What <u>NOT</u> To Do…

As a Smugmug Pro online photo user for 3 years, I've followed their Challenges and watched photographers show images as well as interest on their Landscape forum at DGrin. Several recent image posts and viewer garner follow-ups attracted my attention. Of some 300 photos, I applied workflow techniques described below to selected images during an ad hoc evaluation.

Results were dismaying…

Using simple Lightroom 3 workflow while adjusting channel clipping, extending clarity and vibrance, enhancing contrast, as well as sharpening landscape clearly improved ~10% of selected images 20-50%. It takes less than a minute per image.

With Photoshop CS4, more deserving images can be adjusted until they present breathtaking fine art!

DGrin (Smugmug's online forum)

Two weeks ago, in subfreezing nights, several Arizona photographers camped at White Pocket. Then, they posted some images on the forum. It quickly became clear - the wonder of digital photography creates a tantalizing offshore tsunami effect ready to sweep the distant online photo community into nature. Clearly, there's a desire out there "I want to shoot (you fill in the blank)…!"

In [More Unique Arizona](), Aaron Newman from Phoenix showed 4 images. My favorite is *Upheaval*. Joel Gringorten showed seven unnamed images in *Arizona Obscura*. I like number 6.

Some 30 photographers from across the US penned 90 comments between 10 - 23 December. Other Landscape entries did not stir *nearly* as much interest.

In addition, an intriguing, well-written late 2009 article in [Naturalbornhiker]() shows over 200 images. In an unusual manner, the writer attached whimsical names to some of the more outstanding White Pocket features.

The blue underlined entries are links to the Web; save this document as a PDF. Open the PDF and click on the links to see what magic the Web has to offer.

Photography Critique
Composition and Judging

Four years of camera club and state digital competitions have honed several aspects of dedicated fine art photography. A professional judge evaluates 100-150 images per month over nine months for a camera club with some 200+ members. They discuss composition, blown channels, color balance, tone mapping, and other salient ingredients – stating positive and negative aspects of each image. Simply put, I've watched some 4000 images critiqued.

I had competed at magazine photo contest levels. After the first year, I began competing at state fair levels. Instead of a single judge, these affairs are more formal - juried competitions with three to five judges deciding if an image is worthy of merit. At state fair level, I've watched another 3000 images critiqued. Several of my HDR images have placed in single competitions; *Ship Rock* has placed quite well in three recent juried competitions.

This experience has sharpened my perception of what it really takes to create strong emotional impact in a fine art image.

Present Status of Many Online Images

Available digital photography for White Pocket tends to fall in 2 general categories; broad landscape shots or the occasional, closely cropped feature. The average image tends to be a single frame. There may be oversaturation of shadows to compensate for either camera limitations or photographer experience level. While most HDR shots appear garishly overdone, a few just begin to approach memorable reality judges would honor in competition.

In a review of over 300 White Pocket images posted on the web, simply adjusting channel clipping, extending clarity and vibrance, enhancing contrast, and landscape sharpening improved selected images 20-40%.

Clearly, just getting there and shooting is not enough – you must compose, tone map, and refine each image with great care!

What TO Do

Like most trends in photography, lack of fine art photography at White Pocket will soon be remedied. Several constraints presently seem to inhibit adequate artistic capture.

After uploading several hundred digital images, I use Lightroom 3 to pick Keepers. Although it's best to do as much composition and clipping in camera as you can, after capture global processing its just a matter of globally adjusting the image.

First, look at your histogram in Develop mode - Basic tab. Turn on clipping indicators (vertical triangles - top right; top left). Adjusting Exposure changes highlight clipping; adjusting Blacks changes shadow clipping. Reduce any clipping to a black triangle. If necessary, use Recovery and Fill Light to shift the histogram spectrum more to mid tones. For a final sequence step, adjust clarity and vibrance.

Using sliders from Tone Curve, add contrast (I like medium). If necessary, use Targeted Adjustment Tool for local variations in tone.

Finally, under Presets, click Sharpen - Landscapes. If necessary, modify Amount of sharpening under Details tab.

If farther adjustments are needed, Photoshop CS4 add subtle local refinements using masks, channels, and adjustment tools.

Full Range HDR Fine Art Processing

No one has really used Full Range HDR, emphasized the scintillating color range, used careful tone mapping, and created the exquisite fine art nature truly deserves.

Come with Joe; let him take you beyond just nature photography into capturing and crafting fantastic pictorial natural history stories as you re-create fine art photography from long ago and far away...

We will shoot 2 photographic categories - Nature (sky) and Intimate Landscapes (no sky). The first is broad brush landscape or portrait capture; the second is Mother Nature's way of creating such startling close up reminders of a candy factory.

Bottom Line

Shooting and posting images on the Internet without due regard for proper tone mapping can tell a fine art connoisseur with just an instinctive glance,

"This photographer has not really applied due diligence. I don't want that fine art piece on my wall...!"

Poof...

Why not take Joe's workflow in 2010 Adventure Digital Tours seriously? He can teach *you* how to create fine art!