

# Rescuing & Replacing Skies in Photoshop CS & PS Elements

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# Why Bother?

A good sky can improve an image by:

- Replacing large areas of distracting, featureless white or burnt out sky
- Becoming the main or strong visual element in its own right
- Providing subtle visual references to the focal point in the image
- Creating space in the frame for the focal point of the image
- Adding a much larger sky area than was originally captured

Judges tend to score low when the sky is featureless or completely burnt out - the nature of the sky will make or break an image

# Rescuing Existing Skies

# The Good News

- Many, seemingly featureless, skies can be rescued simply by using the shadows & highlights sliders and brightness and contrast sliders
- Usually, if pixels exist that are not pure white then the sky can be improved using this technique unless it is totally flat and featureless
- Converting to monochrome will always allow for a more dramatic and higher contrast sky that would otherwise look false in colour

# Recovering an existing sky



Highlights suppressed, contrast increased





Conversion to B&W, even more contrast



# Ken Crane





Ken Crane - Highlights reduced, B&W, more contrast



# Replacing an Existing Sky

# Original Sky – Grey & Featureless





# Replacement Sky 1



Replaces Grey monotone with more interest, attention drawn to tree by blue sky



# Replacement Sky 2



Sky becoming the main visual element of the image but not particularly sympathetic



# Replacement Sky 3



Sky is providing subtle visual references to the focal point



# Converting to monochrome adds drama



- Sky a strong visual element of the image
- Provides subtle visual references to the focal point
- Creates space for the focal point to occupy
- Eye drawn to, and keeps returning to, the tree

# Things to consider when replacing skies

- Balance the brightness of the sky and foreground – a sky will always be brighter than the foreground / landscape
- A foreground / landscape will always take on some of the hue, tonality and contrast characteristics of the sky – this can be very subtle but will be obvious if not done well
- If you include the sun / moon in the sky you would expect to see directional lighting and shadows – best avoided unless you're replacing e.g. one sunset for another with the sun in approx the same place

# Techniques

1. Delete all of old sky and replace with new sky from another image
2. Feather-select part of old sky, delete and blend with new sky from another image
3. Use the 'Blending Option' in 'Layer Styles'

# 1. Cut out the whole original sky and replace with new sky

- Works well when there is a sharp boundary or colour change between the existing sky and the foreground e.g. Buildings, urban landscapes
- Several ways to do this in photoshop based on colour, boundaries, quick select tool or manually
- Does not work well when the horizon / boundary has very diffuse objects (eg distant trees) in it or is hazy / misty
- More work to get a balanced result, slight risk of looking unnatural



Sky all one colour, hard edges at boundary





Sky replaced within original image dimensions





Sky replaced on a larger canvas





# Val Moules



# Val Moules – More canvas, new sky, more contrast, crop





# Ken Crane



Ken Crane – new moody sky, darker, more red



2. Cut out only the upper section of the sky with a very feathered transition and blend new sky underneath
- The original horizon / boundary with sky is retained therefore good method when the horizon has very diffuse objects (e.g. trees, bushes) in it or is hazy / misty
  - When the horizon is pierced with objects that are difficult to select around
  - Much easier to match retained partial sky with blended new sky – result tends to look more natural



Sky selected with feathered border close to horizon



New sky added underneath and blended





# Good News

- Replacement skies can be squashed, stretched, extended, reversed, brightened, darkened, cloned, de-noised, blurred and undergo quite radical changes in hue / colour and still look natural – provided it remains sympathetic with the foreground
- Changing the sky also allows you expand the canvas to include more sky than you had in the original image
- Most of the hard work involves removing the original sky – once done it is easy to try many different skies in order to make the right choice
- Once learned, the techniques are relatively straightforward – a sky can be changed in 5-15 min

# Not So Good News

- You must have a good selection of skies to choose from - you probably have more good skies in your current photo collection than you think
- Final image must be from all your own work to qualify for competitions
- Skies taken with the camera pointing upwards rarely work because there will be no recession of clouds or tonality

# Always Remember:

- Whenever you see an interesting sky take a photo of it with the horizon just out of the frame – don't worry about including some objects from the foreground you can erase them / clone out later
- Capture skies that are ordinary, cloudy, stormy, clear, moody, dramatic, misty, sunsets, afterglows, evening moon – they will all be a growing 'investment' that will benefit your work at some point in the future



# Demonstration