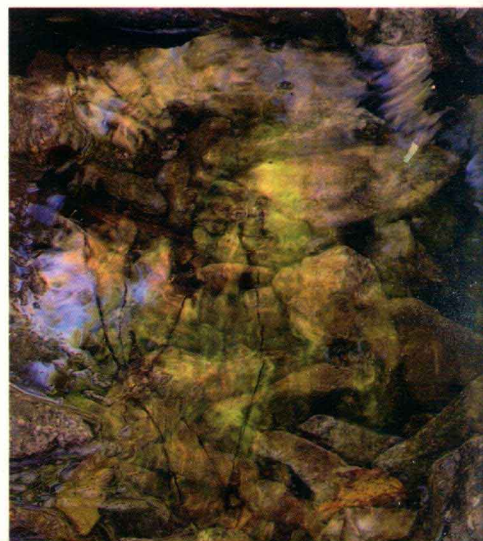George DeWolfe's

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY
FINE PRINT WORKSHOP

- Discover the secrets of preparing and printing professional-quality fine art photographs

- Learn DeWolfe's master workflow techniques

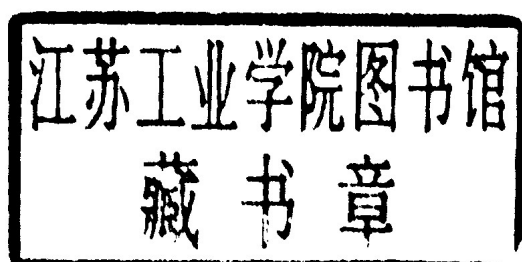- Evaluate and readjust your digital photographs for maximum impact

GEORGE DEWOLFE
Foreword by Dan Burkholder, author of Making Digital Negatives for Contact Printing

George DeWolfe's
Digital Photography
Fine Print Workshop

George DeWolfe

George DeWolfe's Digital Photography Fine Print Workshop

About the Author

George DeWolfe has been a photographer since 1964. He studied with Ansel Adams and extensively with Minor White in the 1970's, and studied Perception with Dr. Richard Zakia.

He taught Zone System and Perception at The New England School of Photography, The University of Idaho, and Colorado Mountain College. He initiated the Appalachian Mountain Club Photography Workshop and teaches numerous workshops and seminars throughout the country, including Large Format, Quadtone and Digital Fine Printing, The Master Print, Advanced Photoshop, Contemplative Photography, and The Contemplative Landscape. For many years a contract photographer, his clients included APC, Eastman Kodak, Hewlett-Packard, Teledyne Water-Pik, United Bank, Yamaha, J.C. Penny, and Sears.

George has published three books, most notably, *At Home in the Wild*, edited by David R. Brower, and has contributed to dozens of others including *The New Zone System Manual, Zone Systemizer, Perception and Photography, Visual Concepts for Photographers, The Dictionary of Photography*, and *Creative Digital Printmaking*. He is in the process of writing *Contemplative Photography* and has published an Adobe Photoshop plug-in, Optipix.

He has shown forty one-man and numerous group exhibitions and is in several permanent collections. He is currently a senior editor for *CameraArts*, and an advisor to Epson America, Adobe, Hahnemühle, and Polaroid. Awards include *Award for Artistic Excellence* from The National Park Service. He holds an MFA in Photography and Graphic Art from The Rochester Institute of Technology.

George's passions are teaching visual and digital photography skills and photographing the mysteries of the world. He combines the structure of ancient Chinese landscape painting with the structure of Western landscape genres to achieve his mysterious style. And when he has the time, he plays the bluegrass 5-string banjo.

Foreword

Art, photography, and the decisions that unify the two are the pivotal elements to make photographs with, dare I say it, soul and meaning. You purchase the cameras, lenses, computers, and printers, and then you strive to make a print that reflects something you *felt* at the time of exposure. This is another of life's curve balls—you have a process that sounds so simple yet is amazingly challenging to execute. Many photographers find this difficult because, easy as it appears, it's quite a journey to take a *feeling* and make it into something you can put in a picture frame. You struggle to translate the reason-for-shooting into an image that has meaning to others (and maybe they'll even purchase it). There's that fundamental breakdown between understanding the original inspiration (why you clicked the shutter) and how to take those raw materials and transform them into a moving, inspiring photographic print.

It's not easy. If it were, we'd all be making a living as artists. Yes, you can read all the technical books to learn about exposure, contrast, and color, but without a foundation of critical expressive thinking, you're on your way to making clichés at best and mediocrity at worst.

So how can you best approach this combined goal of mastering both aesthetics and technique? And how do you go about designing your personal workflow so you spend more time with the creative and fun parts of photography and less time shaking your head at prints that look nothing like what you envisioned?

Reading this book, you will discover an author who makes the intelligent and much appreciated effort to define the "whys" of photography in addition to the much easier "hows." Indeed, you know you're dealing with a photographic artist when he takes the time to explain the difference between *ambient* and *reflected* light. Heck, how many digital imaging authors even take the time to talk about *light* in general terms? In a typical Photoshop book, you're more apt to encounter a longer exploration of the Eyedropper tool than you are to glean any appreciation for the qualities of light that make an image a winner or a sleeper. Bottom line: most of us need as much help with the decisions of aesthetics as we do with the mechanics of photography. Score another point for George Dewolfe's approach.

As something of a digital pioneer myself (the first edition of my *Making Digital Negatives for Contact Printing* was published in 1995, during the Paleolithic period of digital imaging), I've witnessed the right way and the wrong way to navigate the

amazing metamorphosis of photography as it changes from a chemo-mechanical realm into a digital-ink discipline. Anyone who reads books to learn has encountered authors who know how to do things themselves, and in contrast, authors who know how to teach others to do those same things. Happily George DeWolfe falls into the second camp. His style is authoritative but never condescending. He's scientific when needed but never technical for technical's sake. In other words, he takes pains so you don't feel overwhelmed or misled. And, I must add, he is not a computer nerd. His explanations are spot-on, simple, and concise. What more could you want?

You have to decide where your interests in art and technique intersect. George feels strongly that the craft and art of photography are intimately connected. His joined-at-the-hip approach will leave artists with jaws dropped. George certainly explains *how* to achieve prints with glowing highlights, seductive midtones, and deeply lush shadows. But more important, he shows you how to think like an artist, making decisions about color, tonality, sharpness, and all the rest from years of experience. Yes, this is the stuff that separates the technicians from the artisans and George is a master. On the other hand, if your idea of digital excellence is using as many of Photoshop's blending modes as possible in each and every image, you might want to look elsewhere. Believe me, if flexing technical muscles is your primary passion, George won't be disappointed at losing you as a reader. For the rest of us, we leave his last pages as better artists and better digital printers.

So do you really need yet another "Photoshop book" cluttering your desk or bookcase? The short answer is "Yes," as long as the author has conveyed his passion for photography and has written in understandable language. And guess who has done just that? Yep, George DeWolfe. With his help, you'll be putting more of your own feelings into those picture frames.

Dan Burkholder
www.danburkholder.com

Acknowledgments

Ten years ago, few people knew how to print excellent digital photographs. Graham Nash and Jon Cone, of Nash Editions and Cone Editions Press, respectively, were among the few. They were pioneers. Jon first opened my eyes to the *possibility* that such a feat could be accomplished. When I first saw his digital platinum prints from an Iris printer, my reaction was, "Do you take MasterCard and Visa?" That was 10 years ago. Today, I cannot imagine a world without digital fine printing.

A then fledgling magazine, *CameraArts*, where I am now senior editor, asked me to take over the duties of exploring and writing about this technology, largely because I had been using Photoshop since version 1.5 and had much familiarity with digital studio photography. I formed a loose group of people I called the CameraArts Research Group. It consisted of Huntington Witherill, an exceptional fine art photographer in Carmel, California (who was exploring digital printing); Kevin Anderson, a outstanding commercial digital photographer in Chicago (now of Tuscon); David Applegate, senior photographer at the National Gallery in Washington (where much original digital experimentation was occurring); Dan Culbertson, a NASA rocket scientist (I always joked that we had a rocket scientist on our team), who dealt with complicated workflow ideas; and John Paul Caponigro, master of the digital image and one of the early proponents and teachers of this technology. Together, we were a considerable force. We verified one another's work and laid the groundwork for many of the principles found in this book. The workflow is as much a tribute to their contributions as my own.

Manufacturers also contributed equipment, software, media, and supplies to this new workflow concept. These were Epson, Apple, Adobe, Ilford, Hewlett-Packard, Polaroid, Legion Paper, Hahnemühle, GretagMacbeth, Cone Editions Press, Monaco/X-Rite, Lyson, MIS Associates, Lumijet, GTI Lite, ColorVision, Wacom, PictoColor, nik Multimedia, Reindeer Graphics, Nikon, Canon, Olympus, Iomega, LaserSoft, Crane, Lexar, SanDisk, Microtek, and Calumet. A multitude of people within these companies also helped me.

Many people have been my informal advisors and have all added something, however large or small, to the workflow effort: Julieanne Kost, Mac Holberg, Henry Wilhelm, John Nack, Richard Newman, Larry Danke, Bill Bergh, John Panazzo, Mark Rodagna, Stephen Johnson, Theresa Airey, and Joe Meehan. I would like to highlight,

Introduction

The lyf so short, the craft so long to lern.
—Geoffrey Chaucer

When I was 11 years old, in 1956, my father bought me a printing press. I'd been using a funky, inexpensive hobby press that had individual pieces of rubber type I assembled on a drum and then printed on a piece of paper. When Dad saw that I had an interest in printing, we decided to buy a "real" printing press, a letterpress from the Kelsey Company in Meriden, Connecticut. It had a 5-by-8–inch platen, which meant that the largest size I could print was 5-by-8 inches. Large type cases were full of what was then known as "hot type," because it was made from a tin, antimony, and lead metal alloy and cast in individual characters that I had to hand set individually into the 5-by-8 *chase* and secure with *quoins*, a kind of squeeze clamp that helped keep everything tight for printing. Ink went on a large, round ink table. I pressed a large lever, and the monstrous, cast iron behemoth printed stationery, business cards, and even books. A year into the project, a friend and I decided to print a newspaper we called *The West Side News*. We canvassed the neighborhood, collected subscriptions, and printed a weekly gossip rag. We made money and knew we were destined for publishing fame.

Three blocks from our house was a print shop run by two guys named Henry and Jack. I spent hours there watching how they worked, and occasionally Henry would give me a couple of small jobs that he didn't want to be bothered with. The shop even had a Merganthaler Linotype machine that fascinated me. It would cast lines of type through a complicated system of heated lead, dies, and conveyers. It was much quicker than setting type by hand, and I frequently had Henry set large jobs for me with the Linotype. Once, he let me try it out, and I knew from that point on that I was a printer.

From this early experience, I learned the importance of craft. Half a century later, sitting at my computer and my inkjet printer making photographs, I am consummate craftsman. Every aspect of my photography and printing is done with the utmost care, skill, knowledge, and thoughtfulness. I have learned the craft, art, and skills of photography and printing from the best, and I hold experience that historically takes me back almost to the beginning of Gutenberg's introduction of movable metal type in 1550.

This book is about *craft*. It's not about tips or techniques or even Photoshop, really, although these important factors form much of our discussion, and they have their place. Craft is about attitude—the way you approach the subject. It is about excellence and consistency and practice. Craft synthesizes art and technology and makes them

work together seamlessly. We not only have to know how the machines work, but we also know and apply the making and design of photographs, and the printing of ink on paper. We must constantly synthesize the technology with the art in a rapidly changing, complex, and often frustrating digital age.

What you'll learn from this book is how to practice craft. The practice of the craft of digital fine printing (or any other craft for that matter) involves four things:

■ **Excellence** Without excellence as a standard, we have no craft. The quality of our work will not be pleasurable to produce, the work will look half-finished, and no one will buy it. Excellence is also an attitude as well as a result in the print. The continuous striving for excellence produces the few masterpieces that any artist makes in a lifetime.

An apprentice traditionally learns excellence by working with a master of the craft. It takes many years of practice to achieve the standards set by the master, and nothing, absolutely nothing, takes the place of this long internship, love, and dedication to the task. We learn excellence from a master's standard and the hard work that attends it.

■ **Consistency** Repeatability is one of the hallmarks of any artist and always of a craftsman. Consistency allows us to know and intuitively measure that we have achieved a certain level of proficiency in the long road of mastery. And it allows others to recognize our stamp of authenticity.

■ **Workflow** *Workflow* is a modern word that means a way of working that produces excellent prints on a consistent basis. It is the sequence of ideas, steps, and techniques patterned together that creates the dependable final result.

■ **Evaluation** Evaluation—self-evaluation, really—allows us to refine our skills continually to make excellent prints better and occasionally create a masterpiece. It's not the kind of criticism we find in academic circles, where few masters exist, who neither have the right nor the experience to judge adequately; instead, evaluation is self-criticism based on the works of real masters, who do, indeed, set the standards.

The basis of all this is the workflow—The Digital Fine Print Workshop, in our case. The workflow in this book is not a gospel (although it may be good news to many) but a model. It is an aid to the achievement of excellence and consistency. Try it and learn it, use it to its fullest, give it a chance, and if it doesn't produce what you want, modify it and make it your own. Make photographs and make prints—lots of them.

One caveat that I adhere to is called the *Closed Loop*. The Closed Loop means that you do everything in the workflow yourself—and I mean *everything*. The Closed Loop is at the heart of every recommendation I make about equipment and workflow needs. The late President John Kennedy once said that it is morally wrong to abandon your own judgment. In the Closed Loop, this means that there is no sending negatives out to be drum-scanned, no outsider printing your pictures, nobody telling you what you

should do to your prints. The Closed Loop concept is not radical; it comes from the history of photography.

More than 30 years ago, I made a decision that has affected my whole life as a photographer. When I was a photography and printing graduate student at The Rochester Institute of Technology, I spent one afternoon a week going through the archives at the George Eastman House. The important lesson I learned was that all the great prints in the history of photography were made by the photographers themselves, not by an assistant or some other professional functionary. Of course, I'm not talking here about great photographs, just the great prints by photographers who also happened to be great. I made a decision then never to let anyone else print my photographs, and it became the basis of the Closed Loop in digital photography and printing. Only the photographer who took the picture can print an honest and authentic artistic statement about the image. I would like to repeat that: *Only the photographer who took the picture can print an honest and authentic artistic statement about the image.* This is an overt challenge to photographers who hold different opinions, and it is based entirely upon looking at the great prints in the history of photography and 50 years of experience.

The first part of this book—Chapters 1 to 3—introduces you to the qualities of the digital fine print and their evaluation. For those of you who don't realize the need for this preliminary discussion and want to proceed right into the workshop, you can go to the second part—the workflow itself, in Chapters 4 to 11—and get to work. I'd recommend doing this, however, only if you're already fairly well along in digital printing. For those of you who need to buy equipment and set up a studio or workstation, my personal recommendations are listed in Appendix A. How to set up the Photoshop CS2 workspace and a *small* discussion of color management are discussed in Appendixes B and C, respectively. Perhaps everyone should read Appendixes B and C first, on second thought. Even though they are at the back of the book, they may be the first things you need to consider before continuing, to keep the workflow smooth.

As a teacher, it is my earnest desire that you be the best printers you can be. This book was written for all who want to see and print great photographs, and who in seeing and printing, wonder and wish to understand.

George DeWolfe
Southwest Harbor, Maine
March 2006

PART I
DIGITAL FINE PRINTING:
AN OVERVIEW

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