of interest.

**STEP ONE:** Let’s start out by creating a new document. Choose File> New> Blank File and enter 500 pixels by 500 pixels. This size fits most images, and, as you’ll see later, we end up erasing a lot of it. Click OK and you should have a blank, square image.

**STEP TWO:** Select the Gradient tool from the toolbox (or just press the letter G). In the top left of the Options Bar, click on the small downward-facing arrow on the Gradient Picker, which lets you choose a specific gradient. We’re going to choose from a different gradient group, so click the small double arrows to the top right of that window and choose the Noise Samples preset from the list. Then click on the Transparent Pixels gradient (the last one in the Noise gradients list); we’ll use that gradient for our project.

**STEP THREE:** The five icons to the right of the Gradient Picker are the types of gradients you can apply (see Page 8 in the last issue for more on the Gradient options). Choose the Angle Gradient (the middle icon) here. Move your cursor to the middle of the image and click-and-drag toward the bottom right corner to create the gradient. You don’t have to be exact, but get as close to the center as you can. You’ll have an odd-looking image, but don’t worry.
STEP FOUR: The gradient is fairly uneven for what we’ll need to do later, so we’ll drag a gradient three more times: once from the center to the bottom-left corner; then from the center to the top-left; and finally, from the center toward the top-right corner. That will even out the effect and make it look more realistic when we add it to our photo.

STEP FIVE: We don’t want to have any color in this gradient, so go to the Enhance menu and choose Adjust Color>Remove Color. Next, let’s add a little more punch. Choose Enhance>Adjust Lighting>Levels to open the Levels dialog. Slide the black slider over toward the left edge of the histogram and the white slider toward the right edge of the histogram. Then click OK.

STEP SIX: Now we’re ready to apply this to a photo. Choose Select>All to select the entire canvas. Then copy your selection using Edit>Copy. Open the image you want to apply it to and paste (Edit>Paste) the gradient into it.

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Follow along by downloading Matt’s sunset photo from the Subscriber Extras area at www.photoshopelementsuser.com.
**STEP SEVEN:** We’re just about done. Obviously, the gradient looks quite funky the way it’s laid on top of the image. Changing the layer’s blend mode from Normal to **Overlay** will help out a lot, making it look like some really intense sunbeams. Then use the **Move tool** (V) to move the center of the gradient over the sun.

**STEP EIGHT:** Finally, select the **Eraser tool** (E) from the toolbox. Click on the Brush presets in the Options Bar at the top left of the screen and choose a brush. For this example, I chose the 300-pixel soft-edged brush. Then click and drag to erase around the edges of the sunbeams so the rays just affect the immediate area around the sun.

As you can see in the before (far left) and after (near left) versions of the photo, this is a subtle effect, but it can really be quite effective in adding a little bit of energy to an already good photo.

**NOTE:** If you don’t want to recreate this effect all over again the next time you want to use it, save the gradient document after Step Five. That way, you can just open it again and reuse it without going through all the steps of creating it again.


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**EXTRAS: ONLINE VIDEO**

Check out the Subscriber Extras area on www.photoshopelementsuser.com for a video from Matt that details an alternative method to make this effect reusable.
I don't know who coined the term “word art,” but the first time I saw it was in the menu of a popular word processor. Digital scrapbookers have made it their own, using it to mean just exactly what it says—an artistic way of using words in images. But you needn’t be a scrapper to use word art; I use it on my photo greeting cards, bookmarks, photo magnets, and other projects. Utilizing text and text effects is an excellent way to get your point across in any type of image, and this tutorial will guide you through some steps to begin making your own word art.

STEP ONE: Do you have a favorite quote?
If so, why not start with that? If you’re in need of some quotable inspiration, there are innumerable references on the Web; start by searching for “quotations and sayings” on Google.

There are so many clever sayings, I had trouble picking one for this tutorial, but I finally settled on “Bring me sunshine, bring me laughter, bring me love!” It’s a bit boring in this plain old font, but we’ll soon be changing that.

Once you have chosen your quote, create a new document (File> New> Blank File), starting out with a large canvas (you can always crop it down later). I started by making my canvas 8 inches by 8 inches with a resolution of 300 pixels/inch, with a white background. Type each word or phrase of your quote on a separate layer, so each can be altered individually.

STEP TWO: To dress up your word art, consider extracting part of a photo and using it as an embellishment. Or use a ready-made embellishment or stamp a design with the Brush tool. I love sunflowers—they are so cheerful, which fits in well with my saying—so I’ll use one of my sunflower photos. Using the Crop tool (C), crop closely around the area to use for the embellishment.

Next, we must convert the background layer of the cropped photo to a regular layer so that when we remove the background around the subject, we retain the...
transparency. Press and hold Alt (Mac: Option), then double-click the background layer to convert it.

Finally, select the Eraser tool (E) and, using a hard-edged brush selected from the Options Bar, carefully erase away the background from around your embellishment. It will be much easier to erase with precision if you zoom way in on the image with the Zoom tool (Z) and adjust your brush size as needed.

**Tip:** Any of the selection tools may be used to extract the subject for your embellishment, such as the Lasso tool (L), Selection Brush tool (A), or the Magic Wand (W), which works best if the background is a solid color.

**STEP THREE:** Once you get the embellishment prepared with the background erased, move it to your word art project file. To bring both of your images into the workspace, from the Window menu, select Images>Tile. Use the Move tool (V) to drag the embellishment to your word art file, adjust its size by dragging in or out on its bounding box corners, then click the green arrow to commit. Don’t worry about its placement right now, just move it somewhere away from the words (we’ll arrange everything later).

You can now close the extracted embellishment file. If you should decide to save it for use in other projects, save it in PNG format to preserve the transparency, using the instructions in Step Eight.

**Tip:** An alternate method to add the embellishment to your word art file is Cut and Paste. With the embellishment file active in the workspace, from the menu, click Select>All, or Ctrl-A (Mac: Command-A). Next, copy the file by selecting Edit>Copy from the menu, or Ctrl-C (Mac: Command-C). Finally, make the word art project file active and click Paste from the Edit menu, or Ctrl-V (Mac: Command-V).
STEP FOUR: We will now concentrate on the text. Choose a few key words or a phrase to be the focus of the word art, then alter these words to differentiate them from the rest of the text to grab the reader’s attention. The text can be altered by changing the font, case, color, size, orientation, opacity, and/or by using layer styles. Whatever change you make to a word or phrase should be dramatic compared to the remaining words, which should be quite plain. For my word art project, I will emphasize “Sunshine,” “Laughter,” and “Love.”

The fun part is choosing the fonts to use for the words and phrases. Don’t use too many different fonts or the quotation will look too disconnected. Think about the mood you wish to portray and try out different fonts to see what works.

To change the font for a particular word or phrase, go to the Layers palette and double-click the “T” thumbnail for the Type layer you wish to change. This will select the text on that layer. In the Options Bar, select the new font for your text from the font drop-down list, and then adjust the font size.

**TIP:** To view how your word will appear in different fonts, it’s easiest to scroll through the font list on the Type tool’s Options Bar. Just double-click the thumbnail for the type layer you wish to change, and click once in the font drop-down list in the Options Bar. You can then scroll through the fonts with the Down or Up arrow key to get a preview.

After trying out several fonts, I settled on **Space Toaster** (a commercial face from Chank Fonts at www.chank.com) for “Sunshine,” **Baby Kruffy** (free at www.1001fonts.com) for “Laughter,” and **Beyond Wonderland** (also free at www.1001fonts.com) for “Love.” For the remaining words, “Bring me,” I decided to use **CAC Champagne** (free from www.fontcubes.com).
STEP FIVE: Time to assemble the word art. Use the Move tool (M) and click on the appropriate layer; then position the words and any embellishments in an artistic arrangement. This is fun—like playing with those poetry refrigerator magnets.

You can adjust the size of the text with the Move tool by dragging in or out on the text block’s corners (make sure “Show Bounding Box” is checked in the Options Bar). If you need to overlay part of a word or embellishment on top of another, drag one or more layers up or down in the layers stack to place them in a different order. I moved my sunflower beneath the “Sunshine” text layer to slip the edge of the flower under the text.

STEP SIX: In order to bring more attention to the three key words in my word art, I decided to add some color. Rather than use a solid color, I often like to use gradients for a softer look.

To fill text with a gradient, create a blank layer above the text layer by clicking the New Layer icon in the Layers palette. Ctrl-click (Mac: Command-click) on the text layer to get a selection in the shape of the text. Select the Gradient tool (G) and from the Options Bar, choose a gradient from the Gradient Picker and a type of gradient. I used the “Orange, Yellow, Orange” gradient preset with the Linear gradient and dragged horizontally across the word “Sunshine” on the blank layer.

When I fill text with a gradient, I usually add a narrow stroke border. While the selection is still active, from the Edit menu, choose Stroke (Outline) Selection. I used black, a width of 2 pixels, and an Inside location. As a finishing touch, I added a soft drop shadow on the three key words using a Layer Style from the Effects Palette. (Double-click on the ‘fx’ icon in the layer if you want to adjust the “heaviness” of the drop shadow.)
STEP SEVEN: To prepare the word art for later use, we need to crop, flatten and save it. Select the Crop tool (C) and drag out a selection that includes all the words and the embellishment, leaving a little space around the whole quotation. Click the green arrow to commit the crop.

Next, delete the bottom white layer so that the background is transparent. Either click on the layer in the Layers palette and drag it to the trash can icon in the upper right corner of the palette, or select the layer and choose Layer>Delete Layer.

STEP EIGHT: Save the file in PNG format to preserve its transparency. Click File>Save As and in the dialog window, navigate to the location where you keep your word art files, enter a filename for your creation, select PNG from the Format menu and click the Save button. A small PNG Options dialog pops up—accept the default by clicking OK.

STEP NINE: Once you've completed your design, it's easy to use your word art in a project. The easiest method is to open your photo or collage and add your word art file by selecting File>Place.

Diana Day, retired H.R. Manager and self-taught Elements user, hosts a Photoshop Elements Users Group where she teaches Elements to members of her community. Diana also puts her skills with Elements to practical use administering her church's web page and public relations.
round up those pixels
with the lasso tools

Before you make adjustments to specific areas of an image, you want to make sure you’ve corralled the right pixels. And, while there are many ways to select pixels, let’s start with the original selection tool: the Lasso. The three versions of this tool offer plenty of options for getting your selections just right: the basic Lasso lets you throw a freehand selection around anything; the Polygonal Lasso handles straight edges and sharp angles; and the Magnetic Lasso gets in tight to select objects with a minimum of fuss. Press the L key to switch between the three Lasso tools, or right-click (Mac: Ctrl-click) the Lasso tool in the toolbox and choose the one you want from the pop-up menu that appears.

To quickly throw a rope around a passel of pixels, select the Lasso tool and click and drag to create a selection area, then release the mouse button. If you don’t end at the point where you started, Elements completes the loop with a straight shot to the starting point. Don’t worry about trying to be precise as you draw around the subject in your image, because you can refine the edges of the selection easily (see “Further Edge Refinements,” Page 15).

Each Lasso tool includes two settings on the Options Bar that affect the final selection. **Feather** controls the softness of the edge, while **Anti-alias**, when enabled, smoothes the selection slightly to avoid jaggy edges. These settings must be made before you begin the selection. (Later, we’ll see how to alter the selection after it’s been made.)
Polygonal Lasso Tool

When selecting objects with straight lines and angles, use the Polygonal Lasso tool. Click to establish a start point, release the mouse button, and then click again where you want the next corner point to appear.

**TIP:** If you’re drawing a selection using the Lasso tool, press Alt (Mac: Option) to switch to the Polygonal Lasso tool. Keep the key held down while you set corner points to keep the Polygonal Lasso tool active; if you release the key, Elements completes the selection. To switch back to the Lasso tool, press and hold the mouse button and then release the Alt key.

Magnetic Lasso tool

It’s possible you may rarely reach for the Lasso or Polygonal Lasso tools, because the Magnetic Lasso tool does a lot of the work for you. Select the tool and click to set the starting point of your selection; like the Polygonal Lasso tool, you don’t need to keep the mouse button held down as you move around your object. As you move the mouse pointer, Elements draws a temporary path where it detects contrast, applying these reference points automatically. If the line isn’t appearing where you’d like, click to set a reference point (this technique is particularly helpful when specifying sharp angles).

Did a reference point appear where you don’t want it? Notice that the last-created point is solid; press the **Delete** key to remove it without disrupting the path. When you come back around to the starting point, click on it to complete the selection.

The reference points the tool creates are only guidelines for specifying the selection; you can’t go back and edit them later as you would paths in a drawing application. But the Add/Subtract/Intersect modes (see “Editing the Selection”) are also available for the Magnetic Lasso tool to help you fine-tune the selection.

**TIP:** Double-click the mouse to complete the selection at any point.
Magnetic Lasso Selection Options

Using controls on the Options Bar, you can control the strength of the magnet’s pull and how many points appear when drawing:

- **Width**: This value (between 1 and 256 pixels) is the distance between an edge and the mouse pointer that will be considered for a path. A larger value can often accurately grab edges without requiring a lot of precision mousing on your part; a smaller value is better for close-in selections.

- **Edge Contrast**: This percentage helps Elements define what an “edge” is. A higher percentage looks only for high-contrast areas, while a low value can pull an edge out of fuzzy areas.

- **Frequency**: A higher Frequency value prompts Elements to create more reference points on a path, increasing the accuracy of the selection (but also potentially creating a more jaggy area, depending on the image).

- **Tablet pressure**: This control is represented by the small pen icon to the right of the Frequency setting. When enabled, this will use the pressure-sensitivity setting of a drawing tablet to affect the Width value.

Editing the Selection

You could try to draw a selection perfectly the first time, but that trail leads only to frustration. Instead, treat a lassoed selection as sculpture: start rough and refine as you go.

With a broad selection made and the Lasso tool selected, click one of the selection modes in the Options Bar. **Add to Selection** lets you grab areas you may have missed initially or create non-contiguous selections. Use **Subtract from Selection** to pare away areas and get closer to your subject. Or, draw within your selection using the **Intersect with Selection** mode to keep just that area.

Better yet, ignore the Options Bar altogether and switch modes using modifier keys. With any of the Lasso tools active, hold the Shift key to Add to Selection; hold Alt (Mac: Option) to Subtract from Selection; or hold both Alt and Shift (Mac: Option-Shift) to Intersect with Selection. The tool’s icon changes to reflect the mode as you’re working.
Further Edge Refinements

The controls in the Options Bar, such as Feather, apply only if you set them before creating a selection. What if you decide you want a feathered edge after it’s drawn? Click the Refine Edge button to bring up a dialog that can alter an existing selection. (The Refine Edge button doesn’t appear when the Magnetic Lasso tool is selected. Simply switch to the Lasso tool after you’ve made a magnetic selection to make it appear.)

The Smooth slider removes jagged edges and rounds out the selection. Feather applies a soft edge. And the Contract/Expand slider reduces or enlarges the selection in percentage increments. With the Preview button enabled, use the sliders to adjust the selection. You can press F or click the red Custom Overlay Color mode button at the bottom-left of the dialog to see a mask overlay that helps preview the selection; you can also press X to temporarily remove the ‘marching-ants’ border around the selection. Feel free to move the image using the Hand tool or change the zoom level using the Zoom tool while the dialog is still open.

Jeff Carlson is the author of Photoshop Elements 7 for Windows: Visual Quickstart Guide (Peachpit Press). He’s also managing editor of the Macintosh newsletter TidBITS (www.tidbits.com), a columnist for the Seattle Times, and believes there’s never enough coffee.

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Save 35% off the list price of Jeff’s Visual Quickstart Guide for Elements 7! Go to www.peachpit.com and enter coupon code “PSEVQS” when you reach the checkout page.
making a special holiday card

Something our family enjoys every December is the cards and letters from friends and loved ones. Of course, we send out our yearly offering as well—hopefully, it’s well-received, too! If you usually rely on one of the templates available at your friendly superstore or photo lab, how about trying your hand at designing your own this year? It’s fun and rewarding, and it’s easy to make a special, one-of-a-kind creation that your friends and family will love.

**STEP ONE:** First, let’s make the paper.

Go to File>New>Blank File and make a new file that’s 8 inches by 4 inches, with a resolution of 240 pixels/inch, which is a good resolution for printing on many inkjet printers. If you want a vertically oriented card, simply reverse these dimensions.

**STEP TWO:** Choose File>Place and locate the image you wish to use as the background for your card. (We chose a nice pattern of some ice crystals on a window.)

The Place command brings your image in as something called a Smart Object. Smart Objects can be scaled up or down, rotated, or otherwise transformed without (generally) sacrificing quality. If you do need to scale your background image, and want to do it proportionally, make sure the Constrain Proportions box in the Options Bar is checked.
STEP THREE: Press Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J) to duplicate the image layer. Change the blend mode of the copied layer to Multiply, which will darken the image. Make sure your foreground and background colors are set to their default colors of black and white by pressing D on your keyboard (if white is the current foreground color and black as the background, simply press X to switch them). On the Layers palette click the Create Adjustment Layer icon and choose Gradient. From the Gradient picker in the Options Bar, choose the second gradient from the left in the top row, Foreground to Transparent. Click the Reverse check box, and click OK.

STEP FOUR: Select the Rectangle Shape tool. (You can press the U key until the Rectangle comes up, or you can right-click the Shape tool to choose the rectangle). On your page, draw a rectangle approximately where you would like your family picture to appear.

STEP FIVE: Duplicate this shape layer by pressing Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J). Rename the copied layer Black Rectangle and rename the original shape layer White Rectangle (double-click on the layer's name to rename it). Hide the Black Rectangle layer by clicking the Layer visibility icon (the eyeball next to the layer thumbnail). Click on the White Rectangle layer and, making sure white is still your background color, press Ctrl-Backspace (Mac: Command-Delete). This should fill the shape with white.
**STEP SIX:** This bottom shape will serve as the frame for the picture, so it needs to be a little bigger than the black shape on top. Press **Ctrl-T** (Mac: Command-T) to bring up Free Transform. Position your mouse on one of the side borders, hold down **Alt** (Mac: Option) and enlarge the rectangle’s width slightly (we made ours approximately \( \frac{1}{16} \) of an inch larger). By holding down Alt/Option, both sides will resize equally. Repeat this technique for the rectangle’s height. Press **Enter** (Mac: Return) to accept the transformation, and make the black rectangle visible once again by clicking on the layer’s visibility eye.

**STEP SEVEN:** Your white rectangle layer should still be targeted. Hold down **Shift** on your keyboard and click the black rectangle layer. With both rectangle layers selected, click the **Link Layers** icon at the top of the Layers palette. Press **Ctrl-T** to bring up Free Transform. Because both rectangle layers are linked together, they will transform at the same time. Position your cursor outside one of the corners, until it looks like a curve with double arrows. Rotate the rectangles at a slight angle, and reposition on your paper if necessary. Press **Enter**, then click the Link Layers icon again to unlink the two layers.

**STEP EIGHT:** It’s time to add our family photo. Go to **File > Place** and navigate to the photo you plan to use. Because it is a Smart Object (until you press Enter or Return), it can be scaled without affecting the quality. Check the Constrain Proportions box in the Option Bar to scale the image proportionally, and don’t forget to rotate it to fit the angle of the rectangles you just created. Your image should be a little larger than the black rectangle. Press **Enter** to accept any transformation you made.

**NOTE:** The X through the photo indicates it is a Smart Object. It will remain a Smart Object until Enter/Return is pressed.
STEP NINE: In the Layers palette, position the photo layer directly above the black rectangle layer— if it’s not there already— by clicking on the layer and dragging it up. To have the image appear only in the area of the black rectangle, press Ctrl-G (Mac: Command-G), which creates a Clipping Group. You can use the Move tool (V) to reposition the image inside the rectangle. Using a clipping group allows you to use other photos in your template if you wish. All you need to do is place another photo directly above the black rectangle and press Ctrl-G to clip it to the rectangle layer.

Where can I find my own cool backgrounds?

There are plenty of places on the Web where you can download free or inexpensive images that you can use for backgrounds. iStockphoto (www.istockphoto.com) —which provides Photoshop Elements Techniques with many of the sample images used in our tutorials—has thousands of images and illustrations you can buy at reasonable rates. The minimum purchase amount for iStockphoto is $14 (10 credits) which will generally get you two medium-sized downloads. It doesn’t cost anything to search for images at iStockphoto, and definitely check out the Dollar Bin, which features thousands of images “on sale” for a single credit.

If even $14 is too rich, there are lots of other sites where you can find free photos to use in your personal projects. On the right are five of our favorites, although this is no means an exhaustive list.

When downloading an image from any Web site, make sure that you understand—and comply with—the rights usage policy for that image. The owner of any copyrighted image can set the conditions by which it can be used, and it’s important for us all to respect that. – Rick LePage

**MorgueFile** (www.morguefile.com) is a great site with loads of images for all occasions, with sophisticated features like a personalized lightbox, for keeping track of images you like.

**BigFoto** (www.bigfoto.com) has a nice collection of photos from all over the world. While their holiday collection isn’t very deep, if you’re looking for local color, they’re a good place to go.

**StockVault** (www.stockvault.net) is similar in style and features to MorgueFile, and has more than 11,000 free images available.

**Flickr** (www.flickr.com) is known primarily a photo-sharing site, but many members make their photos available for personal use under Creative Commons licenses (see www.creativecommons.org for more about this type of licensing).

**The Open Photo Project** (www.openphoto.net) isn’t as slick as some of the other sites mentioned here, but they have a strong collection of free photos in a variety of styles.
STEP TEN: Let’s add a stroke around the photo to finish it off. Because of the clipping group, however, we need to put the stroke on its own layer. Target the photo layer and click the New Layer icon to create a new layer. Ctrl-Click (Mac: Command-Click) the black rectangle layer to create a selection in the shape of the rotated rectangle. Making sure you have the new, blank layer you just created targeted, go to Edit>Stroke (Outline) Selection and choose your desired settings (we used a 4-pixel, Black, Inside stroke).

STEP ELEVEN: All the heavy lifting has been completed; just add some text to finish up and you’re done! You’ve created a custom card of your own design that’s also versatile, editable, and completely reusable!

Here are some final thoughts for you to consider when working on your own holiday cards:

Nothing says you have to use rectangles! Try different shapes, such as stars, hearts, ovals, or diamonds. Find these and more in the Custom Shapes tool, which nested in the same tool as the Rectangle tool.

Want to spice up the card with some color? By all means, go for it! Just fill that back shape serving as the frame with a color other than white.

All the best to you and yours this season.

Mike Rodriguez is an Adobe Certified Expert in Photoshop CS3, holds a Master’s degree in Educational Technology, and has over 16 years of teaching experience. His current teaching assignments include various technology courses as well as a beginning digital photography course. He contributes video tutorials to www.photoshopelementsuser.com and www.layersmagazine.com, and his stock photography is sold through www.istockphoto.com. According to his kids, he also makes “really good smoothies.”
liberate your photography by changing your **point of view**

Everything we do as photographers impacts our point of view, and our final image is the result of that point of view. Not only do the camera, lens, accessories, settings, and our surroundings have an effect on our photos, so too, does our angle of view. I'm not talking about how wide or long our lens is but, instead, the angle from which we compose our image.

We want our photos to have impact and excitement, but so many of us tend to shoot from a point of view that is determined by our height or the height of our tripod. And, while photos taken from eye level in a standing position can be good, you'll find that shaking things up—changing our point of view before we snap the shutter—can literally change your images in exciting and liberating ways.
As I noted, eye-level photography is the most common angle of view used by photographers. This approach, for the most part, renders rather normal photos and requires additional compositional considerations if you want to make your images more interesting. When shooting this way, look for strong leading lines and definitive foreground, middle ground and background elements, like the image on the right. And remember that contrast, shadows and light all play an important role in taking a normal composition into the realm of something special.

While there is nothing wrong with eye-level photography, more dramatic compositions can be made by simply changing your camera’s angle of view. This simple change will directly determine how our subject is interpreted by our viewers. Think about shooting at your subject’s eye level, instead of yours. This may mean getting right down on the ground to look your subject in the eye, but it is a strong compositional angle of view to photograph from. Render your foreground and background as a soft blur, which will help make your subject pop. Here, we have a sense of seeing the world from our subject’s perspective.
A low angle of view, one that is shot from below your subject, will make it appear bigger and more powerful. Large mammals especially photograph well from a lower angle of view. You will have more control over your background when photographing from a low angle of view, which will help make your subject stand out in sharp relief, such as the bighorn sheep shown above, set against a blue sky.

Turning your attention downward from a high perch can be equally effective, giving your photo an appearance more like that of an aerial perspective. For example, standing on a bridge, aiming your camera down at the fall colors that meander alongside a river, will capture a completely different feel than if you shot from the river’s bank.

Another approach to a low angle of view is achieved by simply aiming your camera up. Interesting compositions can be made when photographing straight up into a canopy of trees. This approach, when used with a wide-angle lens, generates a vanishing point effect, adding a sense of height and grandeur to an already majestic subject.
Flying several thousand feet above the landscape turns the three-dimensional terrain into one dimension, where familiar landmarks are radically altered. Normal compositions are no longer possible from an aerial point of view. A barren, volcanic-ash-covered landscape takes on a spacial perspective when viewed from above. When shooting from this angle, you are now faced with using graphic elements to make up your composition rather than the known compositions of the earthbound.

Photographing from thousands of feet in the air can be an exciting experience, but there are equally interesting subjects right at your feet. Leaves, patterns on the street and other designs can create interesting photos. Take the image on the left, where I was standing on a frozen lake. Looking down, with the bubbles trapped within the layers of ice, I found wonderful patterns to work with.

Moving your camera low and in close to your subject with an extreme wide-angle lens can radically alter your perception of size and dimension. Suddenly a bouquet of flowers becomes larger than life with the rest of the world in miniature.

No matter what your subject may be, it can be made even more interesting by finding the perspective that best captures the essence of what you are trying to communicate. Set your tripod aside for one day, take your camera in hand and explore your environment from various angles of view. Get low to photograph your children or pets from their height, then stand up and photograph them from a higher angle. Try shooting upwards at your subject and observe the radical change in how it appears in the finished photo. Look up, look down, look all around you and you will find that your images begin to speak to you in ways that you had not imagined before. Shoot high, shoot low, climb a ladder, stand on a bridge, and shoot from an airplane. Drop to your belly or to your knees, but whatever you do, change your angle of view. By simply changing your point of view, the ordinary becomes extraordinary.

Laurie leads wildlife photography safaris in North America and is an instructor with the Digital Landscape Workshop Series, Photoshop World, and Cruising Through Life training extravaganzas. She is also the Photo Equipment Advice Desk Guru for NAPP. Check out her Web site, www.lauriexcell.com.
The layer is one of Elements’ most important features, and mastering their many options can really open up the program for you. Here are some of my favorite layer tips.

**Create a new layer without seeing the New Layer dialog**
Pressing Ctrl-Shift-N (Mac: Command-Shift-N) creates a new layer, but it brings up the New Layer dialog box so you can name the layer. Personally, I find this annoying (and it’s not a lot faster for me then just clicking the New Layer icon). However, if you add the Alt (Mac: Option) key, then it will bypass the dialog, automatically creating a new blank layer in the Layers palette.

**Convert a Background layer to a regular layer**
Because it’s locked by default, working on the Background layer can sometimes be a pain. Many of you know you can make it a regular layer by double-clicking on the layer’s name in the Layers palette. Then you just press OK (or hit Enter/Return) in the New Layer dialog to accept the new name. Even better, you can hold down the Alt (Mac: Option) key and double-click on the layer name in the Layers palette. This bypasses the dialog, renaming the Background layer automatically.

**Making font size larger or smaller without going to the size setting in the Options Bar**
If you're working with a type layer and you want to change the font size without having to select from the pop-up menu on the Options Bar, then try this: Select your type by pressing Ctrl-A (Mac: Command-A). Then press Ctrl-Shift-> (Mac: Command-Shift->) to make your font larger or Ctrl-Shift<- (Mac: Command-Shift<-) to make it smaller.

**Retouching on a blank layer**
If you’re using the Clone Stamp or the healing tools for retouching, you can do the work on a separate blank layer to help protect your original image. First, select the tool. Then check the All Layers option in the Options Bar for the tool you’re using (this works for the Spot Healing Brush, the Healing Brush, and the Clone Stamp tool). Create a blank layer and make sure it’s targeted when you’re retouching. Then use the tool as you normally would, holding the Alt (Mac: Option) key to sample a point. Elements will sample whatever is under the cursor (regardless of the layer) and let you retouch on that blank layer so you can turn it on or off or reduce its opacity to help the retouching blend in better. (My “Cloning 101” video in the Subscriber area online shows this tip in action.)
Get rid of that outline around a shape layer

If you have worked with shape layers, you’ve probably noticed the appearance of a thin outline around the shape. The outline you see around a shape layer really doesn’t mean anything. It won’t print or be saved when you export a Web image. However, it can be distracting when you’re working with your images. Just click on a different layer and it will disappear. If you ever need to work directly on the shape layer itself, click on it again to change it (which will turn the outline back on).

Turn off or disable a layer mask

You can Shift-click on the layer mask thumbnail in the layers palette to turn off or disable the mask. You’ll see red ‘X’ appear over the mask icon in the Layers palette. The mask is still there, however; Shift-click on it again to enable it.

Blend Mode Keyboard Shortcuts

I used to never use keyboard shortcuts for blend modes. Then about a year or so ago, I realized that the keyboard shortcuts for blend modes are generally pretty easy. It always involves the Alt-Shift (Mac: Option-Shift) keys and then one letter that is usually the first letter of the blend mode. For example, Alt-Shift-M (Mac: Option-Shift-M) is Multiply. The Alt-Shift-O is Overlay, Alt-Shift-S gets you Screen and so on. It doesn’t work for all of them (Soft Light uses F, for example) but they’re pretty darn close, and since I’ve started using them I find I work a lot faster, especially since you’re really only going to use a few of them regularly.

The list shown on the right lists all the shortcuts for the blend modes. (The Lighter and Darker Color modes don’t have shortcuts associated with them, but I can’t say I know anyone who has ever used them.)

Cycling through layer blend modes (Part One)

Sometimes it’s useful to quickly cycle through the blend modes to see which one works best. Manually clicking on each one just isn’t quick, so try this. Click on the Blend Mode list in the top left of the Layers palette to select a blend mode. Then press Shift + to cycle down the list and Shift – to go back up.

Cycling through layer blend modes (Part Two)

If you try the previous tip, but have a tool selected that also has blend modes associated with it (like any of the brush tools), then you’ll find that the Shift + and Shift - keyboard shortcuts cycle through the blend modes for the tool and not the layer. To work around this, first select a tool that doesn’t have blend modes (like the Move tool). Then use the Shift shortcut and it will work just fine.
wrap up a sweet surprise

Scrapbook papers and elements don’t have to be limited to layouts of your photos. More and more people are finding creative ways to expand the digital scrapping art to create “hybrid” products that are useful in everyday life. One of my favorites is to create custom wrappers for candy bars. They can be used for holidays, birthday parties, showers and weddings. They are always a huge hit and people really appreciate the personal touch.

For this tutorial, I have three different types of wrappers that you can create: for half-pound, regular-size, and miniature candy bars. To get started, download the custom templates for each type from the Subscriber Extras section at www.photoshopelementsuser.com: Half_Pound-Candy-Bar-Template.psd, Regular-Candy-Bar-Wrapper.psd, Mini-Template1.psd, and Mini-Template2.psd. From your own collection, choose the paper type and elements you want to use for your custom wrappers. For the steps here, we’ll use the Half-Pound Candy Bar template; notes about using the other templates can be found at the end of the article.

STEP ONE: Open the paper that you would like to use as your background and resize it—Image>Resize>Image Size, or Alt-Ctrl-I (Mac: Option-Command-I)—to fit the template size, which is 2221 pixels by 2980 pixels at 300 pixels/inch. This is to ensure that your paper fits your wrapper.

(When choosing a background paper, I find that papers with smaller prints are best.)
STEP TWO: Drag the paper onto the layered template. Position it between the two layers so the guides show above the paper. This will help in the placement of your photo and text elements.

Make the paper layer active, Control-click (Mac: Command-click) the background layer to make a selection. Choose Select→Inverse, Delete, then Ctrl-D (Mac: Command-D) to deselect.

This quick set of commands will remove the excess paper from the area around the template. You will now have three layers.

STEP THREE: Choose and place the elements you want to use in designing the top of the candy bar wrapper (labelled “Front of Candy Bar” on the template). Be sure to keep elements between the dotted lines in order for them to appear correctly on the finished wrapper.

What you choose is entirely up to you: incorporate photos, clip art, text and any combination of the above, based on the occasion or recipient.

STEP FOUR: Choose the element for the sides of the candy bar. This is a purely personal choice and can be skipped if you simply want your main background to wrap around the bar.

If you place a ribbon or text on the side design, be sure to rotate the top “side” 180° (select the layer in the Layers palette and choose Image→Rotate→Layer 180°) so it shows properly once the wrapper is in place. If you don’t do this the text will be upside down when the bar is lying on the table.
STEP FIVE: Next, design the back of the bar. The back of the wrapper will overlap the top tab, so you don’t need to design that tab, but extending your background paper into that area is a nice professional touch. Delete the template guide layer.

STEP SIX: Print the wrapper on standard letter-size paper. A good-quality inkjet paper is best for printing the wrappers: photo paper doesn’t work well, since it’s difficult to wrap around the candy bar. Trim the wrapper around the printed edges. Place the top on the candy bar and wrap, tape and enjoy!

FOR REGULAR-SIZE CANDY BARS: These are done using the same process as the half-pound bars, only the scale of everything is smaller. The image dimensions for the Regular-Candy-Bar-Wrapper template are 1800 by 1800 pixels, so be sure to keep that in mind when resizing your paper and choosing the right design elements and photos.

FOR MINI CANDY BARS: These are quite popular as favors at weddings and showers. Due to the small size of these wrappers, it is best to keep it simple. Design your wrapper based on Mini-Template1. A small element and some text are usually all that is needed. Once you’ve created your wrapper, flatten the layers and drag them onto Mini-Template2, which is the printing template. The great thing about the miniatures is that you can design multiple wrappers to print at once and alternate them, to make cutting lines easier to follow. The template lets you use common line cuts, so you have fewer cuts to make when printing large quantities of these wrappers.

Nancy Marti is a designer at www.digitaldesignden.com. She is a member of NAPP and serves as a forum moderator at www.ElementsVillage.com as well as working full-time for a legal consulting firm.

Credits
- Papers, elements and templates for mini bars by Nancy Marti.
- Template for half pound and regular bars by Sandy Collins, Digital Design Den (www.digitaldesignden.com).
- Santa hat by Wendy Williams.
We have covered the hows, the whys, and the specifics of shooting photos in RAW mode, but many of the questions we get about Adobe’s Camera RAW plug-in deal more with technical things like updates, where the plug-in goes, and more. Here, we clarify why it’s important to upgrade to the latest version, which versions of Camera RAW work with which versions of Elements, and exactly what you need to do to get the plug-in running properly.

Why should I update the Camera RAW plug-in? Mine works just fine.

Adobe Camera RAW (ACR) is updated frequently. Why are so many updates necessary? In addition to fixing flaws and bugs and adding new features, tools, and functionality, the primary reason is that support for new camera models is added with each upgrade of ACR. This means that RAW photos taken with the newer camera models are able to be recognized, opened, and processed in the latest version of ACR. For example, the last two releases, 4.6 and the current 5.1, include support for the relatively new Canon 50D and Nikon D90 cameras, among others.

I'm running Photoshop Elements 4, and I just bought a new digital SLR. Does this mean that I won’t be able to use my camera’s RAW capabilities?

Yes, if you want to use ACR to process the camera’s RAW files. However, most camera manufacturers have a utility that comes with their camera that lets you open your camera’s RAW files and convert them to JPEG or TIF formats, so you’re not completely out of luck. The down side is that they aren’t as full-featured as Adobe’s plug-in, and they aren’t integrated into Elements the way ACR is. There is one exception: Nikon has its own RAW program, Capture NX, which is a very good RAW converter. A demo version comes with most of their D-SLRs, although the full version—which ships only with Nikon’s high-end cameras—lists for $180, nearly twice the cost of Photoshop Elements itself.

What ACR versions work with which Elements versions?

If you’re using Elements 3, the latest version for you is ACR 3.6. For Elements 4 (Windows) it’s version 3.7. For Elements 5 (and Mac Elements 4) it’s version 4.6, and for Elements 6 and 7, it’s version 5.1. The complete URLs for all Camera Raw versions are:

**WINDOwS**

**MAC**
I've downloaded and unzipped the latest version from Adobe's Web site. Now what do I do with it?

We’re not quite sure why Adobe doesn’t supply an automatic installer for ACR; it certainly would make things easier. Luckily, it’s not hard to find the right place to put the plug-in. Look below for instructions for both Mac and Windows users.

Installation for Windows users:

The installation process for Windows is basically the same for XP and Vista. Here’s what to do:

1: If Elements is running, close it.
2: Open My Computer (XP) or Computer (Vista); then open the C:Drive.
3: Navigate to the following location: Program Files\Adobe\Photoshop Elements X.0\Plug-Ins\File Formats.
   (Substitute your version of Elements for the X.0, e.g. Program Files\Adobe\Photoshop Elements 6.0\Plug-Ins\File Formats for Version 6).
4: In the File Formats folder, find the file called Camera Raw.8bi and move it to a folder on your desktop (or a different location you will be able to find easily). This will serve as a backup in case there’s a problem with the installation. I usually make a folder on my desktop and name it Old ACR.
5: Open the unzipped folder you downloaded and copy the new Camera Raw.8bi file into the File Formats folder that contained the old version (Program Files\Adobe\Photoshop Elements X.0\Plug-Ins\File Formats). After it is copied, you can close that folder.
6: Launch Photoshop Elements again, and you should be ready to go.

Installation for Mac users:

1: If Elements is running, close it.
2: Open your Mac’s hard drive by double-clicking on its icon.
3: If you are running Elements 6, open the folder Library/Application Support/Adobe/Plug-Ins/CS3/File Formats. If you are using Elements 4, open the folder Library/Application Support/Adobe/Plug-Ins/CS2/File Formats.
4: In the File Formats folder, find the file called Camera Raw.8bi and move it to a folder on your desktop (or another, different location you will be able to find easily). This will serve as a backup in case there’s a problem with the installation. I usually make a folder on my desktop and name it Old ACR.
5: Open the unzipped folder you downloaded and copy the new Camera Raw.8bi file into the File Formats folder that contained the old version (Library/Application Support/Adobe/Plug-Ins/CS3/File Formats). After it is copied, you can close that folder.
6: Launch Photoshop Elements again, and you should be ready to go.

For more information about working with Camera RAW, check out Ben Long’s “Why shoot RAW?” in Volume 5, Number 3 of Photoshop Elements Techniques and “Digging in with Camera RAW,” in Volume 5, Number 4.

If you have a Photoshop Elements question you would like to see answered, send it to q&a@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 us to publish.)
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