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bunch of tests on my group of lenses to figure out what lenses are the best to use when I have a choice of several, and I haven't analyze them yet, but I think the results may be counterintuitive.

I just about always use autofocus. This particular photograph was auto-focused.

I almost always sharpen a single step. I tried multi-step sharpening methods. Did not see any improvement with them, did see a lot more work.

I am sure this is all dependent on what lenses, cameras, and software one uses.

In the three steps of mine that you laid down, local contrast enhancement comes early in the process. Maybe not always before sharpening but definitely before noise reduction, because it frequently has a substantial effect on the noise.

pax \ Ctein
[Please excuse any word-salad. MacSpeech in training!]
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-- Ctein's Online Gallery http://ctein.com
-- Digital Restorations http://photo-repair.com
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Posted by: ctein | Saturday, 28 April 2012 at 05:42 PM

The obvious corollary to this exercise (in my opinion) is to see how good a print can be produced from today's technology and services without having to resort the sort of post processing indicated here. For example, 5 mins of general / local adjustment if necessary, then off to the online photo lab / printer of your choice.

Posted by: Peter Hunter | Sunday, 29 April 2012 at 02:01 AM

The multistep sharpenning is also using multiple algorithems:

1) In SilkyPics I use normal sharpenning (as the camera sort of demands it).

2) In RAWTherapee I use the RL sharpenning which does not create halos and can adress problems with DOF and to some extend motion blur as well (if you forgot to take the tripod with you).

3) In G'MIC a more the cool GIMP plugin which I regard as an essential Swiss Army knife to any photographer, I can also use Octave Sharpenning.....Octave sharpening is harsh if left to its own devices but can perform local magic by using diffent layers and different amounts of USM blur per layer. It can be used on the entire print, but its better not to do that.

4) G'MIC also contains a tool called "Hot Pixel Noise" to remove some arefacts that Octave sharpening can produce (all applied sparingly and masked (or on selections) pleas).

And 4) answers Ctein's question as well. If noise is a problem (which it rarely is since I'm a base ISO till I drop kinda guy) then noise cancellation enteres the arena, to me as a last step and only in those area's were I now need it. That is BTW the result of the threestep proces and the limitations of the software I'm using, since I have now way of directing noise reduction in either Silky or RAWTherapee..... If I'm not satisfied with the endresult because of noise in some region of the picture I denoise in Silky (soft algoritm meanig it won't deal with all the noise but leave image detail intact) and then in RAWTherapee....which has a slightly more agressive noise cancelation algorithm. Then I build a layercake with the original and the filtered image and use a mask to combine both in GIMP.

Now most these are adaptations of techniques described by Ctein in jis brilliant book about photorestotion (from start to finish) that any photographer should have lying und his or hers pillow if only for the brilliant use of maskiug techniques. The use of limited local contrast enhancement comes from the book on printing by Uwe Steinmuller (Fine Art Printing for Photographers) which should accompany it.

Of course since I use GNU software (out of principle) I had to adapt a lot, and the nice thing about adapting recepies is that you make them your own, because you have to study the why as well as the how.

And Ctein you can realy on your autofocus as much as you like (in non critical situations I do as well) but if I need selective focus I only trust my eye to see what I want to be in focus.

About the zooms, I know of one exception to the rule and that is my own old legendary Nikon 80-200 F4.5. That becomes a hard to handle but hard to beat 160-200 F4.5 on my Pana.....that is tack sharp. The old pana kittlens is also nice, the Oly 9-18 not so much, that lens needs some manual adjustments to shine (starting of with CA correction in SlikyPics).

Greetings (and thanx to Ctein for his nice words),

Ed

Posted by: Ed | Sunday, 29 April 2012 at 02:45 AM

Dear Peter,

Yup, worth people's while to try out the different non-custom printing services available to them.

There's a lot of difference in quality and you can't generalize across the stores in a chain, even. Depends a lot on whose running the shop. I hear great things about Costco printing in Minneapolis from several folks. They can sell a large print for only a bit more than it costs me to make. And it looks pretty good!

'Course, it doesn't come close to how well I can print, but it's not supposed to, not at an order-of-magnitude lower prices. But it's more than good enough to make most people very happy.

pax / Ctein

Posted by: ctein | Sunday, 29 April 2012 at 01:54 PM

Nice photo!

But Ctein (and Mike, too)--

Thanks a lot for reminding me that I needed to buy that Oly 45mm. Ponied up for it this weekend, and the lens is just great. Really hits a sweets spot in how it renders, especially for the price.

This blog did me right with the Panny 20 and now this Oly 45. Those and the E-P1 I've felt are like Goldilocks' "just right." But damn I just laid my anxious hands on the OM-D sample at the store when I bought the lens. The shutter delay (well, the lack thereof) and focus speed on the OM-D are really something.

As an amateur, I do not feel compromised at all by buying into u43rds. The systems are really delivering now. They are a delight to carry and use.

Thank you for spreading that word.

Posted by: xfmj | Monday, 30 April 2012 at 12:13 AM

Ctein - that wasn't really my point, but never mind

Posted by: Peter | Monday, 30 April 2012 at 12:18 AM

If it's an advertisement for large sensors, it's an advertisement for sensors larger than 35mm full-frame; I've had to do everything Ctein describes for various bits of pictures from my D700, including masking the sky to apply more aggressive noise-elimination there than elsewhere.

For this kind of photography, medium-format (or large) was the film answer; people doing this kind of big art in 35mm were rare, and pushing the limits of the technology (as Galen Rowell did; for good reasons involving weight he had to transport). Well, I'm sure (never having had the pleasure) that a Phase One back would make the post-processing for this sort of image a relative picnic; but it would make the transportation, setup, and tear-down a LOT more work.

Posted by: David Dyer-Bennet | Monday, 30 April 2012 at 02:13 PM

DDB - I sent you a couple of files for your opinion.

Posted by: Richard | Tuesday, 01 May 2012 at 11:05 AM

Dear DD-B,

Well, err, no, a Phase One back would not have made the printing of this particular photo a "relative picnic." I've used a Phase One back; I know what it can do and can't. It does not magically make perfect files, it merely makes better ones. And in this case it does not make ones that are so much better that this would have obviated my printing.

A Phase One back would have eliminated the upsampling in ACR. Some other steps in the workflow would have changed. It still would have been a several hour printing job, just a somewhat different one.

Bigger does not making printing easier.

As for whether bigger is better in general, that is so off the point of this exercise that it doesn't even bear debating. Again, to make the film analogy, if a pro is demonstrating to you how 35mm film is suitable for professional work, pointing out to them that 8x10 makes a better photograph does not begin to address what they're saying. It's not even on topic.

pax / Ctein

Posted by: ctein | Tuesday, 01 May 2012 at 01:17 PM

Okay, I'm wrong. I thought it would eliminate the need for noise reduction in the sky, and hence the need for the mask.

Posted by: David Dyer-Bennet | Wednesday, 02 May 2012 at 01:42 PM

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