

INTRODUCTION

IMAGES AND EXPERIENCE

The first time I went to college, I had the good fortune of being put on a one-semester academic leave of absence. The one semester turned into eight years, during which I delved into photography, worked in many aspects of the restaurant business, and traveled throughout Europe. When I returned to college to study photography, I was a thirty-year-old freshman with a deep passion for imagemaking that kept me in the darkroom and studio late into the night. In those first years at the Rochester Institute of Technology, I realized I couldn't adequately express my perceptions within the mechanical blink of a camera shutter, and I began to combine and composite images with scissors, tape, glue, and multiple exposures in the darkroom.

One night as I was leaving the darkroom, I passed by a small computer lab, where a few students worked in the weak glimmer of 13-inch Apple monitors on images similar to the ones I had struggled to create in the darkroom. The images were crude, yet exciting, and the energy in the room was contagious. At that very moment, I turned away from traditional photographic materials and processes and toward the future discoveries and potential that the digital realm offered.

I hadn't planned on "flunking out" of school the first time and I hadn't planned to walk down that hallway late at night, but in looking back I see that both moments were probably among the best things that happened to me. As John Lennon said in the song Beautiful Boy, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." As imagemakers, we need to be open and ready to experience life, to learn from the world around us, and to be willing to take risks. Making art entails asking questions, challenging perceptions, and working with our craft to create compelling images.



IS THIS BOOK RIGHT FOR YOU?

This book is right for you if you have ideas to express and love images or if you work with photographs as a dedicated amateur or full-time professional. This book is right for you if you're excited by the possibility of staying up late at night to finesse a perfect mask or to combine images in new and unusual ways. Masking and compositing requires flexibility and dedication—there is no "make great art" button on your keyboard, and it often takes a few attempts and approaches get an image right.

This book is not for you if you don't have the time, curiosity, or patience to read through the examples, try them out and then—just as I push my students—take the techniques further by applying them to your own images.

You have three ways to learn the techniques in this book:

- By reading the examples and looking at the images.
- By downloading the images from the book's Web site, www.photoshopmasking.com, and with the book in hand, recreating my steps.
- By taking the techniques shown here and applying them to your own images. As you work, you'll need to adjust some of the tool or filter settings to achieve optimal results. It is exactly at that moment, when you are working with your own images, that you're really learning how to mask and composite.

This is not an introductory book. To get the most out of it you should be comfortable with the fundamentals of Photoshop, know where the tools are and what they do, and know how to execute common tasks, such as how to activate a layer or color balance an image. I've been working with Photoshop for more than 14 years, but I still learned a lot just by writing this book. I tried to write a book that I would want to buy or that would interest the many intermediate and advanced Photoshop users that are looking for indepth and challenging learning materials.

As you flip through the book, you'll see that all of my screen captures were taken on a Macintosh. If you're a Windows user, don't let that deter you from the book. Photoshop functionality, for the most part, is identical on the Macintosh and Windows platforms. All the features discussed in the book are available on both platforms, and the interface is nearly identical. When offering keyboard shortcuts, I give you both Macintosh and Windows commands.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Creating art is part craft and part imagination—one without the other results in lifeless and banal results. With this book, I address both—sometimes with words, but many times more quietly and effectively by featuring images created by professional photographers, creative artists, and a number of my students. I am fortunate that they trust me with their work and that we all can benefit from the insights the images reveal. Please refer to the Contributor List at the back of the book to learn whose work is featured in my book and what inspires them.

This book should really be called *Photoshop Selections, Masking, and Compositing* but that title never appealed to me. Besides, it would be too long to fit on the spine of the book! However, the four sections of the book reflect how important and interrelated selections, masking and compositing really are:

1. Selection Tools and Techniques
2. Working with Layers and Masks
3. Selecting and Preserving Fine Detail
4. Photorealistic and Creative Compositing

The first part of the book is aimed at helping you build a solid foundation in making accurate selections, followed by information on how to efficiently work with layers and masks. The second half delves into the professional techniques used to separate the finest details, including hair, translucency, and smoke, and continues with photography and advanced compositing techniques.

Each chapter starts with a brief overview of what will be covered in the chapter. I always start with a straightforward example that leads to more advanced examples. You may be tempted to jump to the more advanced sections right away, but I don't recommend it. The introductory examples serve as the foundation for the advanced examples, building on the same tools and techniques.

Although this book was an ambitious project from the very start, there are a lot of Photoshop aspects I do not cover. Throughout the book, I refer to additional references and books, including my other books *Photoshop Restoration and Retouching* and *Real World Digital Photography*. Rather than taking a general approach to Photoshop, I have opted to specialize, and now each one of my three passions has its own book. With this one, I concentrated on the most exciting aspects of imagemaking—combining, juxtaposing, and blending images to express new ideas and explore new worlds.

I did concentrate on the latest version of Photoshop CS when writing this book. If you are still working with versions 6.0 or 7.0, you will still learn a lot, because the most important tools for masking and compositing—layers, alpha channels, and blending modes—are a part of those previous versions. And this book will also be useful long after the next release of Photoshop.

COMPANION WEB SITE

Rather than include a CD with the book, I designed and maintain a supplemental Web site where you can download many of the tutorial images featured in the book. Please visit and bookmark www.photoshopmasking.com to download images, view the reader gallery, follow links to additional resources, and contact me. Each chapter (except Chapters 1 and 11) has up to twelve JPEG images that you can download to work and learn along with as you read the book. In the book, images that are posted are signified with an icon and name, such as

 [ch8_tilewall.jpg](#)



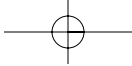
Note

The images on the book's companion Web site are for your personal use and should not be distributed by any other means. If images are not posted on the website it means that I do not have the copyright permission to post them and therefore I cannot legally make them available.

Many of the images in the book originated from my or my husband's own image and photography collection. The image stock collection Dynamic Graphics, Inc. and numerous professional photographers also have generously shared some of their images, many of which are also posted on the Web site. However, I was not able to procure permission to post on my Web site all of the images featured in my book—I would be breaking copyright agreements if I did. The copyright of all images used in the book and posted on the Web site remains with the originator, as noted throughout the book.

In the cases in which I didn't have permission to post specific images on the book's Web site, you can use similar images from your own photo collections to follow along. Although you won't be using the exact image I am using, the issues being addressed are so universal that I am sure you'll be able to learn the techniques using your own. After all, you'll probably be branching out to your own images sooner rather than later.

I would love to hear from you. Please email your comments about the book and Web site to me at Katrin@photoshopmasking.com. Show me how you've taken the techniques in these pages and gone further with them. If you send me flattened JPEG files of the composite image (please keep them small—no more than 1 MB overall), I'll post it in the reader's gallery. Be sure to include information about how I can contact you; great examples of masking and compositing may be featured in the next edition of the book.



CLOSING THOUGHTS

It is the experience of life that the passionate visual artist reaches into to find the creative spark of self-expression. We create images to explore, discover, reveal, and express ourselves, and they often end up being more profound than our words. I hope this book inspires and encourages you to discover, create, and express your own images.

Best regards,

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