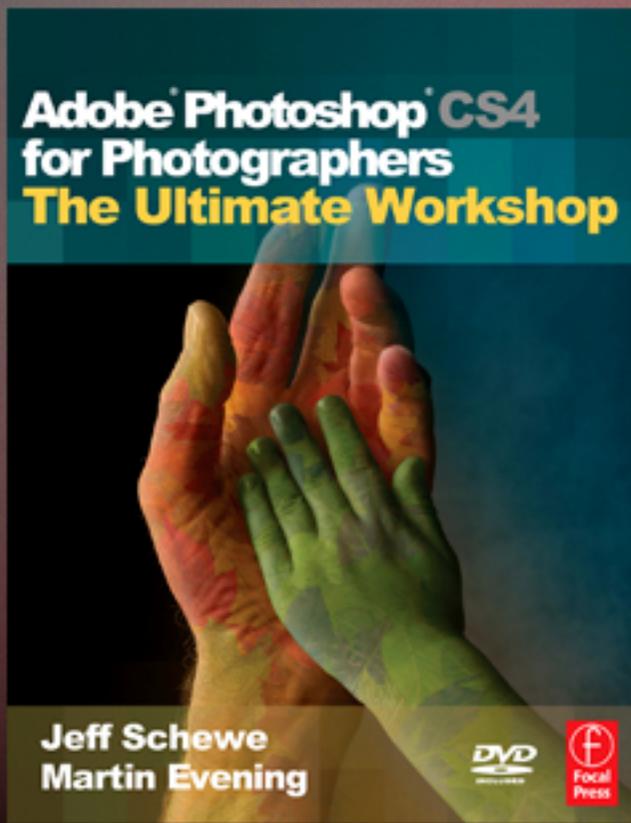
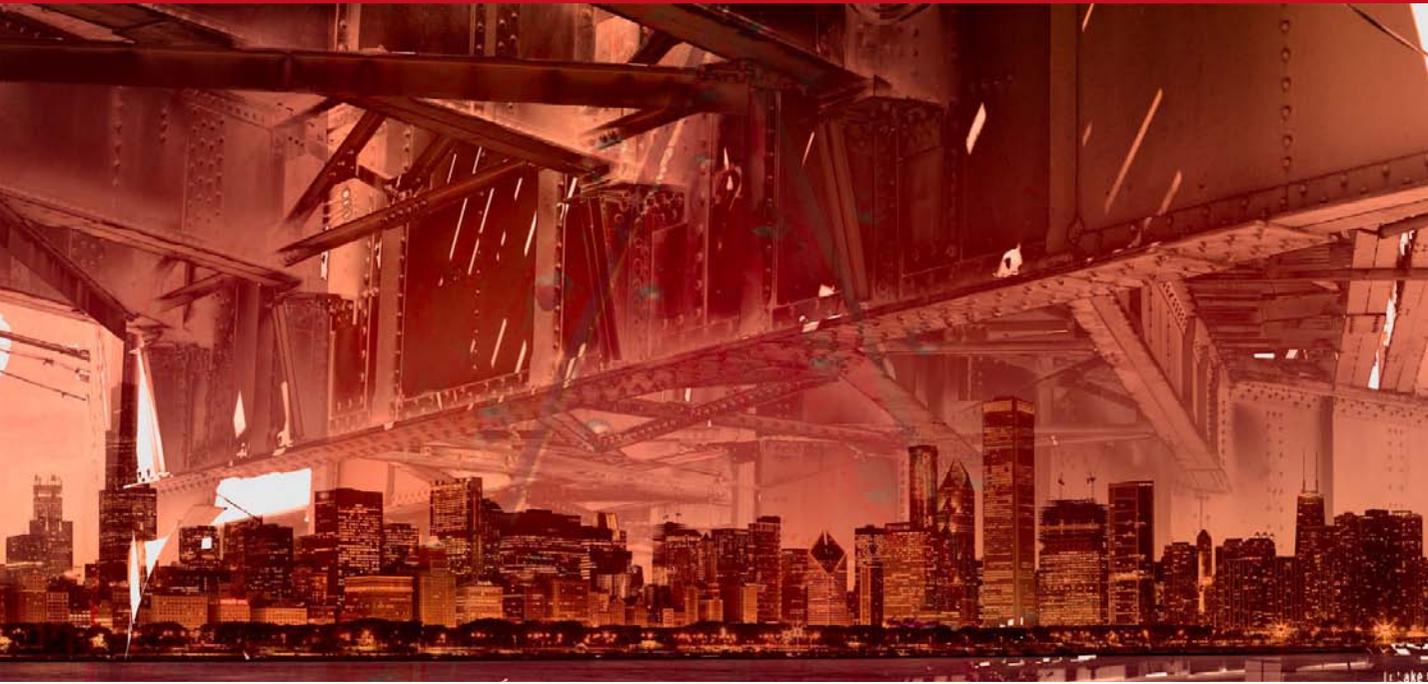


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**Adobe Photoshop CS4 for
Photographers: The Ultimate Workshop
Schewe & Evening
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Chapter 1

Before you shoot

Concepts and planning before you use Photoshop

This book may be all about Photoshop and what you can do with the program, but we thought we would start by looking at where exactly does Photoshop fit in to a photography workflow?

While it is possible to do an enormous amount of work on the computer using Photoshop, just because you can, doesn't mean you should. There is much to be said for taking a step back before you shoot an assignment and pre-plan how you might end up using Photoshop then shoot accordingly with that purpose in mind. Over the next few pages we have used a few studio shoot examples to illustrate this point.



Photo: © Martin Evening



Figure 1.1 Here is a simple example of where it makes more sense to extend the width of an image using Photoshop, rather than create the full width scene 'in camera'.

Before you shoot that picture!

In the days of film photography, we would often use Polaroids as a way to test the lighting and show clients a preview of how the image would look. Photographers would often use the excuse that the quality of the Polaroid wasn't up to standard and that it would look OK once they saw the film (by which time it would be too late!) Now in the age of digital photography, photographers are tempted to say 'we'll fix it in Photoshop'. Of course, Photoshop can be used to fix almost anything, but the trick to becoming a successful and productive photographer is to be able to work out when it is appropriate to use Photoshop and when it's better to get this right in-camera first.

For commissioned shoots this is something that should be worked out before you pick up the camera, or earlier still at the layout stage. It all boils down to making the best use of your time. In Figure 1.1 you can see how Martin easily added extra width to a studio-shot picture using the content-aware scaling feature. It took a matter of a few seconds to do this in Photoshop, whereas it would have required a lot of extra space (and expense) in the studio to have shot the photo like this. For example, most seamless background rolls are only 9 feet wide and Martin would have had to paint the cove by hand to get the full backdrop width 'in camera'.

Some people will call this cheating, while others will look at the economic necessities and conclude that using Photoshop in the post-production stage makes the most sense. These days a lot of movies and TV dramas are filmed on studio sets where many of the props and exterior details are missing and added in later. This kind of post-production work is so successfully done that you'll hardly be aware of the artifice that's involved.

Interpreting a brief

'Briefs' (normally called layouts in the US) run the gamut from a highly detailed and exact rendering of what will be executed by the photographer to a rough guide as simple as telling you whether the image is vertical or

horizontal—and even that can sometimes evolve. Ideally, the relationship the photographer has with the art director or designer will determine how flexible the layout will be. The better art directors tend to be open to opportunities to improve the project with the input and creative ideas of the photographer. It's incumbent on the creative team to know the limits and expectations of the ultimate client. The best photographers are always on the lookout for ways to enhance and extend the original concept and execution, while diligent to maintaining the needs of the client.

All that said, it's not at all unusual for the layout to evolve (and hopefully improve) during the course of a project. When a layout is originally drawn the reality of the final photograph is unknown—unless the layout has been created with stock photography which can be a dual-edged sword. Ethically, a photographer should not merely copy another photographer's work and create a derivative work of the original. It's one thing to use another's work as inspiration, it's another thing entirely to infringe on the work of others.

The example in figure 1.2 is a prime example of a tight layout with room for flexibility in execution and evolution. Even the headline was changed after the photographic image was completed. The art director remained open to taking advantage of opportunities and the end client was not so rigid as to ignore the possibilities.



Figure 1.2 Here is a simple example of an evolution of a layout to final printed ad.

Shooting multiple elements – intelligently

There's no question that a really good photographer can create a compelling image in a single shot and not have to rely on Photoshop to make it great. But given the limitations of time and budget, it's often easier (and no less good) to break down a final image into its essential parts before shooting anything. Shoot those parts and assemble them in Photoshop. This is a prime example of such a shot.



Photo: © Jeff Schewe

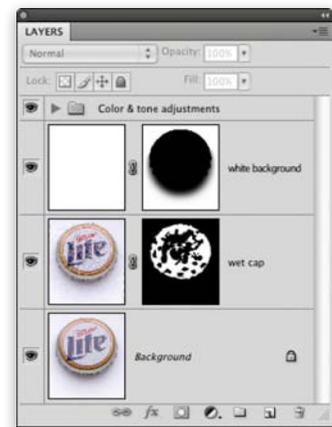
Figure 1.3 This is the final composite of two shots with retouching.

The shot of the Miller Lite bottle cap (Figure 1.3) was an assignment shot by Jeff Schewe. Having experience shooting liquid droplets, he knew that shooting the bottle cap with the droplets placed exactly correct would be tedious and involve lots of very detailed work up close. It would be a pain... So rather than even try to accomplish the final result in a single shot, he chose to shoot two shots; one with the bottle cap completely dry with the lighting finessed and the image optimized for the logo text and a second shot where the water droplets would be allowed to go where they wanted (Figure 1.4). He would make no special effort to keep the background dry.



Figure 1.4 These are the two raw shots before layering and masking.

By planning in advance to shoot the assignment in two shots, Jeff was able to simplify the individual shots to the point where the image assembly was quite simple. Also, by telling the art director that the two shots would be better from the very start of the assignment, doing the two shots was not seen as a failure to ‘get it’ in one shot but a better way to accomplish the goals of the assignment. It also gave the art director the opportunity that art directors love so much, the chance to direct. But instead of looking through the ground glass of a view camera (whose image is upside down) and trying to direct the precise placement of water droplets, he could direct Jeff sitting at the computer and add, delete or move them in Photoshop. To be honest, it didn’t necessarily take less time but it certainly was less tedious dealing with a layer mask rather than the difficulty of placing the real water droplets. Using the separate elements approach was also much more efficient and precise which led to a better result—which was the goal of both the art director and Jeff.



Multi light blending technique

Shooting in the studio with controlled lighting can lead to wonderfully lit still life images. But you are often faced with the realities of optics and physics and the difficulties of getting light exactly where you want it. As a result, Jeff has become adept at shooting subjects under varied lighting conditions and directions and then compositing the resulting elements in Photoshop. Figure 1.5 shows the two original captures. The only real difference is the light was moved from the upper left to the lower right between shots. Both captures were processed the same and were maintained in exact registration between the exposures. The trick then was to “paint with light” by using the second layer’s layer mask to determine the precise visibility of that layer.

This approach—locking the camera down and shooting multiple exposures with different qualities of light (such as a Hard Light mixed with a Soft Light) or as in this example with the same light from different directions is a creative approach that marries the best of photography with the efficiency of Photoshop. Sure, you could labor the long time it would take to finesse the lighting using two separate light sources, but why when this alternative is so simple (and easy)?



Figure 1.5 The capture on the left was the starting position of the light. After capturing and evaluation the first shot, the light was moved 180 and the second capture was made.

There are some caveats; you really should have a very stable shooting platform and it's ideal to keep the lighting rather simple. However, with Photoshop CS4's auto-align function this has become less mission critical. Ironically, for this book Jeff did test the auto-align command on these layers and received the warning shown in Figure 1.6. It seems that the lighting was so different that the auto-align logic was fooled. This wasn't a problem in this case since the registration was already excellent.

Figure 1.7 shows the final layer stack with the layer mask on the 'lower left' layer that modulated the visibility of that layer. Some areas were completely opaque while other areas were blended in partial opacity. The white areas of the layer mask allowed all of the lower left layer to show through. Figure 1.8 shows the final result 'painted by light'. There weren't a lot of tone and color adjustments made. The primary adjustment was a Hue and Saturation increase and a midtone contrast bump to pop some of the detail. More about those types of adjustments later in the book.

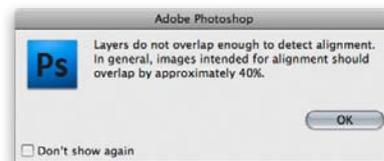


Figure 1.6 The auto-align command prompted this warning when trying to align the two leaf layers.



Figure 1.7 The final layer stack (with the adjustments grouped for brevity).



Figure 1.8 The final blended image.

Complex composite work

The previous examples were simple to composite because of the nature of the images. The Figure 1.9 example was not in the least bit easy to assemble. All of the individual elements had to be shot separately. However, the nature of the assembly dictated that each element shot had to have matching lighting that would enable the final assembly to look convincing. The element shots (Figure 1.10) were set up so that the lighting would cast a shadow in the correct direction and provide realistic clues how to make the synthetic shadows that would be made in Photoshop. The additional challenge was to rig each shot so the model's action would be real. That required tying off the pick axe fellow's suit to make the action look more real. For the shot with the two people with the saw, they did actually

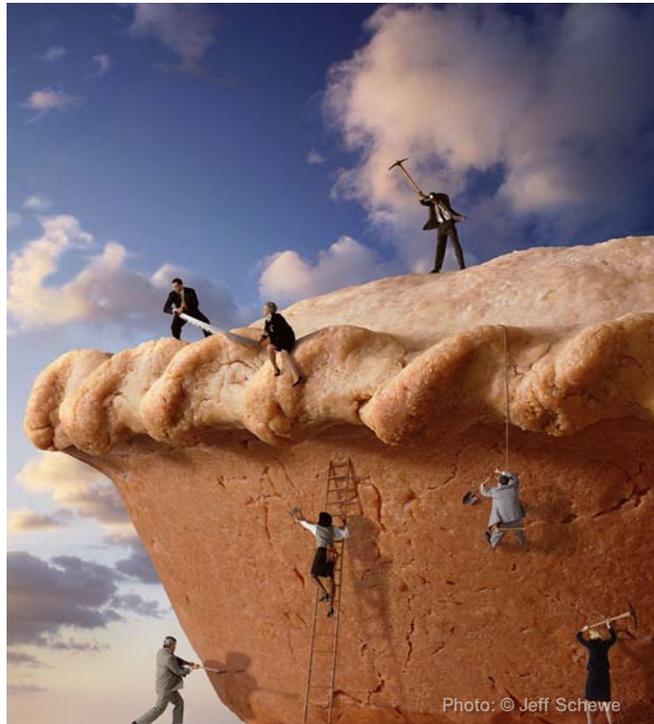
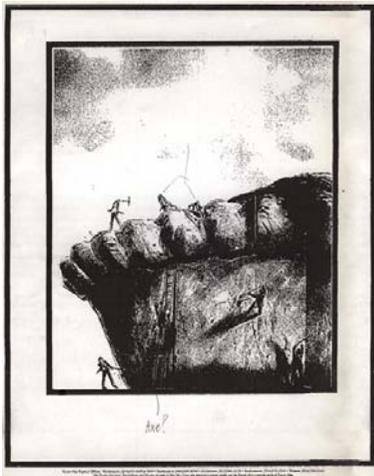


Figure 1.9 Left is the original layout provided by the client. Above is the final retouched composite.



Figure 1.10 The images above were shot with 120 mm color transparency in the studio. The two pie shots were done on 4x5 film. The sky background was studio stock. All of the element shots were outlined using the pen tool to create paths. Separate paths were made from the real shadows and then remade in Photoshop.

have to engage with each other so their expressions would be real. The hatchet girl needed to be on a ladder and even though Jeff rigged a line for the lady with the pick axe (she couldn't actually hold it over her head), it was important that the lighting and the shadow were correct. Even the 70 year old fellow with the shovel (Jeff didn't know the gentleman was 70 at the time—but the model did actually have fun on the shoot) had to be suspended by real rope to look realistic.

The shot that actually dictated lighting direction and quality was the background image. Since the sunset had a low side light angle, the rest of the elements had to be shot to match. Try as he did, the food stylist couldn't get "the perfect pie" so Jeff took parts from two different pies for the final composite.





Photo: © Martin Evening

Figure 1.11 Knowing the end photograph will be edited in Photoshop does mean that one can take shots such as the one shot here, using an extreme wide angle lens and not have to worry if the model's head happens to overlap the edge of the backdrop. This kind of problem is easy to fix in Photoshop and you don't lose the shot.

Fashion and beauty retouching

Where would the fashion and beauty industry be without retouching? It's been used for many years now and had quite an impact on the way fashion images look in the magazines.

A Scottish hairdresser I worked with once told me how the clean hair lines and cuts shown in the photographs created for Vidal Sassoon in the sixties made a huge impression on other Scottish hairdressers and how as a result they refined their cutting techniques to match the precision in the photographs that they had seen. Little did they realize that the pictures had actually been retouched, but Scottish hairdressing has ever since become world famous for it's technical precision!

One might argue that the ridiculous levels of retouching used on some photographs has become too much, but we reckon that good retouching work shouldn't be retouching that you notice. Figure 1.12 shows an image that is featured later in this book used to demonstrate a Photoshop hair coloring technique. There have been several occasions where I have worked on a series of hair coloring shots to demonstrate a range of hair colors and it has been necessary to color a models hair different shades of color (matching a sample color). You have to bear in mind here that to dye the hair for real, the models would be required to undertake a skin patch test to check for chemical sensitivity and the coloring process itself can take up to several hours to complete. So although doing it in Photoshop may not be so truthful, it is the only way many clients can afford to get the exact hair color look they are after, especially at the rates models will charge.

I also believe one can now afford to be somewhat looser about the way you shoot. In the past, it was critical that the models kept within the bounds of the backdrop, whereas now it doesn't matter quite so much (as I have shown in Figure 1.11). I quite like having the freedom to shoot to capture movement and gesture and know that Photoshop can be used to extend the backdrop if necessary. In this respect, Photoshop offers more ways to be creative because you have fewer restrictions.



Figure 1.12 Here is a before and after example of a photograph in which I carried out basic retouching to remove stray hairs, smooth the skin texture and adjust the color of the model's hair.

When it comes to lighting for beauty and fashion photography, there is also more opportunity to shoot without limits. After a long career learning how to light precisely, I certainly know how to control my lighting, yet I do now appreciate the freedom Photoshop gives me to break the rules and shoot without regard to the precise balance of lighting or optimal contrast. For example, I find that I now tend to light that much harder. I have always liked the drama that you get with strong, directional light, but at the same time been wary of the problems you get with strong harsh shadows on the face. However, it is now relatively easy to smooth these out in Photoshop and have the best of all worlds. Some might consider this a lazy approach to photography, but if Photoshop occasionally allows you to break the normal rules of lighting, why not allow yourself to experiment?

When not to use Photoshop

Jeff recalls that the client had originally contacted him because Jeff was thought of as some sort of 'computer expert' so the thought was to make an image of a melted phone in the computer (Figure 1.13). Jeff quickly realized that the client was both over estimating the ease of doing something like that in CGI and vastly underestimating what the costs would be. It would be far better and less costly just to put a phone in the oven and melt the darn thing.

The first test melt wasn't a huge success. The resulting mass of bubbling and blackened plastic looked like a

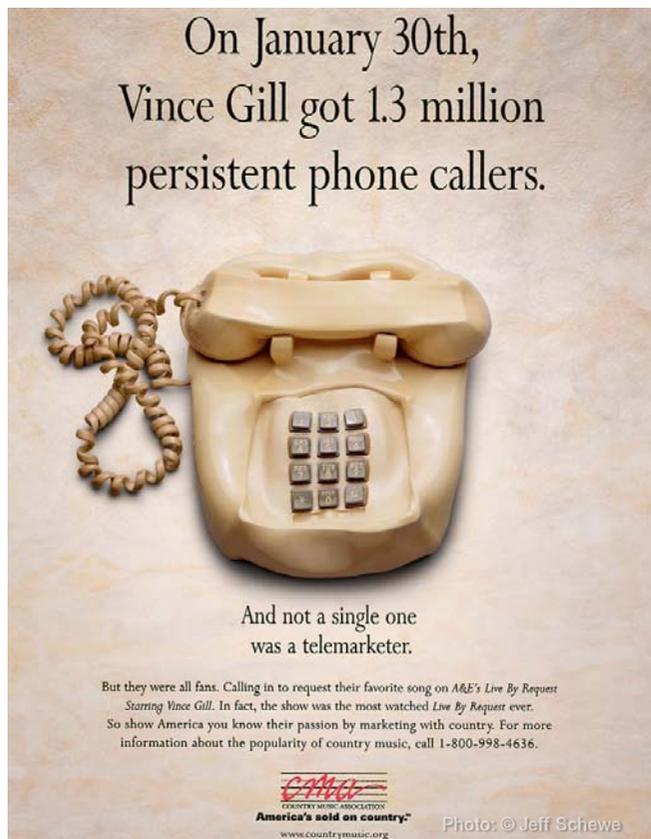


Figure 1.13 This figure shows the final image as it appeared in the ad. The background was shot separately and the layered phone (with shadows) dropped on top.