How I did it
by Chris Axe

Special thanks to Kim Walker

Story of this image

This photo was taken in Garrapata State Park at the very first gate as you head south. It took about 15 minutes to figure out how to get down the cliffs to this location but, turned to be not that difficult.

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How this photo was shot

- Taken on a tripod
- Camera: Canon 5D Mark III
- Lens: 16-35mm f/2.8 L II Canon
- Filters: Two Lee Graduated Soft Neutral Density filters, one 0.9 and the other 0.6 to darken the sky
- Three shots (+1 ½ EV, 0EV, -1 ½ EV)
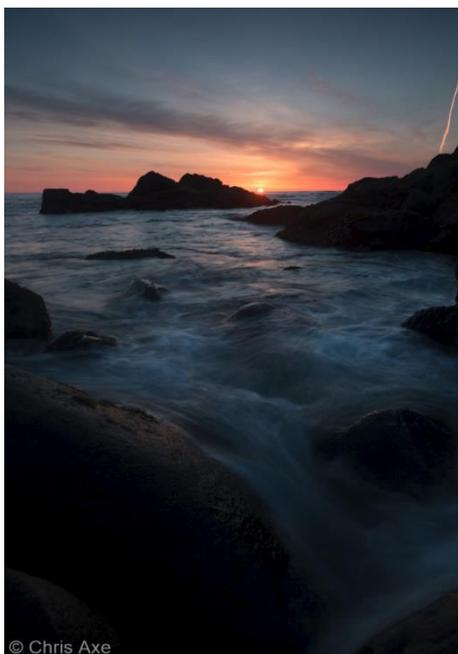- Base shot 1.5 seconds

Lee Filter System

- Three slot filter holder
- Graduated Neutral Density filters
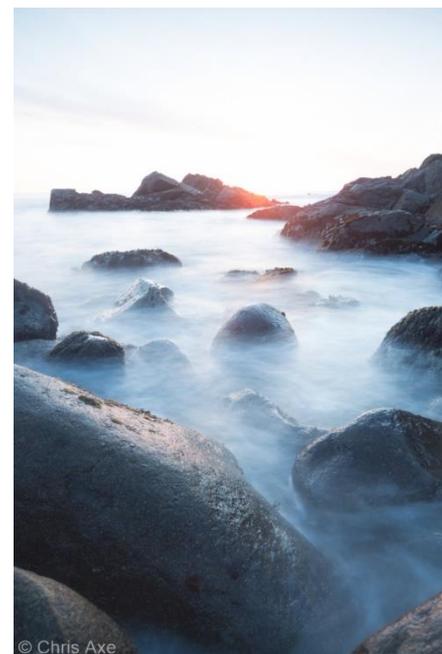
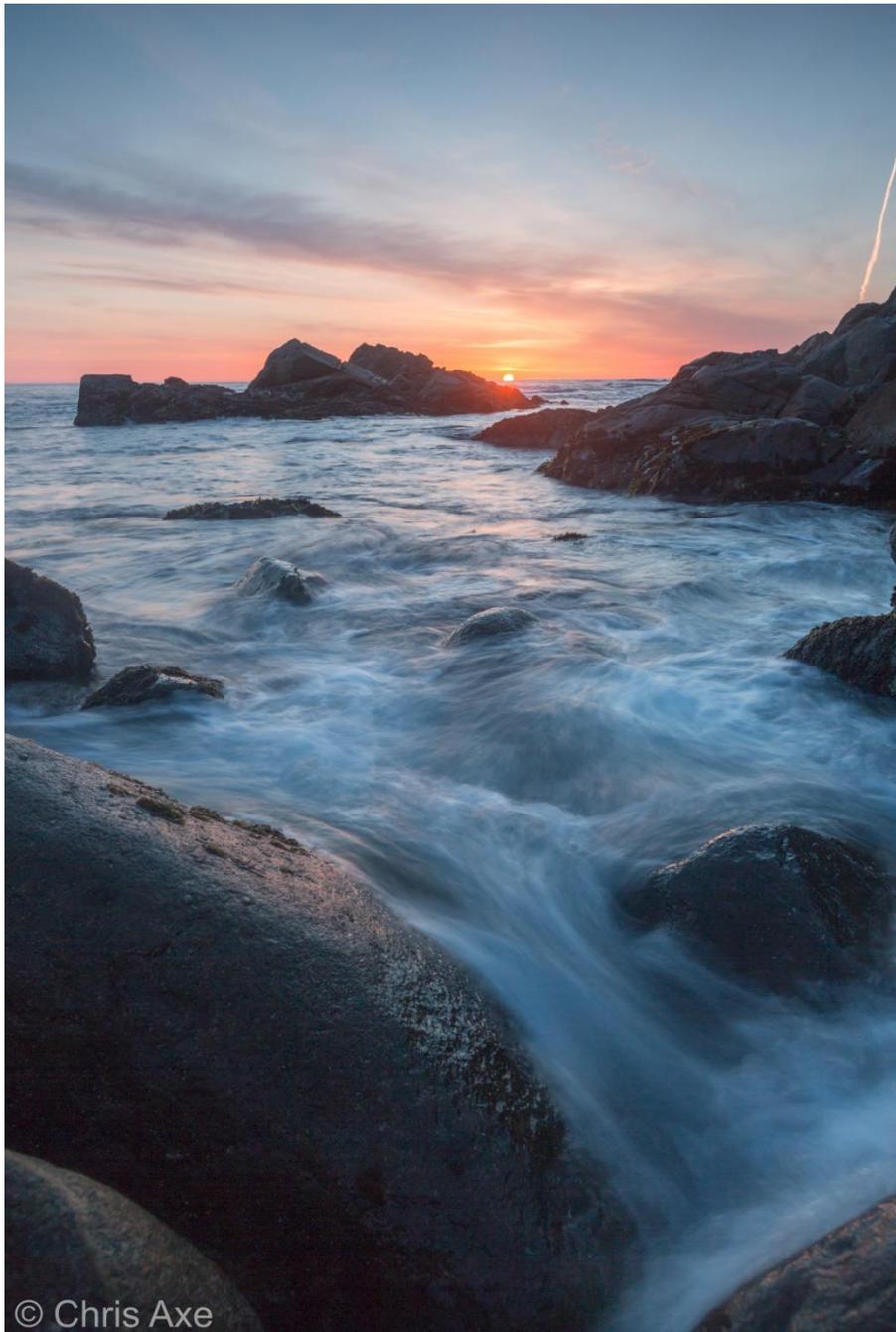© Chris Axe

Original Three Exposures

0EV

-1 ½ EV

+1 ½ EV

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How initial raw file was processed in Lightroom

- Selected -1 ½ EV image since wave looked the best

- Applied noise reduction to the image

- Applied Chromatic Aberration reduction to the image

- Increased exposure by +2.02 EV

- Increased shadows by +64

- Decreased highlights by -86

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Final Image

How image was processed in Photoshop

Local adjustments

o Sky
  - Curves layer for more contrast and adjust color balance

o Left Rock
  - Curves layer for more contrast and adjust color balance
  - Curves layer to darken lower left rock
  - +1 ½ EV image to bring in more shadow detail with 28% opacity

o Far Rock
  - Curves layer for more contrast and adjust color balance
  - +1 ½ EV image to bring in more shadow detail with 15% opacity
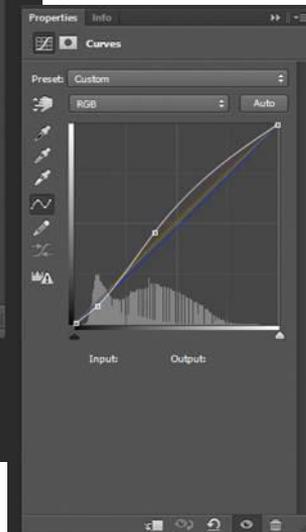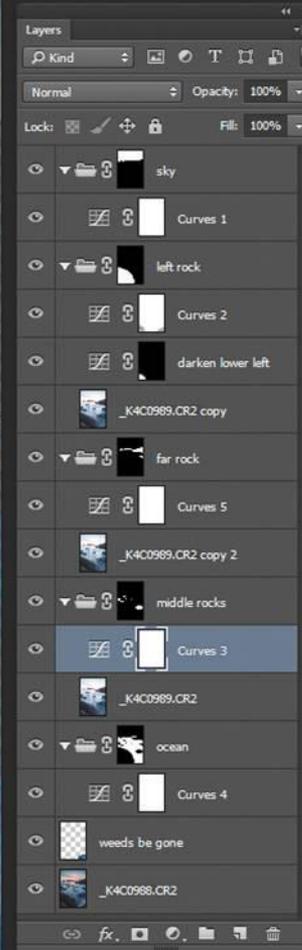
o Middle Rocks
  - Curves layer for more contrast and adjust color balance
  - +1 ½ EV image to bring in more shadow detail with 18% opacity
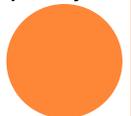
How image was processed in Photoshop

Local adjustments

- Ocean
  - Curves layer for more contrast and adjust color balance

- Weeds be Gone
  - Retouch layer to remove aircraft contrail (spot healing brush), lower right rock (patch tool) and dust spots (spot healing brush)

Final adjustments of the processed image in Lightroom

Story of this image

This was my third attempt at photographing Bixby Bridge at night with the Milky Way. The first attempt conditions were very windy, and the images were blurred. The second attempt I only encountered north bound cars whose headlights shined directly into the camera, giving unsatisfactory results.

On the third attempt the conditions were perfect. There was no wind, and this time I took an additional image of the sky and panned up to get the entire Milk Way. This time I did a two image panorama.

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How this photo was shot

- Taken on a tripod
- Camera: Canon 5D Mark III
- Lens: 14mm f/2.8 L II Canon
- Three shots
  - Bixby Bridge and coastline 5 min at f/2.8 and ISO 1200
  - First sky shot 30 sec at f/2.8 and ISO 2000
  - Second sky shot panned up 30 sec at f/2.8 and ISO 2000

Original Three Exposures

5 min at f/2.8 ISO 1250

30 sec at f/2.8 ISO 2000

30 sec at f/2.8 ISO 2000

No Lightroom adjustments are made prior to processing in Photoshop

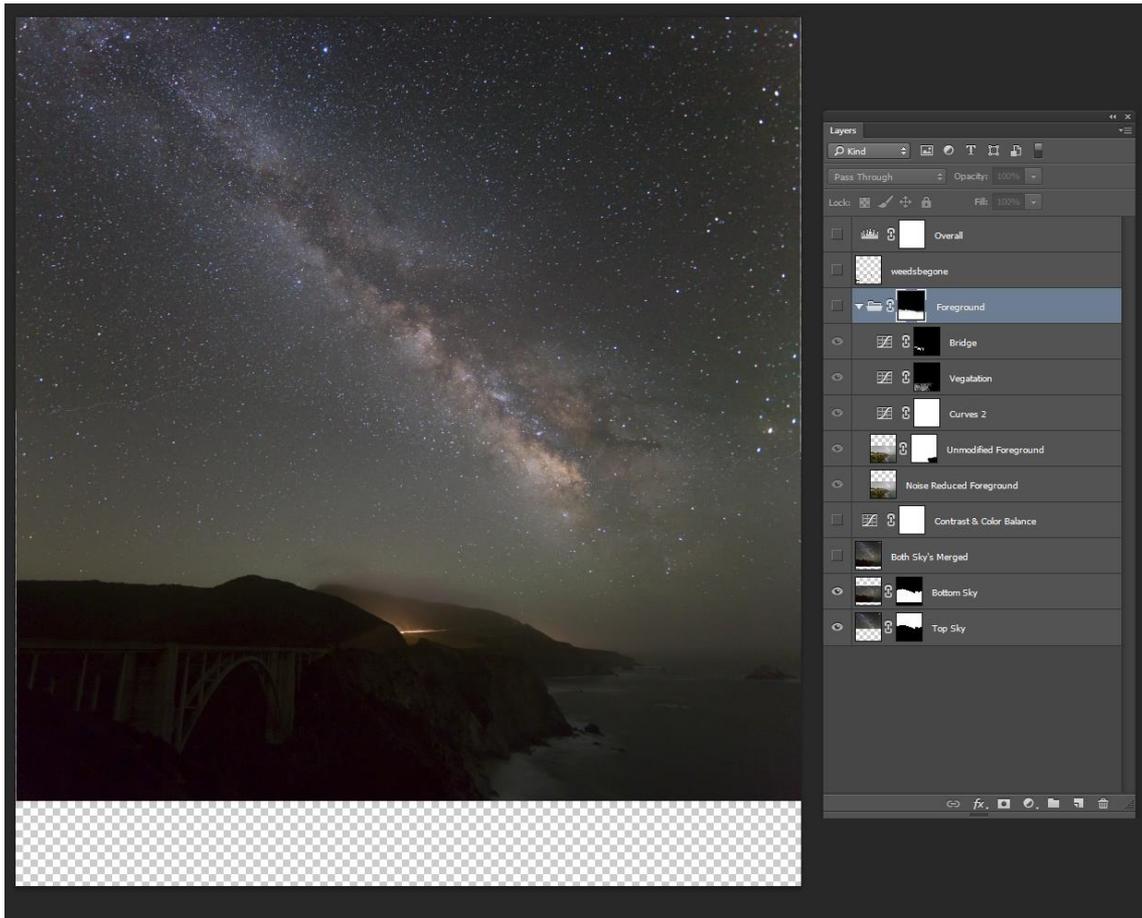# How image was processed in Photoshop

Photomerge

- Sky
  - The two images of the sky are stitched together in Photoshop using Photomerge

Merge Layers

- Both stitched sky images are merged into a single layer to aide in selection of the sky for masking

How image was processed in Photoshop

Addition of the Bridge and coastline

Foreground Group

- The bridge and coastline image is added to this group. Then a mask is applied that merges both sky and foreground seamlessly.

- A noise reduced portion of the foreground image is masked in to remove excessive noise.
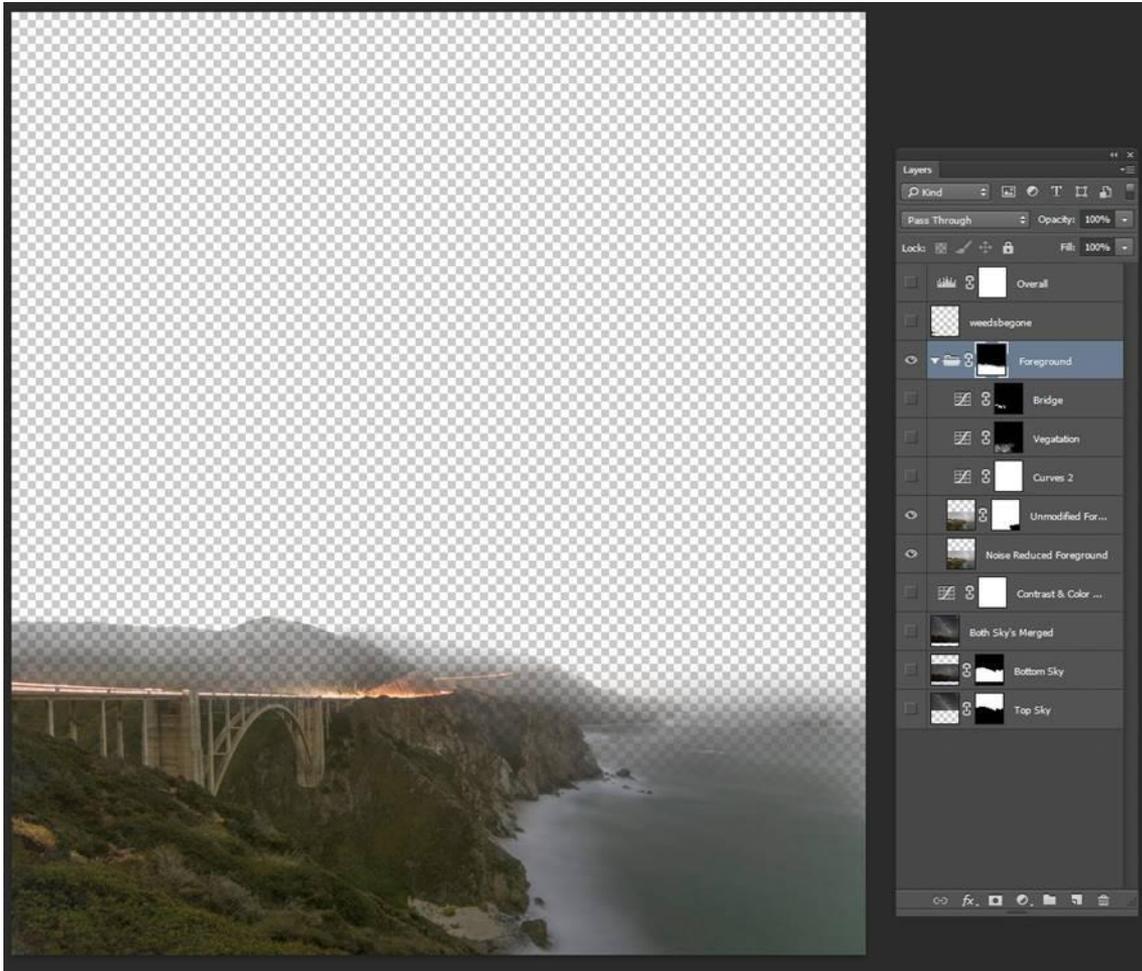
How image was processed in Photoshop

Local adjustments

- Sky
  - Curves layer for more contrast and adjust color balance
- Vegetation
  - Curves layer to brighten the foreground vegetation
- Bridge and Light Trail
  - Curves layer to brighten the bridge and light trail
- Weeds be Gone
  - Retouch layer to remove dust spots and noise
- Overall
  - A Levels layer to increase contrast and brighten entire image

Final adjustments of the processed image in Lightroom

Story of this image

This tree is in Pacific Grove just off Lighthouse down from Holman's. I have always wanted to photograph it because it's so unusual. I waited for late afternoon when the sun was beginning to set.

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How this photo was shot

- Taken on a tripod
- Camera: Canon 5D Mark III
- Lens: 16-35mm f/2.8 L II Canon
- Three shots (+1 ½ EV, 0EV, -1 ½ EV)

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Original Three Exposures

0EV   -1 ½ EV   +1 ½ EV

How the 32 bit HDR was created and tone mapped

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- Resulting 32 bit HDR created from the original RAW images (+1 ½ EV, 0 EV, -1 ½ EV) with Photoshop - Merge to HDR Pro

- Applied noise reduction to the 32 bit image

- Applied Chromatic Aberration reduction to the 32 bit image

- Tone mapped 32 bit image with Lightroom

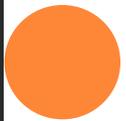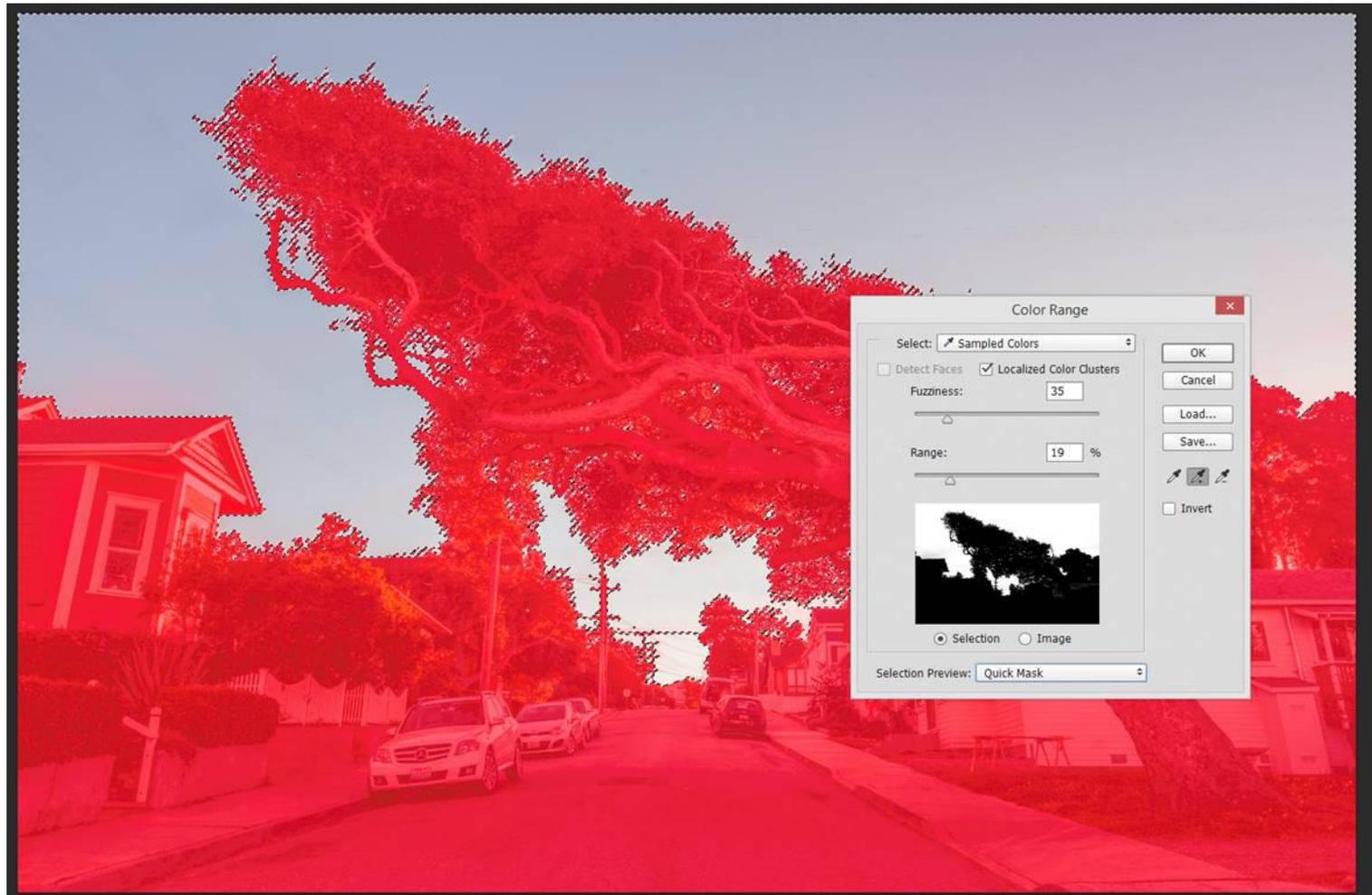# How image was processed in Photoshop

Retouch

- Weeds Be Gone
  - Telephone and power lies removed with clone stamp tool and spot healing brush

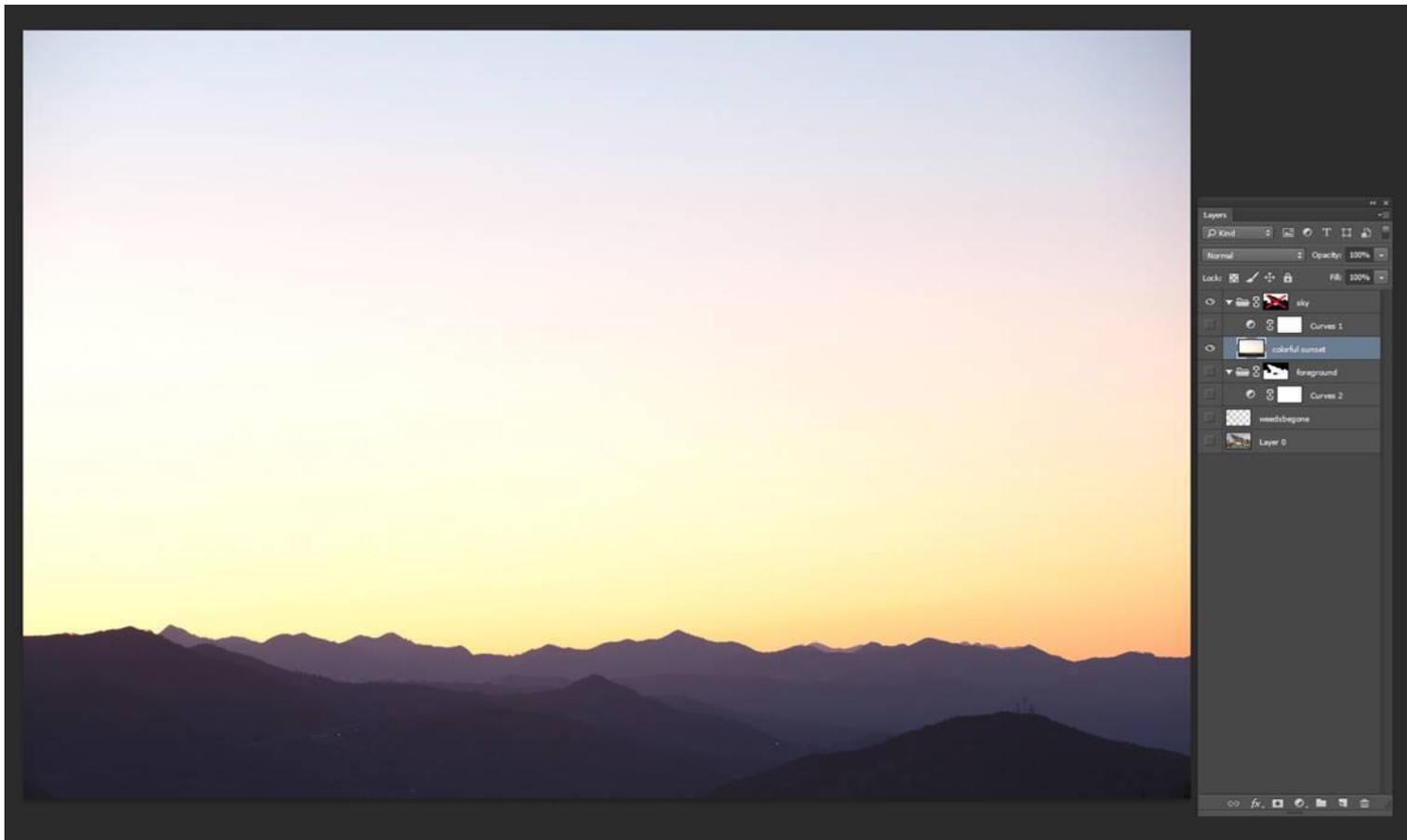# How image was processed in Photoshop

Local Adjustments

- Select Sky
  - Use the color range tool to select the sky even in the tiny openings in the leaves of the tree

How image was processed in Photoshop

Replace Sky

- Sky Group
  - Add a more colorful sky to the dull grey sky

How image was processed in Photoshop

Local adjustments

- Sky
  - Curves layer for more contrast and a colorful sunset layer added with opacity at 71%

- Foreground
  - Curves layer to brighten the foreground to bring more detail from under the tree

Image is perspective corrected and other final adjustments of the processed image are made in Lightroom

Story of this image

The Silver Lake with Dragon in Carson Pass, CA is near Kirkwood Ski Resort. We had to hike in about a mile from Highway 88 to get to this view of the lake and mountain. This evening there was some beautiful light with lenticular clouds. This is a six shot panorama.

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How this photo was shot

- Taken on a tripod
- Camera: Canon 5D Mark III
- Lens: 24-105mm f/4L Canon
- Filters: Two Lee Graduated Soft Neutral Density filters, one 0.9 and the other 0.6 to darken the sky
- Six shot panoramic
- Really Right Stuff Panoramic Gear

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Really Right Stuff multi-row panorama gear
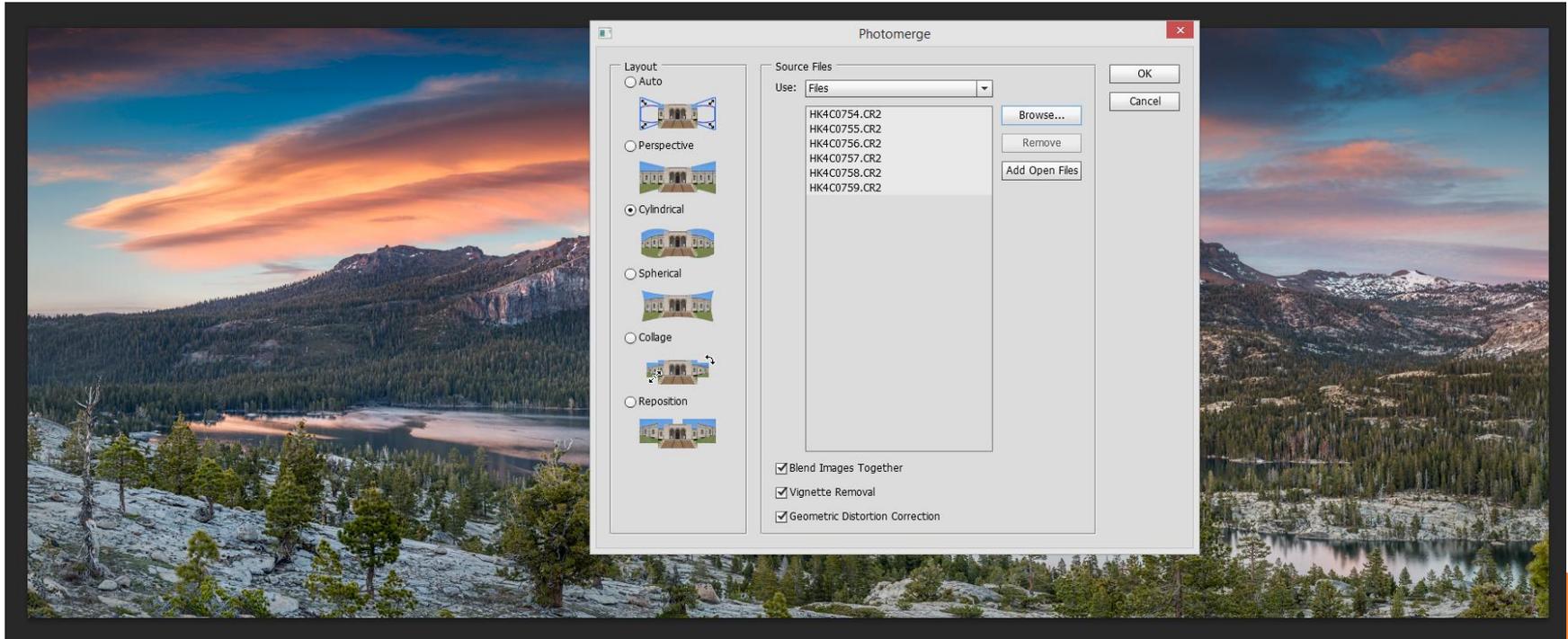
Original Six Exposures

All at 60mm for 1 sec at f/16

How image was processed in Photoshop

Stitching

- Photo Merge
  - Layout Cylindrical
  - Blend Images Together
  - Vignette Removal
  - Geometric Distortion Correction

How image was processed in Photoshop

Local Adjustments

○ Dragon Rock Formation

- Levels to increase contrast (Top picture)
- Light Bleed with Orange Brush to add more color to the Dragon (Bottom picture)
- Light Bleed uses a Soft Light layer filled with a neutral gray and a brush color to match that of the light

How image was processed in Photoshop

Local Adjustments

- Trees
  - Light Bleed with Orange Brush to add more color to the trees (Bottom picture)

How image was processed in Photoshop

Local Adjustments

- Overall
  - Levels layer to increase contrast in trees
  - Levels layer to overall lighten
  - Hue/Saturation layer to reduce blue saturation

Story of this image

This shot is of the Hart Victorian Mansion in Pacific Grove. It was photographed from the sidewalk just feet from the stairway of the house. This was accomplished by taking a multi-row panorama of 2 rows and 5-6 images in each row.

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How this photo was shot

- Taken on a tripod
- Camera: Canon 5D Mark III
- Lens: 16-35mm f/2.8L II Canon
- 11 shot two row panoramic
- Really Right Stuff Panoramic Gear

© Chris Axe

Original Eleven Exposures

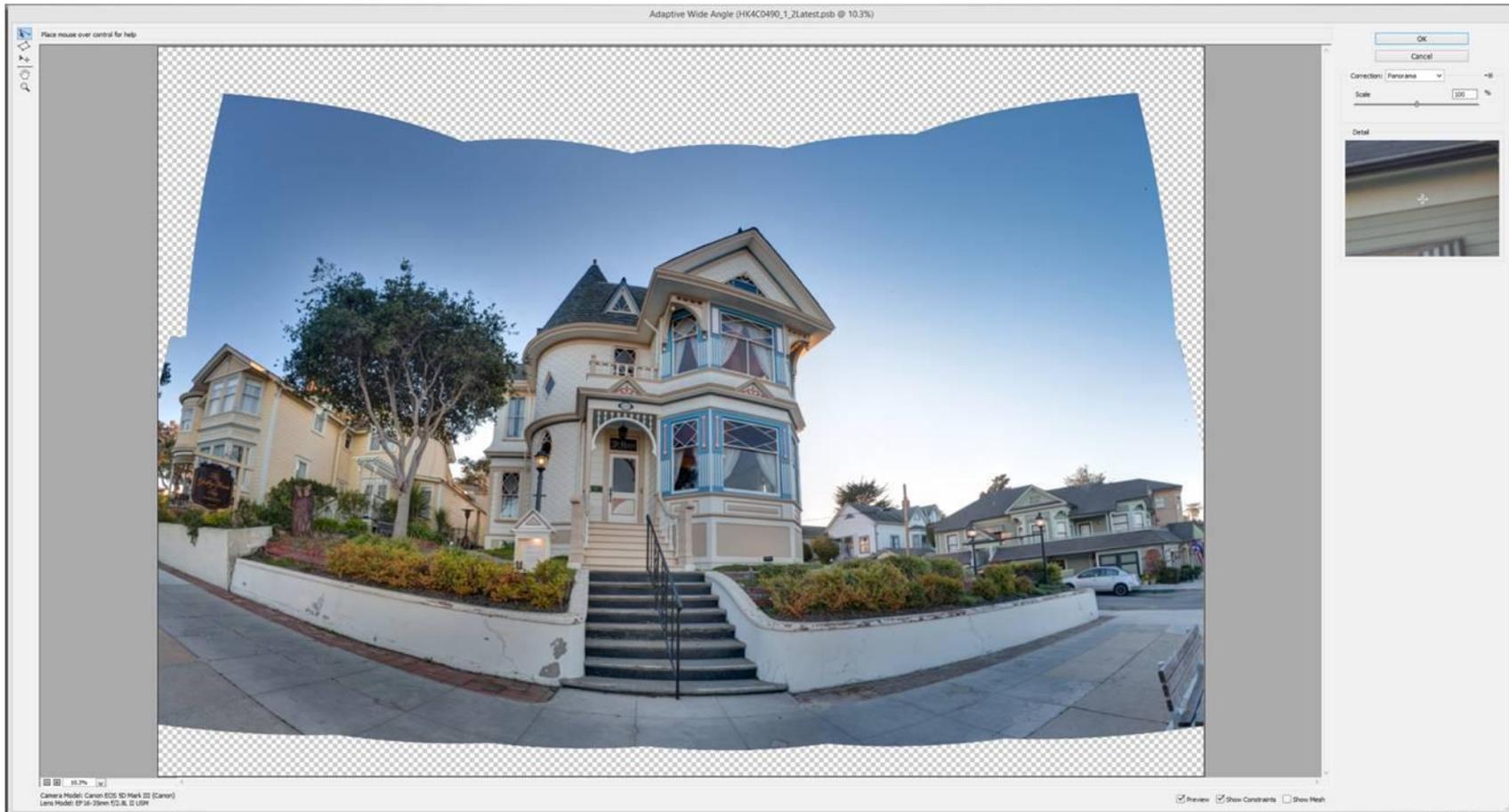# How image was processed in Photoshop

Stitching

- Photo Merge
  - Layout Cylindrical
  - Blend Images Together
  - Vignette Removal
  - Geometric Distortion Correction

How image was processed in Photoshop

Adaptive Wide Angle

- Correct Distortion
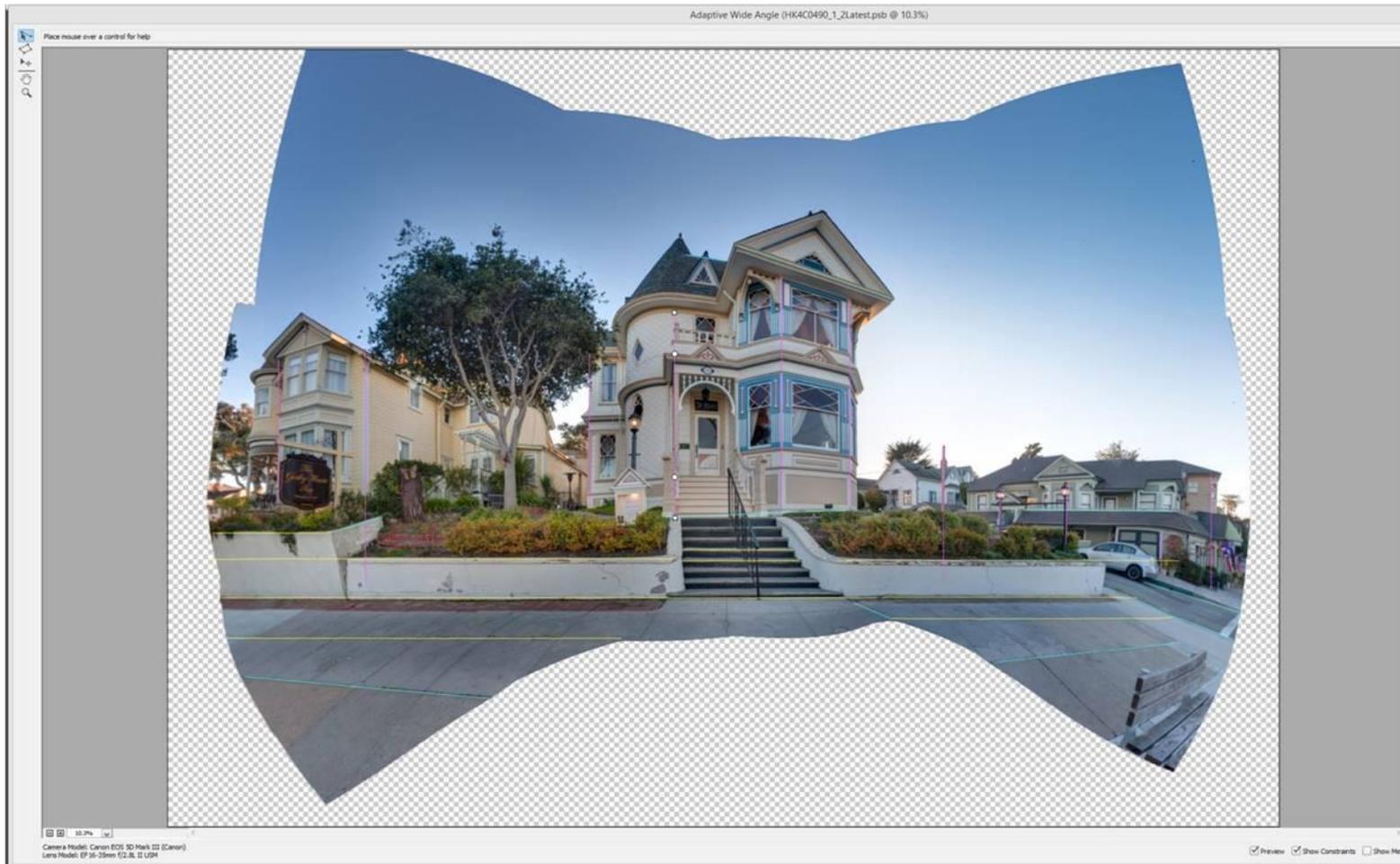 - Use Constraint Tool to fix distortion

How image was processed in Photoshop

Adaptive Wide Angle

- Constraint Tool
  - Horizontal lines are yellow
  - Vertical lines are pink
  - Unfixed straight lines are blue

How image was processed in Photoshop

Back to Photoshop Main

- Initial Cropping
  - Crop image exported from Adaptive Wide Angle

How image was processed in Photoshop

Local Adjustments

- Fix stitching errors

- Weeds be Gone for retouching

- Sky Group
    - Add clouds, more colorful sky, adjust luminosity and reduce saturation

- Overall Adjustments
    - Adjust contrast and reduce saturation

© Chris Axe

Story of this image

This photo was taken in Garrapata State Park at the very first gate as you head south. The ocean was very calm when I first arrived but, as a front moved in, the sea became rough. The scene also became very dramatic with clouds blanketing the sky and the sunset visible through a slit on the horizon.

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- Lens: 16-35mm f/2.8 L II Canon
- Filters: Two Lee Graduated Soft Neutral Density filters, one 0.9 and the other 0.6 to darken the sky
- Three shots (+1 ½ EV, 0EV, -1 ½ EV)
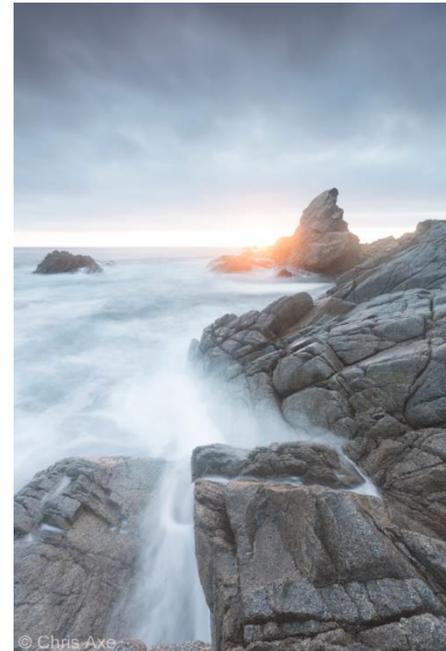- Base shot 1 ½ seconds
- ISO 100

Original Three Exposures

0EV   -1 ½ EV   +1 ½ EV

How initial raw file was processed in Lightroom

- Selected 0 EV image since wave action looked the best

- Applied noise reduction to the image

- Applied Chromatic Aberration reduction to the image

- Increased exposure by +.24 EV

- Increased shadows by +100

- Decreased highlights by -100

Final Image

How image was processed in Photoshop

Local adjustments

- Sky
  - Curves layer for more contrast and adjust color balance
  - Reduce saturation with Hue/Saturation layer

- Left Rock
  - Curves layer for more contrast and adjust color balance
  - Light Bleed highlights

- Foreground Rock
  - Curves layer for more contrast and adjust color balance not affecting the Matterhorn rock
  - Subgroup with adjustment for Matterhorn rock
  - Light Bleed highlights
  - Burn the sun more

- Ocean
  - Curves layer for more contrast and adjust color balance
  - Reduce saturation with Hue/Saturation layer

How image was processed in Photoshop

Local adjustments

o Mask in denoised sky
  - Create a noise reduced layer and mask only the sky in

o Mask in sunset from -1 ½ EV
  - Mask in sky with more detail and more color saturation

o Overall
  - Add an overall levels adjustment

Final adjustments of the processed image in Lightroom

Photoshop courses

- Photoshop for Photographers by Ben Willmore at http://www.creativelive.com
- Mask It Like a Pro! By Klaus Hermann at http://farbspiel-photo.com
- Light Bleeding at Ryan Dyer Photography http://www.ryandyarphotography.com/
- Private instruction by Chris Axe at http://www.chrisaxephotography.com/