Rick Sammon's HDR Photography Secrets for digital photographers

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About the Authors

Rick Sammon

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Canon Explorer of Light Rick Sammon has published 36 books, and this, he feels, is his most creative effort.

His book *Flying Flowers* won the coveted Golden Light Award, and his book *Hide and See Under the Sea* won the Ben Franklin Award.

Digital Photography Secrets and *Studio and On-Location Lighting Secrets*, both published by Wiley, are among Rick's best-selling titles.

Rick has photographed in almost 100 countries, and he gives more than two-dozen photography workshops (including private workshops) and presentations throughout the world each year.

He co-founded the Digital Photography Experience (www.dpexperience.com), an online digital photography learning center. He co-hosts the bi-monthly Digital Photography Experience podcast, and he hosts five shows on kelbytraining.com.

Rick has been nominated for the Photoshop Hall of Fame, and he is considered one of today's top digital-imaging experts. He is known for cutting through lots of Photoshop "speak," making it fun, easy and rewarding to work and play in the digital darkroom.

When asked about his photo specialty, Rick says, "My specialty is not specializing."

See www.ricksammon.com for more information.

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Thank You

As you saw on the cover of this book, I get credit for taking the pictures on these pages and for writing the tips. And sure, I put a ton of work into this project; but the truth is, I had a lot of help-just like every author. No doubt, a book is a team effort.

So I thought I'd take this opportunity to thank the folks who helped put together this work as well as those who have helped me along the path to producing this book.

The always calm and patient Courtney Allen at Wiley was my main editor and project manager. She did a great job calming me down when things did not go as planned, and she was always patient when I was impatient. Thank you, Courtney, for all your help and understanding.

Barry Pruett, VP at Wiley, also gets a big "thank you." Thanks to my initial meeting with Barry, I have four books with Wiley and four how-to DVDs (on Canon cameras).

Behind the scenes, the following people helped bring this book to life. Thank you all for your eagle eyes and artistic flair!

Jenny Brown was my editor, making sure that what you read is actually what I meant to say. Like Courtney, she always had a smile on her face, even when she probably wanted to kill me!

Erik Powers did a wonderful job laying out this book, compiling the text and photos into pages that are easy on the eyes. Thanks, Erik, for making me look good!

Thanks, too, to Alan Hess for his technical editing.

Three Sammons get my heartfelt thanks: my wife, Susan; my son, Marco; and my Dad, Robert M. Sammon. For years, they have supported my efforts and helped with my

photographs. Thank you for all your help and love. Especially, I want to thank Susan for toting my tripod all over the place and for being a great HDR assistant.

About my tripods: I use Induro tripods and Induro ball heads. My friends Joe Brady and Jeff Karp at the MAC Group fixed me up with these sturdy and lightweight tripods.

My good friend Capt. Jack gets a big thank you, too. He took a private workshop with me in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, where several of the pictures in this book were taken.

Another friend who has helped me is Juan Pons, my co-host on the Digital Photography Experience podcast (www.dpexperience.com). Juan has kept me up-to-date on new technology, which one must do in the ever-changing world of digital photography.

My mystery friend on the cover of this book is Chandler Strange, a good friend and model with whom I have worked for years.

I'd also like to thank my workshop students, many of whom have shared their wonderful HDR pictures with me.

When it comes to photo industry friends who have helped me with the book, I have more than a few.

Rick Booth, Steve Inglima, Peter Tvarkunas, Chuck Westfall and Rudy Winston of Canon USA have been ardent supporters of my work and my photography seminars. So have my friends at Canon Professional Service (CPS). My hat is off to these folks, big time!

Jeff Cable of Lexar hooked me up with memory cards and card readers, helping me capture images for this book … and all my books.

Erik Yang at Topaz Adjust is one cool dude when it comes to keeping me up to date with great tips and techniques for

using Topaz Adjust.

On the digital darkroom side, Adobe’s Julieanne Kost; onOne Software’s Mike Wong and Craig Keudell; and Tony Corbell and Ed Sanchez of Nik Software are always there to get me the latest and greatest info and software. And speaking of software, Scott Kelby of Photoshop fame gets a big thank you for just being who he is: a very sharing person.

And speaking of software and HDR, two photographers inspired me to get into HDR photography and to try new techniques: Trey Ratcliff and Ben Wilmore.

Thank you all. I could not have done it without you!

For My Family

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Preface

A Walk Before the Run: Basic Photography Tips

Yes! This book is about High Dynamic Range (HDR) photography. And you are going to love the extraordinary results of HDR techniques.

But keep in mind that photography is photography—no matter what you call your approach or delivery. That's why this book begins with tips that will not only help your HDR techniques; they will improve all of your photography.

So you will not find any HDR tech talk in this Preface. You'll find it in the other chapters; but for now, let's focus on the basics of photography.

To illustrate my tips, I use some of my favorite pictures of vintage cars (and one truck) that I shot during my travels. You'll learn how to create similar HDR images in this book, so stay with me here.

Make Photographs

Before you can approach HDR work, it's important to understand this very basic first tip: *Make* pictures; don't simply *take* pictures. There is a big difference between the two!

Making pictures is fun and creative. It's about adding your signature touch to the images you create. Conversely, *taking* pictures is more of a snap-and-go process. There's not much creative thought involved.

For example, I made this picture by including something in the scene that very few photographers would include in a picture: my own shadow. I also made the picture by following many of the tips that you'll find on the following pages.

After reading this book, you'll have a ton of ideas for making pictures—indoors and outdoors, in bright light and in low light, and in many other different types of settings. Use them in your own creative way and make photographs that mean something to you.

Tell a Story

As photographers, we are storytellers. One way to tell a story is to take a variety of pictures of the same scene or subject in the same location. Take wide-angle photographs and close-ups that show details.

When photographing, imagine that you are shooting a movie with many still frames that will eventually go together to, that’s right, tell a story about your subject or location.

Consider the Background

When composing a picture, it is very important to carefully consider the background. Be aware of the impact it might have on your photograph. Distracting subjects or elements can ruin a photograph, as might objects that are too sharply focused or too out of focus … or even too bright or too dark.

While composing this photograph, I paid close attention to the background, framing the Coke truck so that the letters on it could be seen.

You'll see this same scene, photographed from the opposite angle, in a few pages. I included this scene twice in order to illustrate a point: Many of the tips in this section apply to most of the images in this book.

The Name of the Game is to Fill the Frame

Filling the frame with interesting subject matter is an effective method for creating engaging photographs. While making this image, I moved the orange piece of metal into the frame to fill the dead space.

The sky is mostly filled with distinguished clouds, so I included it in the frame. Had it been an overcast day with a solid mass of gray clouds, I would have cropped most of the sky out of the frame.

All that said, using open space in a photograph can be effective. It depends on the story you are trying to tell.

Check Your Camera Settings

Most professional photographers are constantly changing their camera settings to create the image they see in their mind’s eye.

They change the aperture to control depth-of-field, the shutter speed to stop or blur action, the white balance to control color, ISO to control digital noise, and so on. I am one of those photographers.

Because I change my settings so often, I am constantly checking them before I shoot. That helps to avoid silly mistakes, which could result in missed photographs.

P.S. What might look like a dust spot in the sky is actually an airplane! I could have cloned it out, but leaving it in the image shows you the power of shooting RAW files with a high-end digital SLR camera.

Choose Your Lens Wisely

Lenses are critical for telling a photographic story. Different lenses provide different views of the same scene, and different perspectives. Wide-angle lenses, when set at small apertures, let us capture wide scenes with good depth-of-field. For this photograph, I set my 17-40mm zoom lens at the 17mm focal length and set the aperture to f/16.

A scene photographed from the same position with a telephoto lens would have less depth-of-field, which might be desirable when photographing wildlife or a person. Generally speaking, I've found that a wide-angle lens is most conducive for HDR photography.

Interesting Subjects Make Interesting Photographs

Never underestimate the importance of an interesting subject. Seek out interesting subjects, and photograph them in an interesting setting. Then, take the time to make a picture.

This 1957 Chevy is an interesting subject. It became more interesting when I asked the owner to open the hood and the trunk. Another story for another time ...

Anyway, the setting is interesting, but it was not the original location of the car. I first spotted this Classic in the bright—extremely harsh and unflattering—sunlight. I asked the owner to move it into this position on a shady street, which reduced the contrast range and offered much more flattering light.

Once again, making pictures is fun and creative—and the result is much better than the passive, point-and-shoot alternative.