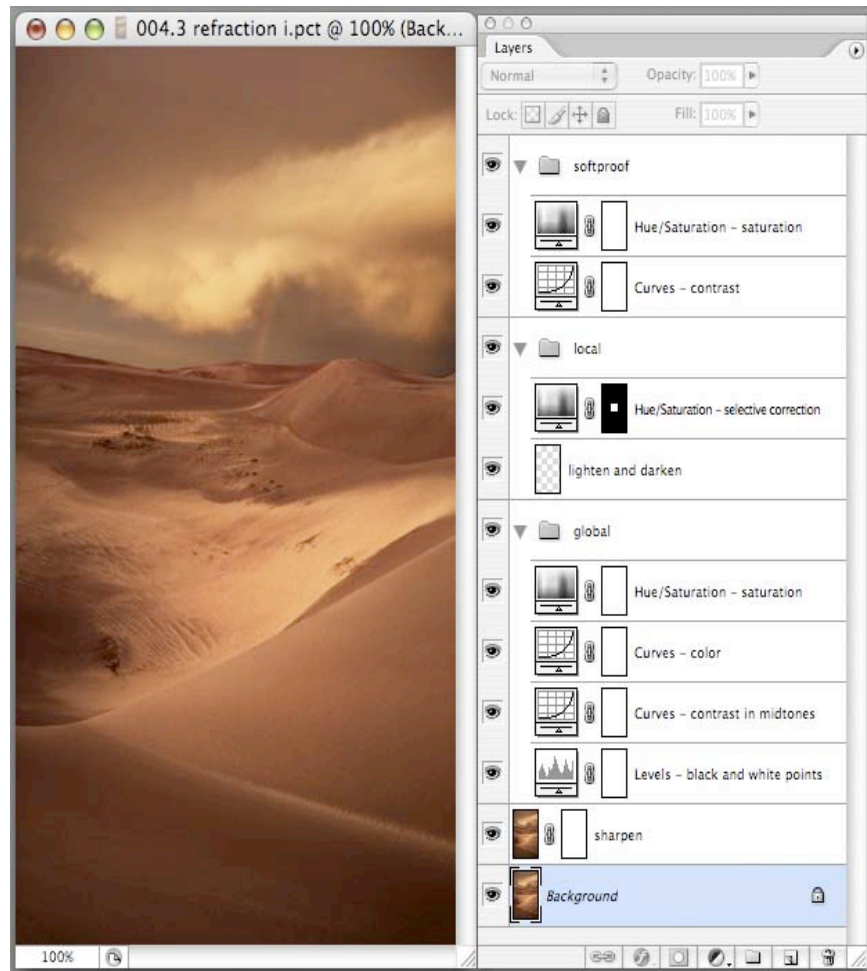


JOHN PAUL CAPONIGRO

TECHNIQUE



1. A typical layer stack for this editing strategy.

HOW TO ADJUST AN IMAGE FILE

“How do you process a digital file?”

It’s a question I’m asked frequently. Here’s my answer. This is a concise summary; I detail each step at other times (in my newsletters, in my book, *Adobe Photoshop Master Class*, in seminars, and in workshops).

I haven’t called this process a workflow, though it is part of a standard workflow. The word “workflow” is often used to describe the entire imaging process from choice of tools through capture, acquisition, editing, archiving, and output. Editing is only one part of workflow.

This strategy suits my objectives. It may or may not suit yours. To evaluate any workflow, in whole or in part, you need to identify the objectives of the person adopting it because these will create biases towards doing certain things and prejudices against doing other things. Different photographers have different needs. Even the same photographer has different needs at different times. Workflow changes accordingly. As a fine artist, my goal is to create a master file that has the best quality possible, capable of creating the best quality derivative files that are optimized for the specific media they will be output

to. This master file is structured so that I can make further modifications to the file without adverse effects, including revising past decisions. I choose the methods I use based on precision, flexibility, and efficiency – in that order. While I value efficiency, I'm willing to devote as much time as it takes to get optimum quality. When productivity is a primary concern certain compromises may be acceptable and even recommended for gains in efficiency.

Andrew Rodney often comments that there is both the "best way" and a "right way." For instance, it doesn't make sense to use an 8x10 view camera when documenting military maneuvers on the front line; even though that tool will deliver the highest resolution available, in that situation it increases the chance of missing shots or even being shot. While I think the following process is the best way to edit a file, it's not the right way for every situation.

Here's an overview.

Start with a wide gamut, RGB, 16 bit, high resolution, unresampled, unsharpened file.

If you're starting with a scanned image, scan at 16 bit into a wide gamut editing space (Adobe 1998 or Pro Photo). Turn all scanner adjustments and sharpening off; make these corrections in Photoshop. A good scanning software's capabilities come into play when you need to automate these functions to increase productivity – for instance when preparing a large volume of files in a short time.

If you're starting with a RAW file from a digital camera, make a majority of your corrections with Adobe's Camera Raw. First choose a wide gamut editing space (Adobe 1998 or Pro Photo), 16 bit, no resampling, and the resolution of your most frequently used output device. Then, under Adjust, erring on the conservative side, set Temperature, Tint, Exposure, Shadows, Brightness, Contrast (for more precise contrast control use the Curves feature), and Saturation. Next, under Detail, don't sharpen but do reduce noise using Color Noise Reduction. Finally, under Lens, make compensations for chromatic aberration. Fine tune this file in Photoshop.

Retouch minor imperfections, such as dust and scratches, on the Background layer using any combination of the Clone Stamp, Healing, or Spot Healing brushes.

Do not make further modifications directly to the Background layer. Instead, make corrections as adjustment layers and image layers.

Duplicate the Background layer, rename it "sharpening," change it's blend mode to Luminosity, and sharpen the new layer. On this layer, retouch any minor imperfections accentuated during the sharpening process. (You may wish to sharpen at the end of the image editing process when the contrast has been refined; if so, this layer's position in the layer stack is still recommended. It will differ only for multi-image documents.)

Make global corrections to the file as adjustment layers and file them in a layer set named "global corrections."

Make local corrections to the file as adjustment layers or image layers and file them in a layer set named "local corrections."

While softproofing the image, make output-specific corrections (either globally or locally) as adjustment layers and file them in a layer set named "softproof." Make notes of the conditions for softproofing (rip, color management route, profile, rendering intent, media settings, media) in the title of the layer set or alternatively with the Notes tool.

Determine crop marks, but don't crop this master file. Instead, crop a duplicate file for output.

Save and archive this file.

If you follow this editing strategy you end up with one file with the highest quality data that contains three image layers (the Background, a sharpened duplicate, and a Soft Light layer for local correction), and three layer sets (one each for *global*, *local*, and *softproofing* corrections). You can modify existing corrections (including resharping) or add additional corrections at any time. The Background layer is left relatively untouched so that you can turn off all adjustments and return to the unmodified source at any time.