

Photoshop

IN-DEPTH
STEP-BY-STEP
TUTORIALS

SCOTT KELBY'S
DOWN AND DIRTY TRICKS

NEW REVIEWS
AND OTHER
COOL STUFF

USER

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DISPLAY UNTIL JANUARY 14, 2014

UNDER THE HOOD

HDR and Panoramics



▼ Brian Matiash

Picture this: You're in a stunning and historic church in beautiful Sorrento, Italy. You have the entire place to yourself except for a few locals who are sitting quietly with their thoughts and prayers. You're standing *all the way* in the back of the church, trying to capture all of the ornate details of the wide interior.

You know that you're going to have to shoot some brackets to tone map an HDR image, but your lens isn't wide enough to capture everything in one frame (or set of brackets). This is where the beauty of shooting panorama panels comes into play, and it even works well if you're creating an HDR image.

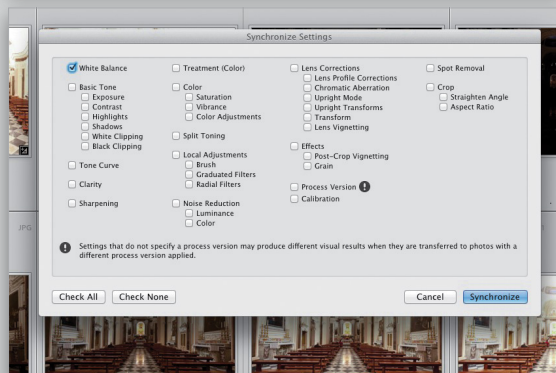
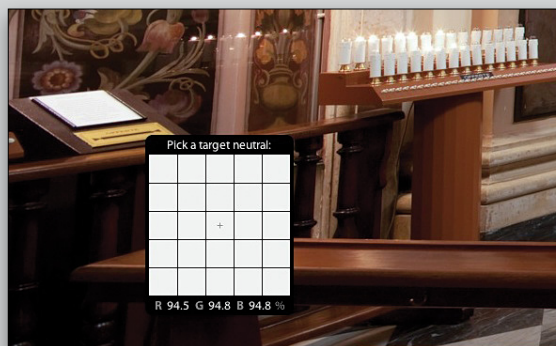
CAPTURING THE PHOTOS

The scenario I described above is exactly what I experienced several years ago when I visited Italy. I simply couldn't get a wide enough frame, even though I had my Canon 17mm Tilt-Shift (TS) lens on a full-frame Canon EOS 5D Mark II. That's when the idea of panos popped into my head. If I took a set of brackets covering the left, middle, and right portions of the church, I should be able to tone map and stitch everything together to get a beautifully wide, ultra high-resolution HDR pano. And that's exactly what I ended up doing. I simply shifted my TS lens to three sections—from far left, middle, and far right—and took a series of bracketed images at each section. Don't worry if you don't have a TS lens. The same general workflow below will apply even if you simply swivel your tripod head to capture the pano panels. You are using a tripod, right?



STEP ONE: Typically, whenever I begin editing a series of brackets for HDR, the only edit I make before tone mapping is white balance correction. In the case of these images, the white balance was off because of the light inside the church. So, in Lightroom, I simply pressed W to choose the White Balance Selection tool, and selected a portion of the image that I wanted to use as the base for my new custom white

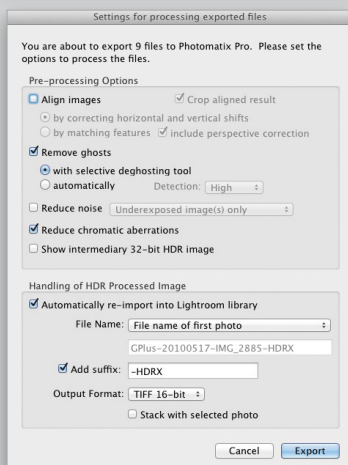
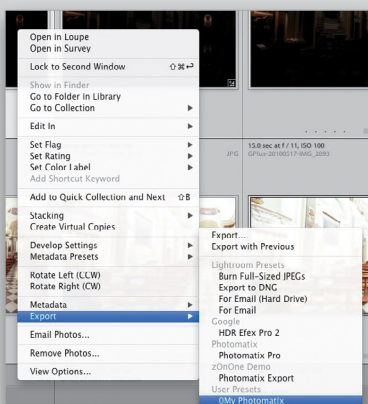
balance. Next, I selected all of the remaining bracketed images in the Filmstrip and clicked the Sync button to synchronize the white balance and ensure consistency. Now, when you look at three of the sample brackets in Survey view (N), you'll see a more accurate color representation.



STEP TWO: There are actually two ways you can proceed from here. Some photographers prefer to stitch each set of

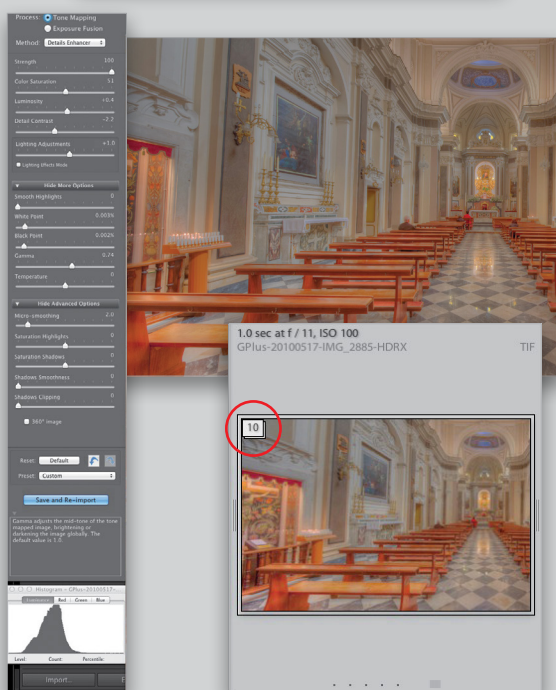
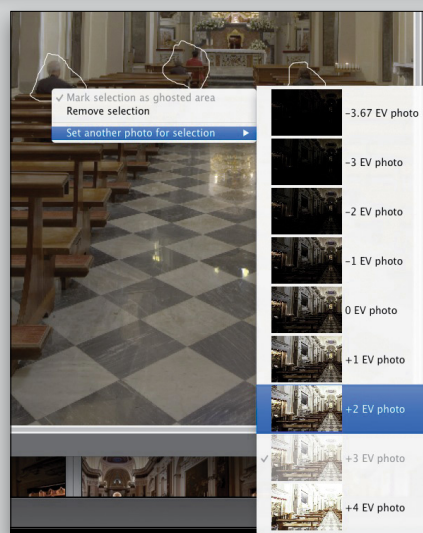
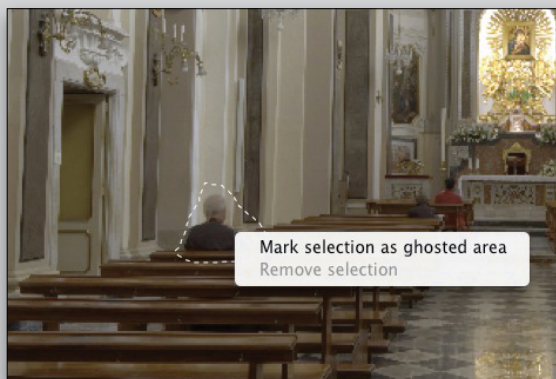
brackets into their own pano image files before tone-mapping, but I find that process to be more time-consuming and convoluted. I prefer to first create my three tone-mapped HDR files and then stitch those into a single pano. To begin, I'm going to send my first set of nine bracketed images to Photomatrix for tone mapping. Now, you don't have to use Photomatrix; you should use whatever tone-mapping product you're most comfortable with.

In Lightroom, I selected the Photomatrix export action that I created, which launches the Photomatrix dialog. You can also select the photos and choose Photo>Edit In>Edit in Photomatrix Pro, or whatever application you're using if you've set it up as an external editor in the Lightroom (PC: Edit)>Preferences. Because there was motion from some of the churchgoers in my bracketed images, I made sure the Remove Ghosts checkbox was turned on and selected the With Selective Deghosting Tool radio button.

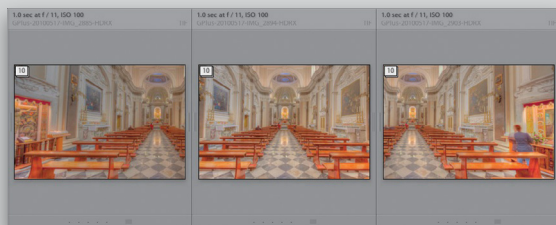


STEP THREE: Next, I drew selections around the people who were moving through the frames and chose the bracketed image I wanted to use as the source. When the elements are looking good, I proceed to tone map the image accordingly. When I'm done and return back to Lightroom, I'll have the first of three tone-mapped panels ready to go.

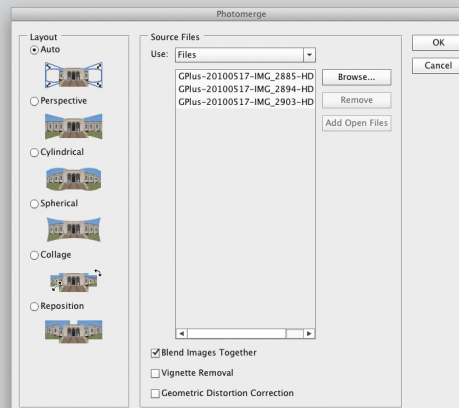
For the sake of keeping my library tidy, I always stack the tone-mapped image along with the bracketed source images.



STEP FOUR: The next steps are actually pretty automated. Because I want to ensure that my three tone-mapped HDR images blend evenly during the pano stitching process, all I do is select the next set of brackets, send them to Photomatrix, and apply the tone mapping without touching any sliders. One thing to note is that you want to make sure that whatever tone-mapping software you use has sticky settings, which essentially remember the state of the sliders from your last session. Because Photomatrix supports sticky settings, all I need to do is click one button to proceed with the exact same settings as before. Repeat this process for each panel that you want to tone map and subsequently stitch together. With the tone mapping complete, I can see the three source panels that I'm going to stitch together to create my pano image.

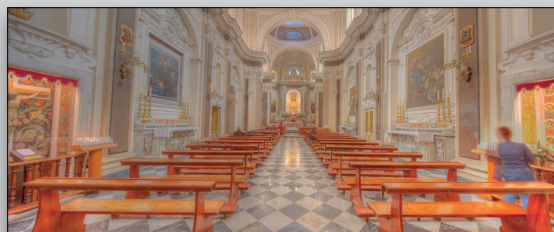


STEP FIVE: While there are many apps out there that will stitch multiple files together to create a pano image, I've been really happy with how Photoshop CC handles this task, and because I already have it installed on my computer, there are no extra apps to buy or install. To start, select the three source panel images in Lightroom, Right-click on one of the photos, and choose Edit In>Merge to Panorama in Photo-



shop. In the Photomerge dialog that appears, you'll have a variety of options for how the files are analyzed, edited, and stitched together. I almost always use Auto then click OK.

STEP SIX: When Photoshop is done analyzing and stitching, the result is a beautifully wide photo that accurately conveys all of the details, architecture, and craftsmanship of this gorgeous church. There isn't much to do at this point other than choose the Crop tool (C), crop the pano, and then save the file to finish things in Lightroom.



STEP SEVEN: Because I prefer to create my initial tone-mapped HDR images to be rather flat, the final pano image could stand to have a few mild edits applied. This image is truly beautiful and stands on its own, and for that reason, I don't want to apply any heavy-handed changes, such as cross-processing, so I stick with some basic adjustments like cooling off the color temperature, adding a contrast boost via the Tone Curve panel, and applying some sharpening. Now I'm left with a truly accurate and beautiful representation of what it felt like to stand in this church, and it couldn't have been possible without combining two fantastic tools with HDR and pano stitching. ■

