

THE CAMERA CLUB OF CENTRAL MINNESOTA



The Newsletter of the Camera Club of Central Minnesota

Volume 9, Issue 6

1 June 2017

Club Meetings and Other Bits of Information

The **Camera Club of Central Minnesota** will be meeting on the first Monday of each month with the second Monday of the month as back up starting in January 2017. We will meet at the Public Library in St. Cloud from 6:45 to 8:45 pm.

The club has monthly photo topics, image sharing and critique, hands on demonstrations of photographic gear and software, member online gallery links, discussions about photography, and is open to all.

Assignments

Monday, June 5, 2017, Bremer Community Room 104. The assignment is *Construction*.

Monday, July 10, 2017, Bremer Community Room 104. The assignment is *Up Close*.

Monday, August 7, 2017, Bremer Community Room 104. The assignment is *Clemens/Munsinger Gardens*.

Remember, all your photo assignments and meeting dates are online at

<http://cameraclubmn.com>

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#### Things I Wish I Knew When I Started Photography

Here are just a few recommendations I have for beginner photographers based on my stumblings and bumbings through photography as a beginner all those years ago.

I made so many mistakes as a beginner photographer that I could probably come up with 30 off the top of my head!

So I have come up with five things I wish I knew back then.

Take my mistakes to heart, avoid making them yourself, and you should have a smoother experience as a beginner photographer than I did. With that said, let's get to it!

When I started in photography, I really didn't understand this concept. I figured the whole point of photographing something was to photograph everything (well...as much of everything) as I possibly could.

Where that got me was sitting in front of my computer poring over landscape photos that were busy. And I mean way busy. In fact, I had tried to cram so much stuff into each shot that they became a muddled mess.

The problem was that I either had too many strong subjects, each of which were competing for attention, or I didn't have a strong subject at all. Either way, the landscape shots I took back then suffered from including too much and not excluding enough.

The lesson here is that there is something to be said for simplicity, so long as in that simplicity you have a single, strong subject to attract the viewer's eye. What's more, there shouldn't be a lot of other elements to compete for the attention of our eyes.

Trees in the background can add texture and color to a shot, and trees that extend along the side of the image can help provide some depth. The trees add to the shot but don't make the shot overwhelming. That's precisely what you need to aim for.

I think a 50mm lens should be the first lens you purchase. One of the reasons for that is because many 50mm lenses have very large apertures in the region of f/2, f/1.8, or f/1.4. That makes low-light shooting much easier, and if you're into portraiture, will help you create that nice, blurry background that works so well for portraits.

And while all that is certainly true, one thing to note is this, don't shoot at your lens's maximum or minimum apertures. The reason for this is simple - a lens is simply not its sharpest when you shoot at its extreme apertures.

That means that my 50mm f/1.8 is much



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# The Camera Club of Central Minnesota

## Things I Wish I Knew When... (continued)

sharper if I shoot one or two stops up from f/1.8.

Conversely, rather than shooting at the extreme minimum aperture of f/22, moving one or two stops down will get me sharper results.

All lenses have a "sweet spot" where they produce maximally sharp results.

Though the sweet spot is different from one lens to the next, what is shared among all lenses is that none of them have a sweet spot at the extreme ends of their aperture range.

If you want the sharpest photos avoid shooting at those extremes.

### Don't Judge Your Work Compared to the Greats

In fact, don't judge your work compared to anyone else's photos...

The problem with comparing the photos you take to the photos other people take is that they are on a different path in their photography journey. This is especially true of professionals that have been at it for a long time.

Yeah, if you picked up a camera for the first time two months ago, comparing your portraits to Dorothea Lange's is only going to make you feel like you're a terrible photographer.

Same goes for trying to replicate Ansel Adams' famous photo of the Tetons and the Snake River. Is the photo above terrible? No. Is it as good as the one Ansel Adams took? Definitely not...

So, instead of judging what you do based on what others do, flip the script and use the work of other people as inspiration.

Scour places like Flickr, Instagram, and photography galleries to find photos that resonate with you.

And once you find photos you like, ask yourself what it is you like about them.

Think about the subject matter, the lighting, the composition, and so forth. Really examine the photos and pull out the details that speak to you.

Doing so will do a couple of things. First, it helps you determine what sort of photos speak to you. If 99 percent of the photos you like are landscapes, I think it's safe to say that's where your interests are at.

Second, and perhaps most important, drawing inspiration from others helps you define your style.

That doesn't mean that you'll look at a few dozen photos and have your unique vision for your photos all lined out. But it will at least help you start working towards who you are as a photographer and where you want to be as a photographer in the future.

### Join a Club

You know that feeling you have when you're out taking photos and you have no idea why they aren't turning out? That feeling of desperation, that if you just had someone to ask a few questions, you'd be so much better off?

Yeah, me too!

When I started out in photog-

raphy, I was a lone wolf. I went out on my own, made tons and tons of mistakes, then came home and tried to figure out what went wrong.

It was a long, drawn out process, that, in the end, worked. But man, I wish I'd have had some backup back then.

What I'd strongly recommend for beginners today is to join a photography club of some kind.

That might be in the form of an actual in-person club in your area or be an online club like the forums we have on PhotographyTalk.

Either way, having other photography enthusiasts around is immeasurably helpful because you have a ready-made support system to help you out when you need it.

### It's not unlike working out...

You can tackle it yourself at home with some DVDs, but we all know that actually going to a gym and having a workout buddy will get you better results in the end.

If you're serious about becoming a better photographer, get connected with other photographers so you have that same kind of support as you continue to learn and grow.

### Failure is the Only Option

Not to end on a sour note, but this is probably the most important realization a beginner photographer can make - you will fail, and fail often.



REALLY EXAMINE THE PHOTOS AND PULL OUT THE DETAILS THAT SPEAK TO YOU.



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I talked in the first article about how perfection is not attainable in photography. The inverse - failure - is definitely an option, though.

However, failing in photography shouldn't be viewed as something you've done wrong, but as a learning experience.

That photo you took of your kids that has a distracting background - use that as inspiration to work on noticing what's behind your portrait subjects in the future.

That landscape photo you took last weekend that's overexposed - take that experience to learn more about exposure and how to control it.

The point is that failure in photography isn't something that's going to go away...

Even the most famous and successful photographers screw things up.

But what makes them different from beginners is that they know how to fix

those mistakes.

The more mistakes you make, the more opportunities you have to learn, and the more you learn, the better equipped you'll be to fix mistakes in the future.

It's a bit of a vicious cycle, but trust me - all that practice in getting better and not repeating your mistakes will pay dividends!



## The Filter That Removes Light Pollution

Light pollution is a common problem among nightscape photographers. Either it's within a city or out in nature, it has the potential to make an image less appealing. Every now and then an image can benefit from the orange color cast but this is rarely the case.

NiSi Filters recently announced their latest addition to their family; the Natural Night filter, a filter which removes light pollution. I've been testing it in various settings around my hometown during the last couple of weeks and it does a great job removing the color cast but is it as groundbreaking as many claims?

### NiSi Natural Night Filter

The Natural Night filter is NiSi's first filter dedicated solely to night photography. As of writing this, the filter is only available for their 100x100mm holder systems (V5 or V5Pro). This means that I haven't been able to test the filters on my Nikkor

14-24mm f/2.8 which is my go-to lens for night photography. Instead, I've relied on my Nikkor 16-35mm f/4 (not the best for this purpose due to a more shallow aperture) and a Fujinon 23mm f/1.4. I've spoken with the great people over at NiSi, though, and by my understanding, a 150mm version will most likely be released soon.

NiSi describes their latest filter as this: Between mercury vapor, sodium and Low CRI streetlights, there are many undesirable wavelengths of light that pollute the night sky. The glow from these can keep your camera from seeing the sky properly and affects your night images. Because of this, NiSi has created the Natural Night Filter to block the most common wavelengths of light pollution. Like the rest of the NiSi line, this filter is made of high quality, precision annealed, optical glass. Its surface is finely ground and polished to

ensure sharpness for today's ultra high megapixel cameras.

A filter that removes light pollution has a great potential to become an essential tool in a night photographer's backpack as it definitely eliminates an essential problem.

### Quality in Focus

There's one thing I've learned after using NiSi filters for more than a year: quality is important for them. Their filters keep impressing me and the overall quality of their products are extremely high (I still haven't got any significant scratches after one year of tough use).

The NiSi Natural Night filter is no exception and it appears to be of an equally high quality. I don't fear that it will be broken easily either.

The NiSi Natural Night Filter features NiSi's unique NANO Coating technology. This multi-layer coating reduces reflection on the surface of the filter to help with ghosting and flare. It also includes a protective layer that makes it easy

THE GLOW FROM THESE CAN KEEP YOUR CAMERA FROM SEEING THE SKY PROPERLY AND AFFECTS YOUR NIGHT IMAGES.



# The Camera Club of Central Minnesota

## The Filter That Removes Light Pollution (cont)



to wipe off water, dust, and oil from the filter without worrying about scratching your glass. The NANO Coating process achieves this without loss in sharpness.

### NiSi Natural Night Case Studies

I'll admit. The weather has been quite boring in my region lately and the surroundings haven't been particularly photogenic during either day or night. Luckily, we got a few days of clear nights (and even some northern lights) which made for interesting conditions to put the filter to work.

All the case study images are unprocessed and straight out of the camera (unless anything else is stated). This allows a better understanding of how it performs.

### Distant Light Pollution

Despite my camera switching to shooting only JPGs sometime during the night, this was the scenario where I saw the biggest difference by using the filter. The original image was flat and boring, with an undesirable yellowish color cast as a result of the city located in the distance behind the hills.

You can see a big difference between the two images and the light pollution was completely eliminated when using the Natural Night filter. The added magenta color looks good for this type of photography and looks more natural than what was captured in the

first image.

### Northern Lights

It's not often we get Northern Lights here so when I saw that the activity was supposed to be high and we had clear skies, I ran out as quickly as possible. The location where I took the images is one of my go-to places to check the activity of the Aurora and to decide whether I should head further. Since there's a small amount of light pollution due to the distant town, I figured this would be a good opportunity to test the NiSi Natural Night filter's performance with the Northern Lights.

Initially, I was a bit skeptic on how it would affect the color of the Northern Lights and if it would try to neutralize it as well. I was happy to see that it didn't. In fact, I think the filter did a great job in removing some of the unwanted color cast within the lights themselves. You can also see how the lights from the distant town have been neutralized and don't take as much attention from the image anymore.

### Impact on Luminosity

The Natural Night filter has a slight impact on the brightness of an image. It's not as dominant as an ND Filter or even a Polarizer but I calculate it to darken the image with approximately 0.5 stops.

A 0.5 stop decrease in brightness has very little impact on the image and

quite honestly, you won't even notice this.

### Natural Night vs Adobe Lightroom

My biggest question when testing the Natural Night filter was: how hard is it to replicate the exact same effect in Adobe Lightroom or another RAW editor?

The truth is, I'm able to remove the light pollution relatively easy by using Lightroom and it took me less than a minute to make the image taken without the filter to look more or less the same as the image with the filter.

If there's a lot of different light sources it might be harder to replicate the filter's effect but by tweaking the hue/saturation sliders it is possible.

However, the filter also removes some flare from the image, which is much harder and more time-consuming to do in post production.

Keep in mind that these images aren't taken within a major city with a high amount of light pollution and the filter might perform slightly different in such a scenario.

### Conclusion

Despite the fact that you're able to remove a lot of the light pollution in post production I can clearly see its value for night photography.

By using the filter you maintain the details and brightness in the highlights even though adjustments are made to the tint and temperature.

I just hope that the 150mm version of this filter will be released soon!

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## Digital Blending

Digital Blending is a Post Production Technique You Need to Get a Hold Of If that's the case, how come you're still not using it as much as you could be?

If you're a landscape, cityscape or nightscape photographer, many a time you would have come across situations where you felt that your images looked, well....flat. They probably lacked color and vibrance and maybe looked very dull and boring.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that you need to blend and create some art on your screen.

So, despite taking the time to compose the image and get it right, your photo still fails to perform. Huge bummer – honestly, this sucks.

Sometimes, however hard as you try, the weather, lighting and other similar conditions can result in nothing but... uninteresting images.

There are graduated filters that sometimes do a better job, but manually blending the images to create an image that has correct details in all places is the best step forward. Learning digital blending in photography is going to be the next step to creating images you'd be proud to call your own!

But don't lose heart there yet, there is a solution for all of these and the best solution is to use digital blending techniques to bring out all the details that you wished you could have had in your image. Let's start from the beginning...

### What is Digital Blending?

As the name suggests, digital blending is a technique used mostly by landscape photographers (also by other photographers) and is combining together two or more versions of the same image digitally using software like Photoshop.

Basically, you work with layers, using the layer mask method.

The final image is created by revealing or hiding different parts of each layer so that the best areas from all layers are visible in the final image.

The photographer takes at least two images, for example, if it is a landscape where there is huge contrast between a bright sky and the foreground that may appear dark in the image, the photographer takes one image correctly exposed for the sky and another image correctly exposed for the foreground.

These are then blended together and layer masks used to reveal correctly exposed areas from each layer.

There are various blending methods that can be used based on the needs of the photographer and there are some techniques that do not require working with masks at all.

So, in order for you to get started with digital blending, here are some basic tips and techniques that we think will help you:

### Gear and Camera Settings

Digital blending requires different brackets of the same frame. It is best to use a camera that can be controlled manually for aperture, shutter speed and exposure.

You do not want to move your camera and lose out important details and elements in the frame due to camera movements – hence using a tripod preferably with a remote trigger is very important when exposing for the same shot multiple times.

Always shoot RAW and use the same aperture values for all the shots in the series. Keep an eye on the metering settings on your camera.

Matrix evaluation metering is the best for landscapes and architecture/cityscape images and these are the type of images that are most commonly considered for digital blending.

### Exposure Bracketing

This is the basic when it comes to digital blending as you need more than one image of the same frame but with different exposure bracketing.

Take at least two exposure brackets of the same image, one with the brighter areas correctly exposed and another one with the darker regions correctly exposed and blend them together.

If you are working with more than two images, say for example 3 or 5 images, the best thing to do is to shoot in steps of 2 EV if you are doing three brackets (-2, 0, +2) or 1 EV step if you are doing



**IT SHOULDN'T COME AS A SURPRISE THAT YOU NEED TO BLEND AND CREATE SOME ART ON YOUR SCREEN.**





## CAMERA CLUB OF CENTRAL MINNESOTA

Membership is \$25 per year. Members should provide: Email Address, Mailing Address, and Phone Number.

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The Camera Club of Central Minnesota publishes a monthly newsletter which is distributed via e-mail. The newsletter will contain information about up-coming meetings, summaries of previous meeting, recommendations for photographers, announcements of photographic workshops, and other material that seems appropriate.

If you would like to send suggestions, comments, or other communications concerning the club or newsletter, please send your e-mail to [rheath@tds.net](mailto:rheath@tds.net).

## Digital Blending (continued)

five brackets (-2, -1, 0, +1, +2).

**WARNING:** – Do not wait for too long between shots of the same scene, especially if it is a sunrise, sunset or there are moving clouds, winds or other moving elements.

Best is to use the Auto Exposure bracketing function as it helps to take pictures quickly without having to touch the camera.

There are various methods to utilize digital blending in photography, ones used by pro photographers each depending on what they need to create.

### Blending Using the HDR Technique

Using the HDR technique is a process where the photographer takes multiple exposures of the same image with different exposure values (a range of bracketed images) and blends them together.

Most of the time, it is three exposures (one underexposed, one correctly exposed and one overexposed), which are then blended using software to create the final photograph.

### Blending Using the Gradient Mask

Most landscape photographers use a piece of glass in front of their lens called a graduated neutral density filter to darken very bright areas, mostly the sky while maintaining the correct exposure for the other areas.

This can be created in photoshop using the gradient tool technique.

As with all blending methods, this requires you to capture two images; one exposed for shadows (darker regions) and another exposed for highlights (brighter regions). These are then blended together using the gradient tool in a software like photoshop.

Create a layer mask. With the gradient tool selected, draw a line from above the center of the image to just below the center of the image to reveal the correct details from both images. Certainly, a very quick and easy technique to start with!

### Using Luminosity Masks

The most powerful of them all is blending images using luminosity masks. So, what is a luminosity mask? It is a layer mask that hides certain tonal ranges in the image and reveals others.

The masks are created using the image itself, making transitions between the black and white parts smooth and hence does not create those harsh edges or halos.

This method may seem complicated and time-consuming at first, but with practice, you can master this technique and create beautiful images in minutes.

There are a lot of photoshop actions available online free to download. You can make use of them for a start till you create your own masks!

Having a good understanding of masking techniques and use of brushes is a must, to start with exposure blending techniques. There are good tutorials online that are very quick and easy to understand.

