

Pseudo HDR

Ian Whiting - 19th August 2011

Brief Introduction

HDR images are principally two or more images, typically 3 to 5 images, each taken at a series of stepped exposure values, e.g. -2, 0 and +2 stops. One or more images are under exposed and collect progressively more details in the highlights and one or more are over exposed and progressively collect more details in the shadow areas.

Using software they are merged together to form one picture. This gives a wider dynamic range than would have been possible from the just a single exposure.

An advantage of using RAW images is that they have an additional latitude at either end of the scale. They stand up well when the exposure slider is moved one or two stops up or down the scale to correct the initial exposure.

Using this approach it is possible to create three exposures from one RAW image, one correct, one under by two stops and one over by two stops. This is a bit like, though not as good, as having taken three shots of the subject at -2, 0 and +2 stops. If we then feed these through the HDR software they may give us an image with a wider dynamic range than we had originally.

In Practice

I took an image taken at the Box End Park in August to see what could be achieved using this method.

The image straight out of the camera



The sky is not at all how I remembered it, probably because I exposed for the boat and the sky lost out. I wanted to get that sky back but could not extract it from the RAW image using digital

graduated filters or exposure adjustments. I went for the pseudo HDR technique to see what I could do with the sky.

In Lightroom (the same can be done in Adobe Camera Raw or DPP etc) I created two further copies one at 2 stops under exposure and one at two stops over exposure



Two stops under (more details in the highlights, e.g. water trail)



Two stops over (more detail in the shadows, e.g. tree line)

There are a number of competing HDR processing programs on the market, e.g. Photomatrix. Some are free and some quite expensive. I used Photoshop CS5. I opened the images in *Merge to HDR Pro* (File > Automate > Merge to HDR Pro)

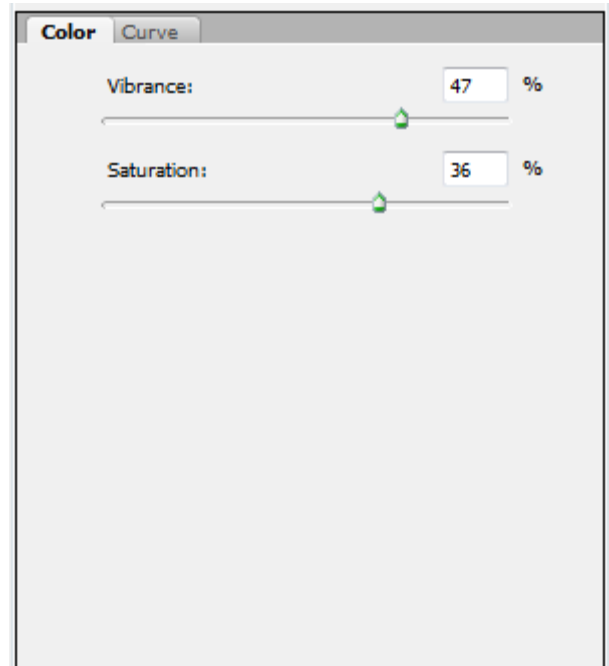
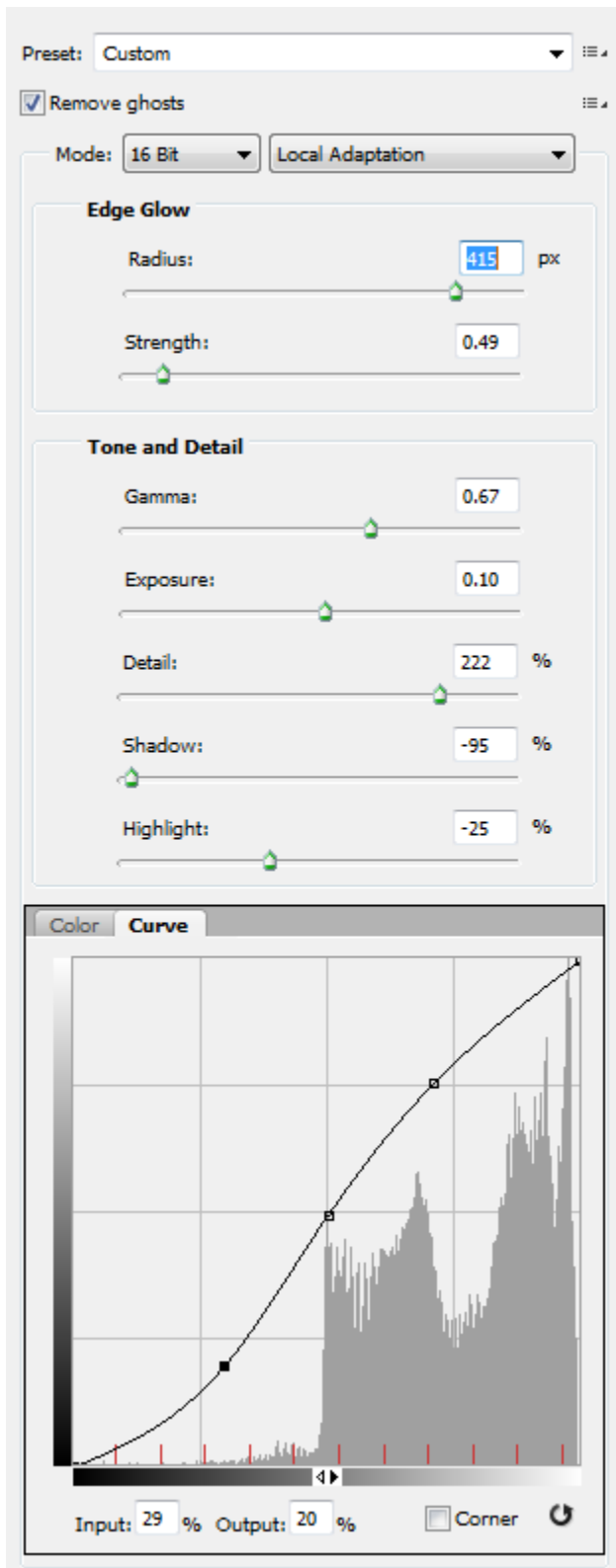
The initial result using the Photoshop defaults is not that good



However *Merge to HDR Pro* has some different presets to try and a few sliders that let you adjust the "tone mapping" yourself to improve the merge.

These need to be experimented with until a reasonable balance is achieved.

My final settings are shown below. *Remove Ghosts* (eliminates small differences between multiple shots, e.g. wind movement) is checked but was not needed as all three images were derived from the same original and are thus identical.



SAVE the image as a TIFF file. Close the image in Photoshop, open BRIDGE, select and open the TIFF in *Photoshop in Camera RAW*. As this is a TIFF file we get all of the normal RAW image processing features including the vibrance, clarity, graduated filter and temperature sliders. These can be used to enhance the image even further.



Halos are appearing on the flowers in the foreground and the tree line but I am only interested in the sky.

I duplicated the layer and selecting a blend mode of OVERLAY to get even more colour from the image. The effect is too drastic so I lowered the opacity of this new layer.



Not perfect but the difference this has made to the image can be easily seen.

Another attempt, using different settings gave me the following one. All detail was lost in the trees and lots of halos but a better sky for my purposes, ready to be cut out and used in the final photo.



Compare the final HDR sky with the original photo

