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# Story of an Image

## through the window

BY BRIAN MATIASH

There's a philosophy that I tend to subscribe to when traveling, and that is it never hurts to ask. This is especially true when you first approach a hotel check-in desk after a rather long flight from California to Tokyo, Japan.





Weary-eyed and stiff, I tried to summon my most cordial manners and asked the hotel clerk if she could possibly find a room as high up as possible. The higher the floor, the more likely my chances are of getting some cool vantage points for cityscape photos. In this case, I scored the jackpot with a sweet nineteenth-floor room in a hotel in Roppongi with a picturesque view of the famous Tokyo Tower.

For anyone who has experienced trying to photograph through a hotel window (or any window for that matter), you probably know that it's mostly going to be caked in grime and there will be a fiesta of reflections to deal with. Photographing around sunrise and sunset and on through the night will mitigate dealing with the grime, but reflections will always be a burden. You'll absolutely want to snuff out any light sources coming from within your room and close all window blinds except for the one that you'll be shooting through. My rudimentary solution was to simply drape my jacket over my camera, creating a hood of sorts. This drastically helped cut down on the reflections from inside the room. The rest boils down to experimenting with the time of day and the lighting conditions afforded to you.



## experiment

While I was fortunate enough to get some pretty clean photos as the sun rose alongside the Tokyo Tower, I really wanted to capture the skyline at night, when all of the buildings would be dotted with their own lights. To cut down on extraneous distractions and reflections, I opted to use my longer 70–200mm lens. This allowed me to frame the shot tightly and introduce some much needed lens compression, which helps create the impression that the foreground, mid-ground, and background are closer together.

You'll want to begin testing compositions and exposure settings shortly before moonrise (or sunrise or sunset) to maximize your time actually creating cool photos. I found an exposure that gave me a good depth of field but at the expense of requiring a 6-second exposure. The problem with

this shutter speed is that it's too slow to prevent motion blur of the moon once it rises. I contemplated taking two exposures, one for the scene and one for the moon, and then masking it in post, but I have never really been happy with those sorts of results. I simply waited for the moon to rise to a good level and took my exposure.



As expected, when I zoomed in I could instantly see the motion of the moon. On top of that, the shutter speed was slow enough to totally blow it out. It's during these types of situations where you're really put to the test. Creative thinking is in order and knowing what tools you have at your disposal is critical in pushing past these obstacles. When studying this photo, I felt that it was a bit too flat—there wasn't enough separation between the primary subject, the orange-

lit Tokyo Tower, and the rest of the cityscape. Normally, you'd probably want to take care of your principal edits in the Basic panel in Lightroom, but in this case, let's quickly jump right into Photoshop by going to Photo>Edit In>Edit in Adobe Photoshop [version].

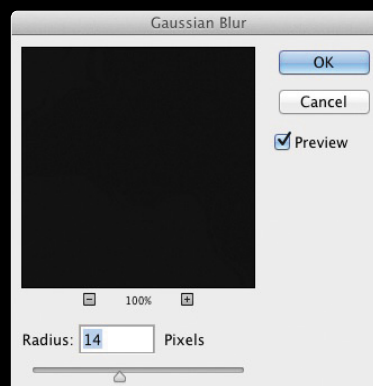
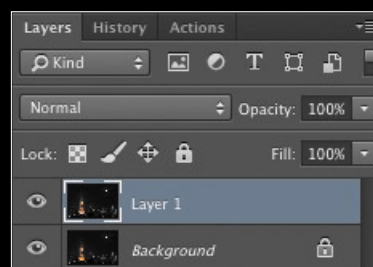


## create separation

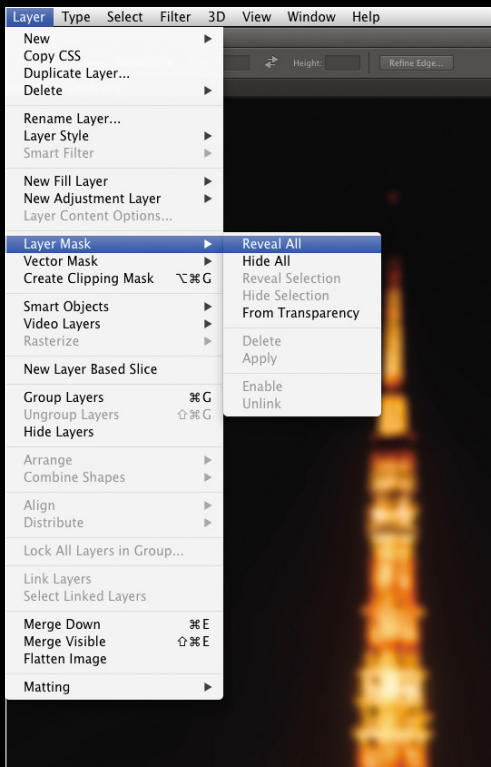
A great way to help create separation from your primary subject and the rest of your image is to create a shallow depth of field, and an easy way to do this is to apply a blur to your image and then mask in the areas you want to keep in focus. Before we begin, press Command-J (PC: Ctrl-J) to duplicate the Background layer. Next, apply a Gaussian Blur to your duplicate layer by going to Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur. You can specify the amount, or strength, of the blur by using the

Radius slider. Experimentation is key here. Make sure you have the Preview checkbox selected so that you can see a real-time view of the filter in action. For this image, a Radius of 14 Pixels gave me the desired effect.

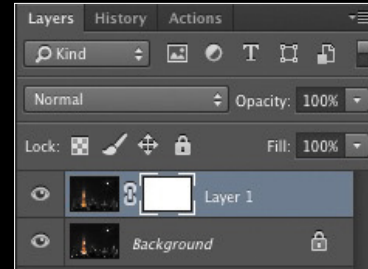
Now it's time to bring back focus to the subject area



with a layer mask. With the duplicate layer selected, choose Layer>Layer Mask>Reveal All. With the mask selected, choose the Brush tool (B) and press D then X



to make the Foreground color black. With a soft-edged brush, paint on the area where you want to restore focus. With this image, we painted on the tower while taking care not to reveal the surrounding buildings. If you accidentally paint a part of the image that you didn't intend to, press X to switch your Foreground color to white and paint that area away. Make sure to switch back to black



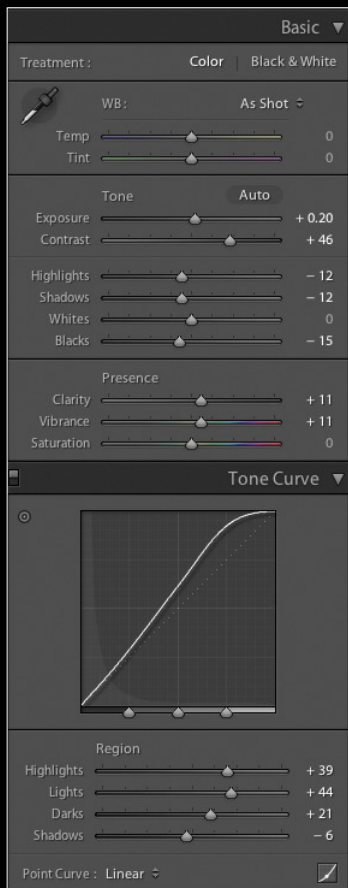
(by pressing X again) to resume your masking. With the masking done, choose File>Save to save the file and return to Lightroom to stylize.

## creative license

The key to making this sort of image pop is to make all of those specular highlights of the blurred city lights pop. Doing so involves a combination of boosting highlights and contrast while also deepening the shadows.



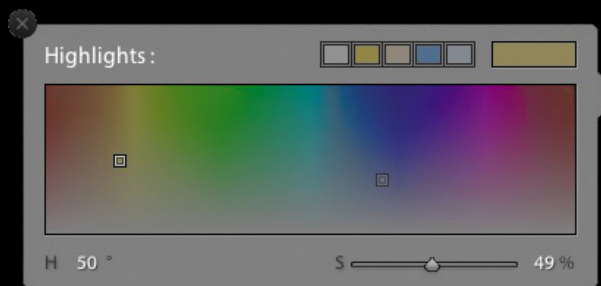
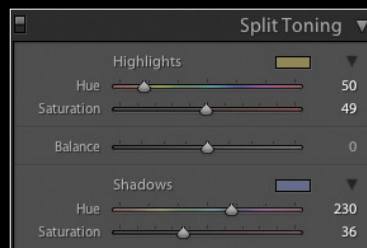




I made the necessary edits in the Basic and Tone Curve panels, as shown here.

Now, the real fun begins with the artistic editing. A great way to help you set your image apart is by applying some cross-processing, where you specify a color value for your highlights and another one for your shadows in the Split Toning panel. For night scenes, especially ones that have a very warm primary subject, I prefer accentuating that by selecting an orange tint for the Highlights and counter it with a blue tint for the Shadows. To do this, you can

either drag the Hue slider to the desired color and adjust the Saturation, or click the color swatch and select the color in the color picker.



By applying some quick, creative thinking, we're often able to infuse a really cool style to an image, even if there were some obstacles along the way. You just need to know how to use the tools that you have at your disposal. ■

