

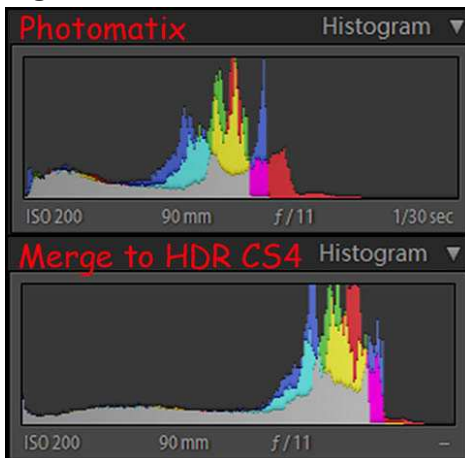
Full Range HDR Photoshop CS4 - Part II

The same CS4 image has reduced noise and little chromatic aberration. One problem down, one to go... But, it produces a washed out image as we see from the CS4 image.

16 bit FRHDR Histograms

When I judge histograms, differences stand out more strongly.

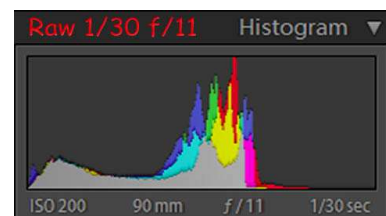
The Photomatix histogram (top) is mostly midtones and is slightly dark. CS4's histogram (bottom) is mostly lights and highlights and several EV lighter. Midtones and darks



are far less prominent.

The raw histogram (right - shot 4) is shown for comparison. It resembles the Photomatix hdr histogram.

Photomatix spreads red, magenta, and cyan portions in HDR processing a bit in making the 32 bit image.



Your HDR Weapon of Choice...

HDR tone mapping is not an exact science. For me, it's using the best tone mapping tools from several excellent pieces of software. I want to create a skillfully tone mapped piece of fine art. I know it will pass more rigorous qualifications for juried entry into fine art shows, competitions, and galleries.

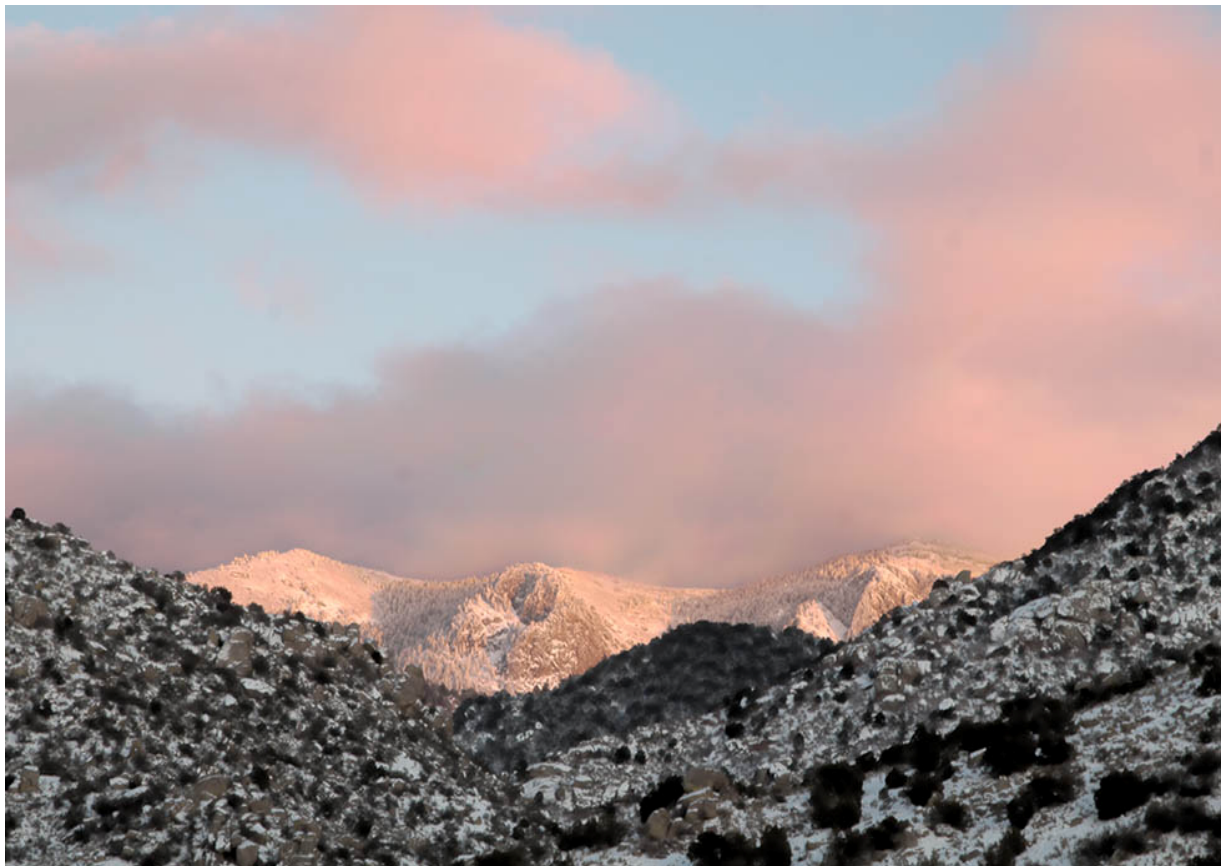
The 600% zoom images show various problems - let's take a look at finding the smoothest path thru this gnarled forest of software trees.

Good news - you are not going to waste time masking to remove edge blurs and noise with CS4. The bad - you're going to go round in circles trying to make Photomatix give you a skillfully tone mapped image which passes a judges critique.

I choose Lightroom for initial global changes. I use Repair, Fill Light, Clarity, Vibrance, and HSL's Targeted Assessment Tool (TAT) to restore deep orange colors which so easily caught your eye when shooting.

This path eliminates many hours of sheer drudgery trying to recover from Photomatix' inhibiting artifacts.

CS4 HDR Tif file



Our HDR tif file has simply been printed as a jpg so we can show you how it looks initially.

We did Basic (warmed white balance, fill light (reduced blown highlights), clarity, and vibrance (strengthen mid-tones)), Curves (medium contrast; then TAT high lights -15, lights -30), TAT (Luminance, orange -18) & (Saturation, orange -10).

Crop Image to Golden Circle



To compose the final image, we use Lightroom's Golden Circle to estimate proper crop dimensions. The Golden Circle (rather faint in this picture) is that white line sweeping upward from the right hand corner, closing on the most prominent central peak region for final image.

In this case, it is slightly left of the most challenging and prominent granitic ridge face. So, we want to bring our crop in from the left until it's end is near or at the peak center.

We also want to drop the top boundary until distracting central blue sky disappears. When done, we resize cropped image to original 1:1.5 aspect ratio.

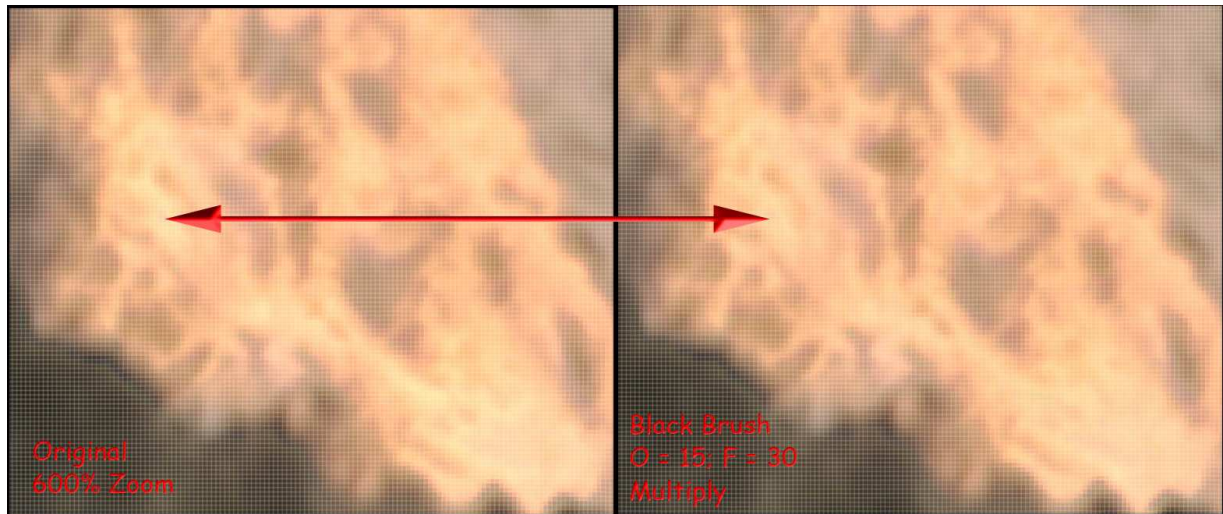
2nd Hi Res Scan - Reflective Hotspots

Now, recalling we saw some blown yellow-white highlights on the prior scan - let's do another 600% zoom scan for such highlights using CS4.

Closely scan snow capped mountains. Search each small (few pixel) area where yellow color begins to approach white [blown out]. Duplicate background (Ctrl J). Choose Brush tool (15% opacity; 30% flow) and set Multiply blend mode. As you work, you may want to vary these brush settings for individual taste.

Now, when you find a blow out, position your brush and decrease the yellow-white area. It took half an hour to work the entire region and lower hotspots.

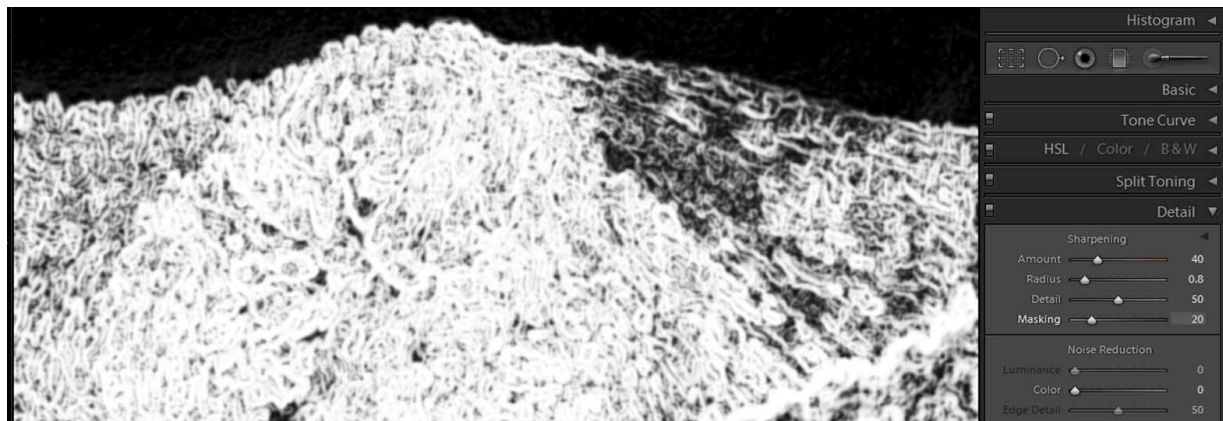
This step minimizes unsightly blotches when you later apply sharpening - either globally in Lightroom or special 3D effects with Photokit Sharpener.



Pixel grid display @600% showing hotspots before and after...

LR3 Capture Sharpening of Snowy Peak

So far, we have been treating this image like it is still Raw - there has been no sharpening. Lightroom has advanced in sharpening prowess recently. We make a Virtual Copy, then use Landscape Preset to begin our sharpening. Details Panel handles sharpening; our modification is to zoom 1:1, then holding down Alt key, begin to move slider until features on the granite mountain face sharpen in Magic Hours sunset light. Black means don't sharpen; white means sharpen.



Our best choice for this special sharpening mask was Alt +20... We've done capture sharpening, but with a bit of boost.

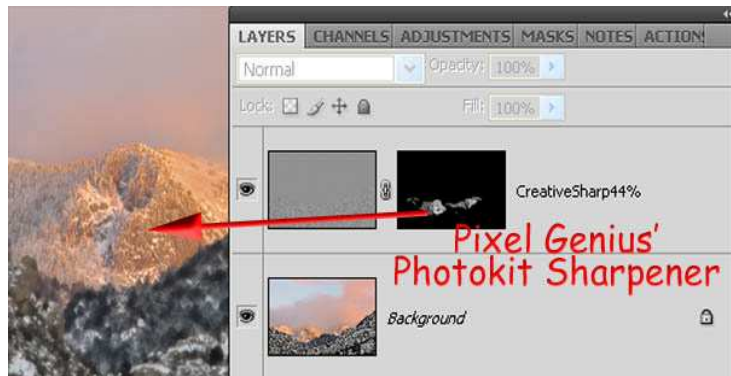
Creative Sharpening with Pixel Genius' Photokit Sharpener

Our last step is really punching sharpening along 'bare' granitic faces. For this purpose, we use a white brush with opacity @ 44%. Since the pen allows flexible hand motion and is pressure sensitive, the amount of sharpening varies.

In some instances, we might choose to sharpen some areas more than others - giving a 3D effect. Either we vary opacity or pen pressure to create this greater sense of a 3-D surface.

We find using Pixel Genius' *Photokit Sharpener* adds to sharp clarity of snow capped peaks. We set opacity at 44%, use a pen pressure brush on a Wacom tablet, then snap those mountains into stronger relief.

Illuminated peaks have been sharpened varying amounts. Opacities range from 22 to 44%, depending on what peak segment was sharpened.



Critique ~ Photomatix v CS4

Conventional wisdom - use Photomatix to put together a ± 2 EV AEB set of images. In effect, one assembles a 32 bit HDR file from three images. BUT, noise and chromatic aberration readily appear. When one gathers 10 or 15 images using Full Range HDR, our problem *quickly* compounds. Noise and chromatic aberration overwhelm the image; requiring many hours of clone and mask techniques to fix.

The Merge to HDR CS4 capability alleviates sky noise and chromatic aberration. In combination with Lightroom, color balance, contrast, and tone mapping follow well recognized steps. CS4 does take a while to put together in a multi-CPU computer; a 3 MB Windows XP Dual Core only uses 1.7 MB for Photoshop to put together the HDR image. But, you don't spend valuable time, making corrections to gobbledygook.

Here 'Tis



Our final result is a cacophony of softly lit pastel colors. The light represents that brief moment when the setting Sun's ambience creates the sort of Magic Hour light natural landscape photographers kill for. Our sky contains virtually no noise; dust spots have been removed. Snowcapped peaks contain no blown out highlights and are accentuated by a 3-D sharpening effect, ranging from shadow pines to bright, prominent crags. The foreground is simply a dark frame; yet the snow is white.

This fine art image now approaches memories created on that startling, cold, blowy January day when our Sandia Mountains became burnished gold for just that magic instant...

Be the best you can be...

I thank Sandy Corless for discussions about her experiences with Dan Burkholder's HDR workshops on Full Manual HDR Capture and its subtle Glow...

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