

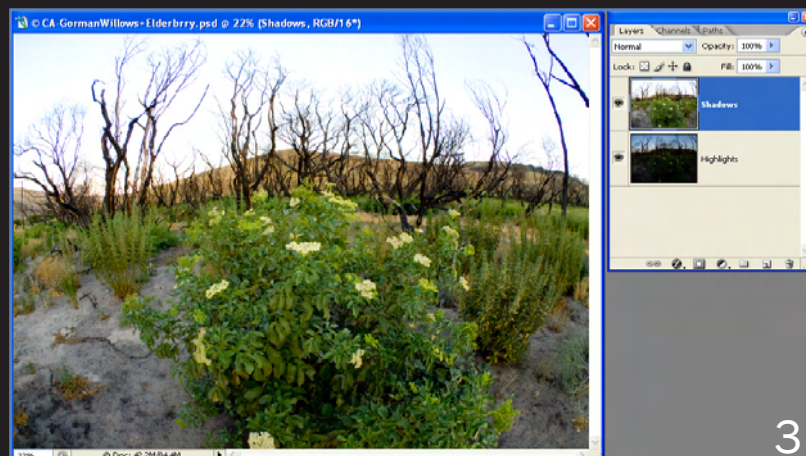
# Technique of the Month



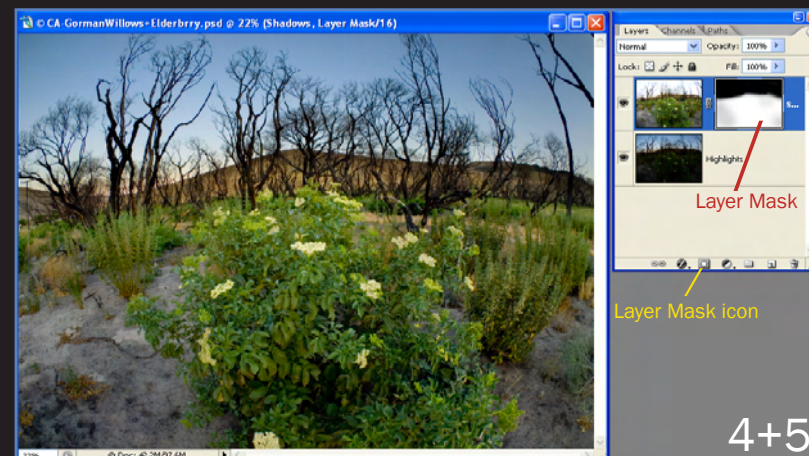
1



2



3



4+5

## Double Process RAW Files

One very important technique for nature photographers to know and use is double processing a RAW file. This often allows you to get a much better and truer rendition of tones in a scene with challenging tonalities.

In order to do this, you process the RAW file twice, once for the highlights and once for the

shadows, creating two different files that are combined in Photoshop. This allows you to process the RAW file optimally for each range of tonalities rather than doing a compromise (and challenging) single processing that, in the end, is neither satisfying nor truthfully represents the subject.

This shot is such a great example

of this technique. I shot it at dusk, actually after the sun had set. It was a burned area of willows, with a lot of ash, yet some plants, like the ubiquitous elderberry (the center plant), were coming back. There were some neat graphic elements from the ash to the green to the stark burned trees against the sky, and there was no way a single

exposure could capture what I saw in the scene.

You can see the shot processed for the bright sky at the upper left and the dark ground below it. A graduated ND filter would have helped a single exposure, but its unnatural straight edge would not have matched the hills and would have caused problems for this shot.



Final

## Double-Processing Steps:

**1** PROCESS YOUR RAW FILE FOR THE HIGHLIGHTS: Make the highlights look good and ignore what is happening to the dark areas of the image.

**2** PROCESS YOUR RAW FILE FOR THE SHADOWS: This time make the shadows look good and ignore what is happening to the dark areas of the image. Note: You can only follow this exactly with Photoshop CS2. For other versions, you have

to save the first image before you can open a differently processed photo.

**3** COMBINE THE TWO PHOTOS INTO ONE LAYERED FILE: This gets a little tricky. Either image can go on top. I usually put the one needing the least amount of change on top. To do this, move the photos in the work space until you can see them both. Then click on the photo you want to be on top. Next, while holding down the shift key, drag that image on top of the other one. Now this is very important: you must drag ALL THE WAY onto the other photo until the cursor is on that image, and you MUST keep the shift key held down, then release the button.

**4** ADD A LAYER MASK TO THE TOP PHOTO: You can just click the layer mask icon at the bottom of the layer palette – a rectangle with a circle inside it.

**5** BLEND THE TWO LAYERS WITH THE LAYER MASK: Use a large, soft brush tool. Then use the foreground color: black to block or hide that layer and its effects; white to reveal that layer or its effects. You can paint back and forth white and black as needed. Here, you can see the top of the layer mask is black, which visually removes the top of the shadow layer to allow the lower, highlight image to show through. I also used a low opacity brush on the sides (seen as gray) to make those areas darker by allowing some of the darker lower image through.



This very wide-angle shot is from a full-frame, 8mm fisheye on an Olympus E-330.

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