

SHARPENING AN IMAGE WITH PHOTOKIT SHARPENER



39.1



39.2

ABOUT THE IMAGE

Getting Ready to Shoot
Canon EOS 1D, 300mm f/2.8
IS with 1.4 tele-extender, ISO
800, f/4.0 @ 1/320, Fine
Image File setting, edited
and cropped to be a 5.8MB
.tif (5" x 7" @ 240 dpi)

Sharpening an image well is nearly always a challenge. Despite the fact that there are many sharpening plug-ins, **Actions**, and techniques available, all of them fail on more images than they succeed on because optimal sharpening depends on so many factors and it is very difficult to provide a “one size fits all” approach to the wide range of images that you will want to sharpen. So, how do you sharpen an image well? It all depends on the image, the desired “sharpening” effect, the source of the image, and the intended output.

The good news is a talented group of Photoshop experts (Martin Evening, Bruce Fraser, Seth Resnick, Andrew Rodney, Jeff Schewe, and Mike Skurski) at Pixel Genius, LLC. have created an incredible sharpening tool they call

PhotoKit Sharpener that can be used to sharpen just about any image for any output. If there is bad news, it is that you must spend considerable time reading the excellent documentation and learning how to use PhotoKit Sharpener. It will be worth your time—that I promise you. Anytime I feel it is important to sharpen an image, I always use PhotoKit Sharpener; whether it is for sharpening images that are to be used for making prints or for images that will be displayed on a Web page.

In this technique we look at how you can use PhotoKit Sharpener to sharpen an image of a lacrosse player taken in early evening using an ISO 800 setting. This challenging image was selected to show you how PhotoKit can be used to sharpen an image to be printed on an inkjet printer (Epson 2200 using Premium Glossy Photo Paper) and how one can be sharpened for use on a Web page too.

To get a copy of PhotoKit Sharpener or to learn more about it visit www.pixelgenius.com/sharpener, or you can visit www.reallyusefulpage.com/50pscs/plugin-ins.htm to get a clickable link to the download page and to learn more about many other Adobe Photoshop CS-compatible plug-ins. Trial versions are available and there are versions for both PC and Mac. You may also want to download and read the PDF user manual from that site as it is one of the best resources you will find on image sharpening.

TIP

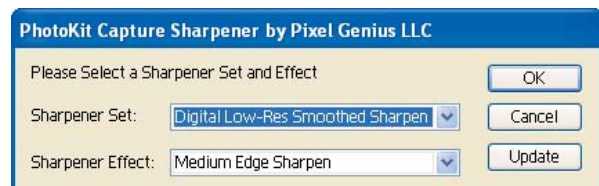
To get the best results from PhotoKit Sharpener when shooting with a digital camera, you should turn off any sharpening or smoothing features in your camera. You should also turn off any sharpening or smoothing features when converting an image from a RAW file. Otherwise, you may get unpredictable results from sharpening an already sharpened image.

STEP 1: OPEN FILE

- Choose **File > Open** (**Ctrl+O** PC, **Cmd+O** Mac) to display the **Open** dialog box. Double-click the **\39** folder to open it and then click the **lax18-before.tif** file to select it. Click **Open** to open the file.
- Select **View > Actual Pixels** (**Alt+Ctrl+0** PC, **Option+Cmd+0** Mac) or double-click the **Zoom** tool in the **Toolbox**. Viewing the image at **100%** makes it easier for you to judge the effects of sharpening settings.

STEP 2: APPLY PHOTOKIT CAPTURE SHARPENER

- PhotoKit Sharpener has been designed to address sharpening in three stages: capture sharpening to restore sharpness lost during the digital capture process, creative sharpening to enhance specific parts of an image, and output sharpening designed for specific output size and output device. To apply capture sharpening, select **File > Automate > PhotoKit Capture Sharpener** to get the **Capture Sharpener** dialog box shown in **Figure 39.3**.
- Click in the **Sharpener Set** box and select **Digital Low-Res Smoothed Sharpen**, which has been designed for digital captures up to about 4 megapixels with the need for some smoothing due to a high ISO setting.
- Click in the **Sharpener Effect** box and select **Medium Edge Sharpen**. This setting is for



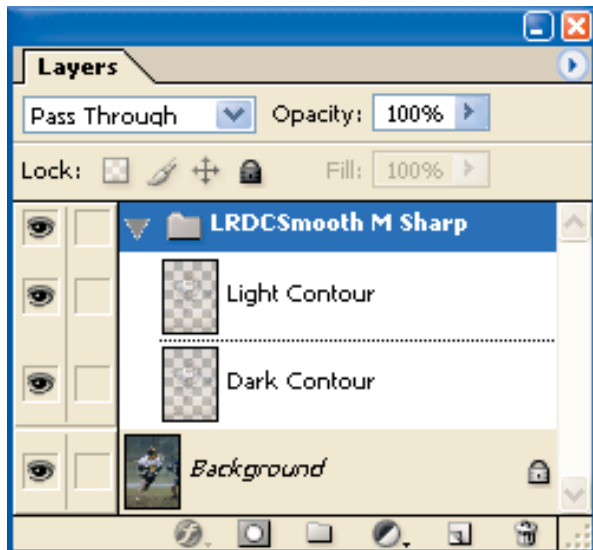
“normal” images without fine detail or wide smooth areas that may require a “wider edge” sharpening effect. Click **OK** to apply.

If you take a look at the **Layers** palette you will find that you now have a layer set with a **Light Contour** and **Dark Contour** layer as shown in **Figure 39.4**. If you click either of these layers you will find that **Opacity** has been set to a default value of **66%**. You can make adjustments to the layers at once, or either of these layers independently to increase or decrease the strength of this initial sharpening.

- After you have made any adjustments you want you can flatten the image to conserve memory by selecting **Layer > Flatten Image** or keep the layers as they are.

STEP 3: APPLY PHOTOKIT SELECTIVE SHARPENER

- Now you can apply some localized sharpening or smoothness to the image to meet your artistic intent. In this case, let’s sharpen the players in the



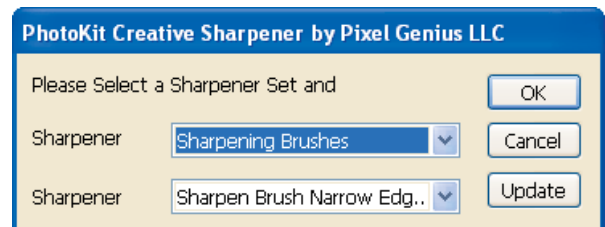
39.4

image along with their equipment. Click on the **Background** layer to make it the active layer. Select **File > Automate > PhotoKit Creative Sharpener** to get the **Creative Sharpener** dialog box shown in **Figure 39.5**. Click in the **Sharpener Set** box to select **Sharpening Brushes** and then click in the **Sharpener Effect** box to select **Sharpen Brush Narrow Edges 1**. Click **OK** to apply the settings and to automatically create a layer mask set to hide all.

- The **Brush** tool is now active and you can begin painting on the mask with white to reveal the layer with the sharpening effects. I suggest that you paint over both players with the **Brush** tool while varying the size by pressing the [key to increase brush size, and the] key to reduce brush size. You may want to avoid painting on the player’s legs. Don’t forget to paint across the ground in a horizontal line where there is an “in-focus” patch of grass.

If you paint where you should not have painted, just change the color to **Black (X)** and paint the mask back. Switch back to **White (X)** and continue painting until you are finished.

- Once you have completed your painting, you can modify the strength of the sharpening effect by adjusting the **Opacity** level in the **Layers** palette. To strengthen the effect, slide the slider up from **50%**. Conversely, you weaken the sharpen effect by sliding the slider back down from **50%**. I chose to set **Opacity** to **25%**. While it looks a bit too sharp on the screen, it will look good when it is printed on the target inkjet printer.



39.5

- Another way of making part of the image look sharp is to soften the area next to it. So, now let's smooth the area around the players using a PhotoKit **Smoothing Brush**. Click on the **Background** layer to make it the active layer. Select **File > Automate > PhotoKit Creative Sharpener** to once again get the **Creative Sharpener** dialog box. This time select **Smoothing Brushes** by clicking in the **Sharpener** box; then, click in the **Sharpener** box and select the magical **Edge-Protected Smoothing Brush 2**. This magical brush allows you to smooth non-edge areas of an image without using layer masks to protect important edges! Click **OK** to apply the action.
- Once again you can paint the mask to smooth the image where you want to smooth it. This smoothing effect has the added advantage of reducing the digital noise caused by the **800 ISO** setting. Once you have completed the painting of the mask, the **Layers** palette should look similar to the one shown in [Figure 39.6](#).

STEP 4: COMPLETE EDITING AND SAVE FILE

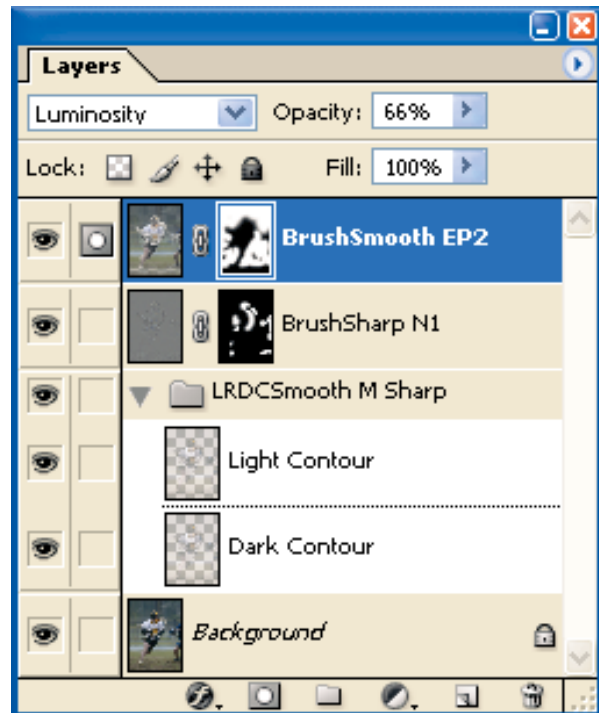
Now is the time to do any additional editing you might like to do such as applying **Curves**, **Levels**, **Hue/Saturation**, and so on. Just to add a little punch to this image I added a slight adjustment with **Curves** to increase image contrast. Once your editing is complete, you can save the file with the layers, or flatten the image and then save the file if you don't plan on going back to do any further tweaking of settings.

STEP 5: SHARPEN IMAGE FOR USE ON A WEB PAGE

- As our original goal was to create a well-sharpened image for both the Web and an inkjet

printer, select **Image > Duplicate** to make a duplicate image. Select **Image > Image Size** to get the **Image Size** dialog box. Make sure there is a checkmark in the box next to **Constrain Proportions** and next to **Resample Image**. Click in the **Resample Image** box and select **Bicubic Sharper**. Type **600** in the **Height** box in the **Pixel Dimensions** area and click **OK** to resize the image to 401 x 600 pixels.

- Select **View > Actual Pixels** (**Alt+Ctrl+0** PC, **Option+Cmd+0** Mac) or double-click the **Zoom** tool in the **Toolbox**. This will make it easier to judge the effect of the sharpen settings.
- Select **File > Automate > PhotoKit Output Sharpening** to get the **Output Sharpening** dialog



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box. Set **Sharpener Set** to **Web and Multimedia Sharpeners**. Notice that the dialog box shows the current image size as being 480 pixels wide. Click in the **Sharpener Effect** box and select **400-pixel Wide Edge Sharpen**. Click **OK** to sharpen the image. As was the case with the sharpeners we applied earlier, you can make choose the level of the sharpening effects by varying **Opacity** in the **Layers** palette after choosing sharpening settings.

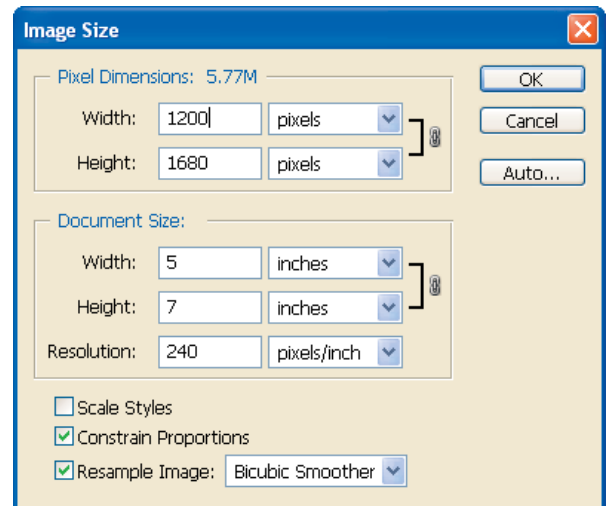
The image now looks perfect for display on a Web page. Save it using **File > Save for Web** so that you can pick optimal JPEG setting. If you use the **JPEG Medium** setting, the image is only 30K! If you want to view this image you may find it in the \39 folder. It is named **lax18-web-after.jpg**.

STEP 6: SHARPEN IMAGE FOR PRINTING ON AN EPSON 2200 INKJET PRINTER

- Now let's return to the original image to make a print using an Epson 2200. Click on the **lax18-before.tif** image to make it the active image. Before we apply any sharpening we need to check the image size to make sure it is properly sized for a 5" x 7" print at 240 dpi. Select **Image > Image Size** to get the **Image Size** dialog box shown in **Figure 39.7**. It is sized as it ought to be sized.
- Select **View > Actual Pixels (Alt+Ctrl+0 PC, Option+Cmd+0 Mac)** or double-click the **Zoom** tool in the **Toolbox**. This will make it easier to judge the effect of the sharpen settings.
- Select **Layer > Flatten Image**.
- Select **File > Automate > PhotoKit Output Sharpening** to get the **Output Sharpening** dialog box. Set **Sharpener Set** to **Inkjet Output Sharpeners**. Notice that the dialog box shows

the current image size as 240 dpi. Click in the **Sharpener Effect** box and select **Inkjet 240 Glossy** because we intend to print this **240** dpi image on glossy paper. Click **OK** to sharpen the image. Once again, you have the option to adjust the level of the sharpening effects by varying **Opacity** in the **Layers** palette. For this image, set **Opacity** to **60%** and you are ready to print the image. Remember that you do not have to save this image if you saved the earlier image with the **Capture** and **Creative Sharpeners** applied as this image can easily be created from that image or another one can be created for any other output.

Just imagine—when you need to automate an entire batch of images like the lacrosse action photo we just sharpened, you can do so with little effort if you use these PhotoKit Sharpeners in a Photoshop **Action** or **Droplet**.



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