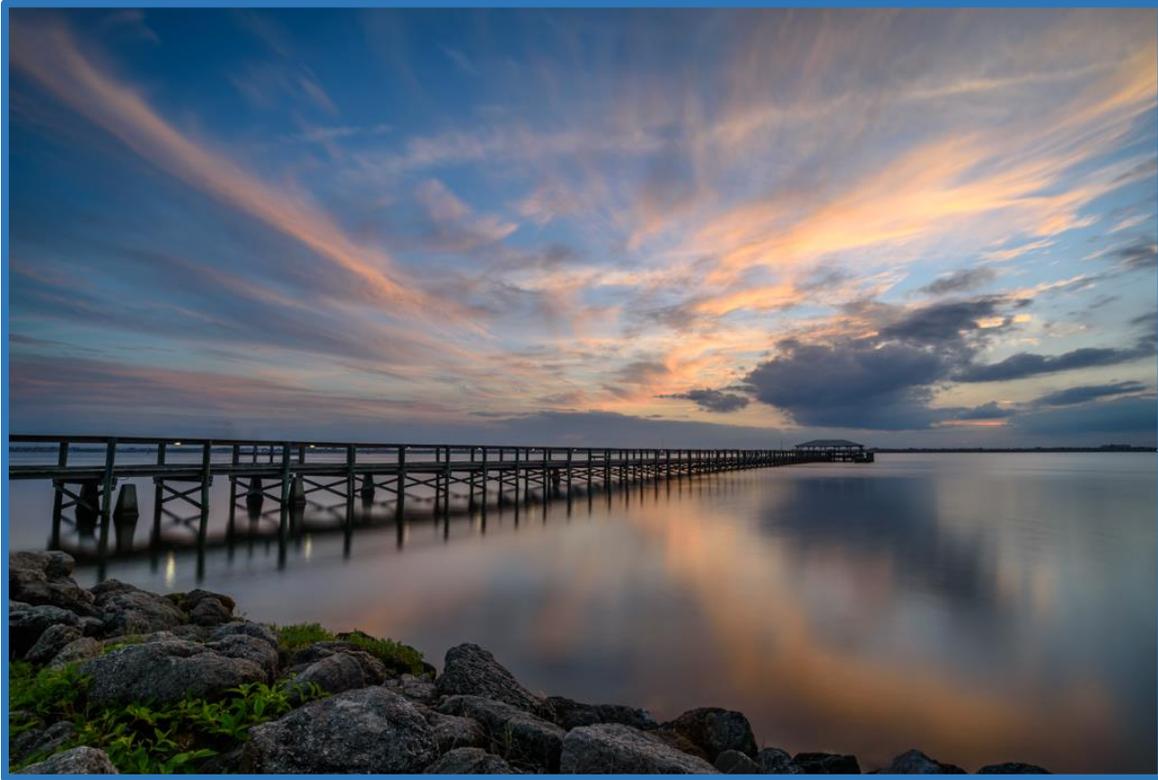


Intentional Post-Processing. . . completing the photographic process

By Chuck Palmer



When I first started processing my digital images several years ago, I had no idea what I was doing. I pushed the sliders back and forth, moving a slider to see if I liked the effect. There was no intent to my work or reason to what I was doing. Fast forward a few years. Thankfully, I have made some progress in my approach to post-processing. I have come to realize that post-processing is critical for completing the creative process.

In the early days of photography, the photographic process was only completed after a print was made. The masters spent hours in the darkroom to create a print that best represented the photographic art that the photographer intended. The same philosophy is true for digital image post-processing. The tools have changed, but the intent should be the same.

Post-Processing Goals

The main goal of post-processing is to refine the visual design (our message) of our captured image. There are many reasons why we might want to refine the original message we had in mind at the time of capture. However, very important reasons to consider include:

1. Setting the mood of the image

2. Complementing the composition design.
3. Focus the viewer on our message.
4. Creating depth in the image.

With these goals in mind, we can ask ourselves a series of questions as we intentionally post-process our digital negatives. Keep these questions in mind as you create your remarkable photographic art.

1. Set the mood. *What mood or ambiance do you want to set for the viewer?* Colors, tones, textures, shapes, and lines have emotional impact in an image. Soft contrast with warm hues will give a romantic tranquility feeling to the viewer. Vibrant, high-contrast tones and colors will convey energy and excitement. Light tones are positive and energetic while dark tones are often dramatic and sad. Creative changes to White Balance can have a dramatic effect on the mood of your photograph.
2. Composition Design – *How do you want to lead your viewer through your image? Do foregrounds and lines within the image lead my viewer to the main message of my image? Is my image balanced or intentionally imbalanced?* Although our goal is to compose our photos in camera, the crop and transform tools in post-processing can help us complement the captured image. Use composition overlay grids to optimize your originally intended composition. The crop tool can often be used to eliminate distractions and focus your viewer on the main message too. See Focus the viewer below.
3. Focus the viewer – *What is the message of your image? What or who is the main subject of your image? What or who are complementary characters that support your message? What are the distractions that don't support your image?* Focusing the viewer is probably the most important goal in post-processing. We have Light Value (exposure), Contrast, Clarity, Color, Color Saturation, and Sharpness at our fingertips in post-processing to emphasize our main subject. Likewise, a reduction of any of all of these focal point enhancers can de-emphasize or eliminate distractions. Ask: What changes can I make locally to each one of these enhancers to focus my viewer on my subject? Where are the distractions I can de-emphasize? Of course cloning out distractions all together solves the problem too!
4. Create Visual Depth – *Do I want to alter or enhance the visual depth perspective in my photo? Should I alter the atmospheric, tonal, color, or sharpness perspective in my frame?* Atmospheric haze reduces contrast in the distant part of a scene, giving a sense of depth. Light tones appear to advance to a viewer while dark tones recede from the viewer. Warm colors (reds, oranges) advance, while cool colors (blues, greens) recede. And things that appear sharp are thought to be close while things that are out of focus recede to the background. Local adjustments like clarity, sharpness, white balance, and

exposure to any or all of these perspective design elements can enhance the depth of your image, giving your viewer a feeling of being there in the scene.

Post processing your photos should be considered a necessary step in photography. It starts the moment we had the idea in our mind as we peered through our viewfinder as the shutter was released and only ends with the final conclusion in our post-processing. Much like the masters before us, our final photograph is crafted from our digital negative into something that comes close to the visual design we have in mind.

Make your post-processing intentional. . . and may the Remarkable Photos always be Yours.