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Story of an Image

changing your perspective

BY BRIAN MATIASH

Changing your perspective is something you've likely heard or read at one point or another and it's advice certainly worth considering when practicing photography. Recently, I had the opportunity to revisit the gorgeous country of Australia and spent a good deal of time in Hobart, Tasmania.

While there, a good friend took me to photograph a little-known waterfall. Given my love of waterfalls, I was immediately excited to get to the location. Once I got there, I quickly saw that the little-known waterfall was also little as a whole. It didn't take much more than setting up my tripod and aiming straight to capture a majority of it.

MATT GLASTONBURY

Initially, I was a bit dejected about having my expectations dashed but I wasn't about to let that keep me from making the most of the situation. *It's all about changing your perspective!* I initially started photographing the waterfall with an ultra-wide-angle lens but quickly found the images to be sort of flat and made the waterfall seem far off in the distance.

To combat this, I switched lenses and began using my telephoto. By isolating a specific part of the waterfall, I could incorporate some postprocessing magic to give it a totally different feel. So, I began experimenting with isolating a few parts of the waterfall until I finally found the exact perspective I was looking for (see photos at right).

remove distracting elements

With the image imported into Lightroom, it's time to get to work. I knew that I wanted to build a miniature-world look of sorts using the Tilt-Shift blur in Photoshop, simulating the look that can be achieved optically with an actual tilt-shift lens (I left mine back in the U.S. to save weight). But before

going down that road, you'll want to make sure that the image is prepped. To start, remove any elements that can clue the viewer in to what the true sense of scale is. This means healing or cloning out things like leaves and branches.


Press the Q key to launch the Spot Removal brush in Lightroom and heal/clone out anything that can give your secret away. While this may sound like a laborious task (and it usually is), it will make the final result that much more believable. With this image, that means removing stray leaves, branches, and twigs.


basic adjustments

Next, you'll want to make the basic adjustments to the image. This usually involves getting proper tonality, contrast, and saturation. As you can see with this image, it's rather flat, which is usually a result of photographing under the midday sun. To alleviate this, you'll want to pay close attention to your Histogram, which is located in the top-right section of the Develop module. With this image, I'd like to shift some of the tone from the shadows to the midtones.
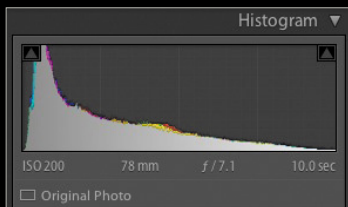
One way to do so is to increase the Exposure and Shadows sliders. While this may add to the image looking flat, you can remedy that by increasing the Contrast slider. Additionally, it's worth spending time adjusting the Tone Curve of the image. This lets you achieve fine control over your image's shadows, midtones, and highlights. With the adjustments shown here, the histogram looks more in line to what I was expecting, and the image now looks more evenly exposed, giving the baseline needed to begin stylizing.
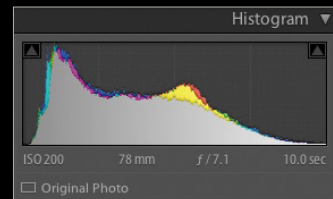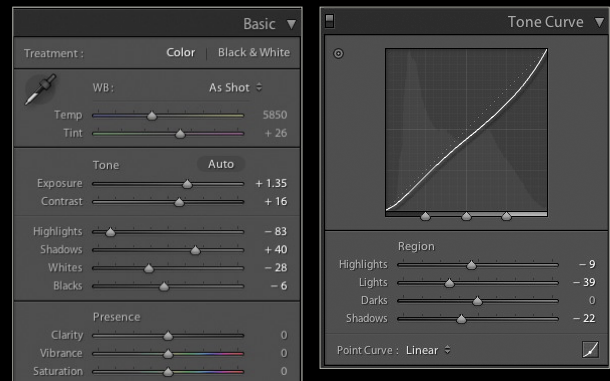
split toning & saturation

One of my favorite ways to stylize is to incorporate a cross-processed look, and Lightroom makes it really easy to do that with the Split Toning panel. With cross-processing, you can selectively assign colors to the highlights and shadows of your image. The key is finding a good color combination that *works* with your image. With this foresty image, I decided to apply a slight green tint to the Highlights by dragging the Hue slider to that area of the color spectrum. You can control the overall strength of whichever color you have selected by using the Saturation slider directly below. For the Shadows, I opted to use a light blue. Finally, you can control whether you want to bias the cross-processing to favor the Highlights or Shadows by moving the Balance slider to the right or left, respectively.

We're almost ready to apply our tilt-shift effect but before doing so, you'll want to make sure that your colors are popping. Because of the added green hue with the cross-processing and because there's so much green moss in this image, it makes sense to make it stand out. An easy way to do so is to use the Target Adjustment tool under the Saturation tab in the HSL panel. As you hover over your image, you'll see the detected primary color slider illuminate. When you're hovering over the color that you want to affect (in this case, green), just click-and-drag up to increase the saturation or down to decrease it.


tilt-shift blur

Now, it's time to apply the Tilt-Shift blur to achieve that miniature-world look. Fortunately, Photoshop CC has a really great utility built right in to accomplish this: the Blur Gallery. Start by sending the image over to Photoshop by pressing Command-E (PC: Ctrl-E). Once in Photoshop, go to Filter>Blur>Tilt-Shift. The first thing you'll notice is a main target with a set of solid lines and a set of dotted lines. The main target controls the center point of the tilt-shift blur. You'll typically drag this onto the area of your image that you want to keep in focus. The distance from the main target to the

set of solid lines above and below it is the boundary that will remain in focus. The wider the distance, the more of your image will remain in focus and vice versa. The distance from the set of solid lines to the set of dotted lines is the transition area where the in-focus portion of your image becomes out of focus. The greater the distance between the two, the more gradual the transition is and vice versa.

For this image, I wanted to keep the in-focus area tight and limited to the area where the waterfall is crashing into the puddle at the base. So, I dragged both the solid and broken lines close to the main target positioned at the base of the waterfall. You can also control the amount of blur by adjusting the Blur slider in the Blur Tools panel. When you're done, click OK in the Options Bar to apply the blur, save your image, and return to Lightroom. [*For more on the Blur Gallery in Photoshop, see the "Beginners' Workshop" on page 64.—Ed.*]
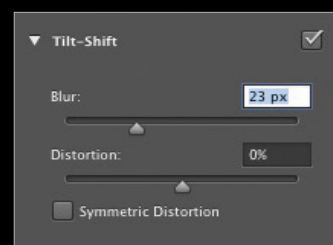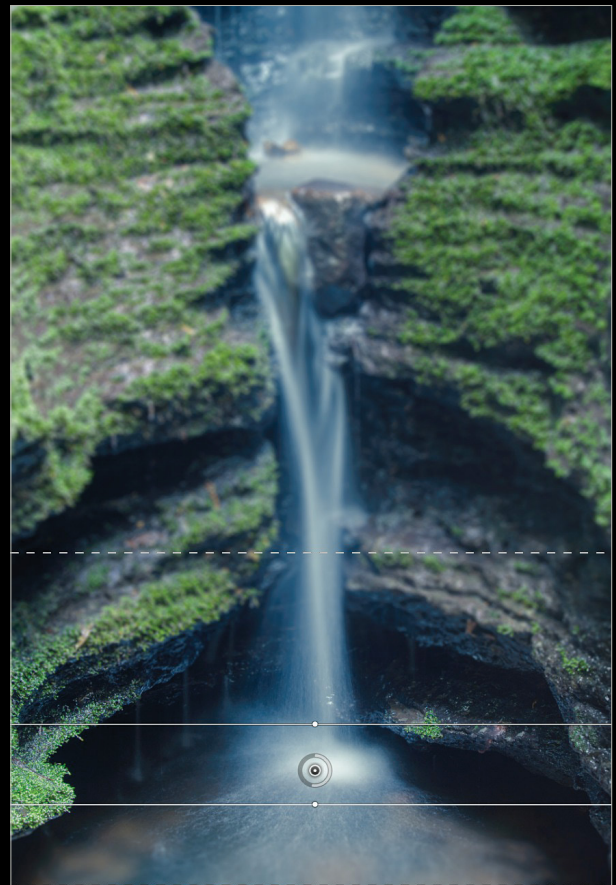
final touches in lightroom

The last thing you'll want to do to really nail this effect is to draw your viewers' eyes right to the in-focus area. One way to do so is to use a Radial Filter (Shift-M). Draw a selection over the in-focus area and adjust the Exposure slider accordingly to darken the area outside of the radial boundary.
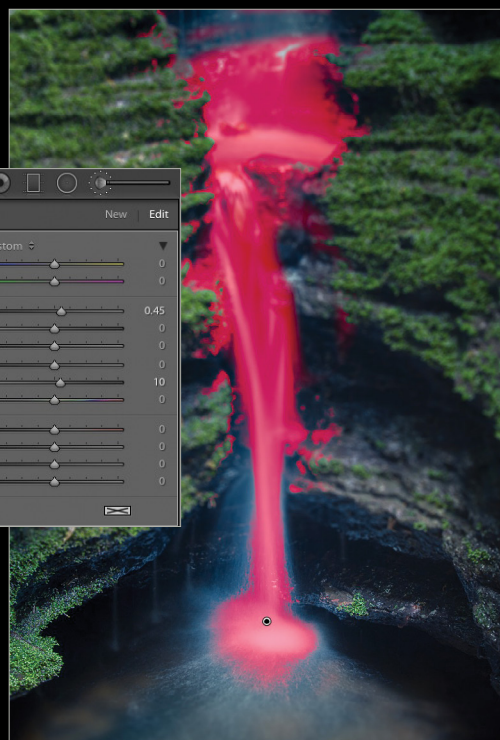
You can also apply a vignette in the Effects panel to darken the edges more evenly. A great way to ensure a smooth transition for your vignette is to use the Feather slider.

To finish things off, you can also selectively bring out elements of your image using the powerful Adjustment Brush. To use it, just press K on your keyboard, paint on the area of your image that you want to adjust, and then drag the sliders that you want to affect. With this image, I wanted the entire waterfall to pop off the screen, so I drew along it and increased the Exposure and Clarity sliders, bringing the image to the exact place that I envisioned in my mind while I was standing there.
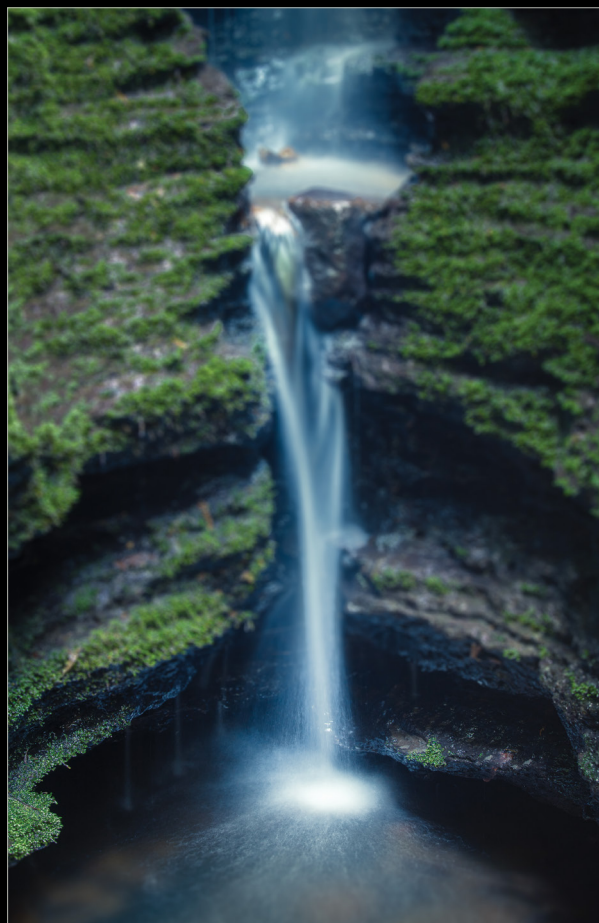
So can you see now? It's all a matter of perspective. ◼