Lightroom Tutorial – Graduated Filter and Adjustment Brush

By Bob Coffey

This step-by-step procedure is the one that I used in the **Adobe Lightroom** training session in February. It is an excellent example of turning a non-descript grab shot into a more impactful image with the imaginative use of two very versatile features; the **Graduated Filter** and the **Adjustment Brush**. While LR does not have layers, these tools and others can be used to achieve some of the same effects with great ease and speed. In this example there are five basic steps with many sub-steps.

Image #1

This image, ***British Countryside***, was supplied for this demonstration by Adobe as part of their joint training program with the **Photographic Society of America**. As you can see, it was over exposed with low contrast and a tilted horizon. Also, the color temperature was too cold. The net effect was one of a quick grab shot taken out of the car window that would normally be rejected. However, judicious use of the right tools can salvage it by transforming this sow's ear into a silk purse.

Image #2

The first step was to straighten the horizon using the **Crop Overlay** tool, either by rotating it from a corner or with the **Angle** tool. Then the **Color Temperature** was increased from **5100** to **6405 degrees Kelvin** to warm up the color. To improve the contrast, the **Black Point** was set by pressing the **Alt** key and the **Blacks** slider simultaneously and selecting the point at which the very first specks of black appear. The **White Point** was set by pressing the **Alt** key and the **Recovery** slider simultaneously and setting it at the point where the first specks of white appear. These two steps assure that the whites are white and the blacks are black, thus showing the entire range.

Image #3

In order to darken the clouds, the **Graduated Filter** was drawn down from the top such that the center line was along the tree line on the horizon and the bottom line was just below the hedge row along the far side of the plowed field in the center. When this tool is activated, a drop down menu includes

separate sliders for multiple adjustments; **Temperature, Tint, Exposure, Contrast, Highlights, Shadows, Whites, Blacks, Clarity, Saturation, Sharpness, Noise, Moiré, Defringe** and **Color**.

The **Exposure** was decreased by one stop and the **Brightness** was lowered slightly. The **Contrast, Clarity, Saturation** and **Sharpness** sliders were then increased to bring out the details in the clouds. These amounts are strictly subjective, so trial and error adjustments are encouraged to achieve the optimal settings.

Image #4

To lighten the center field, a second **Graduated Filter** was then pulled up from the bottom with its center button in the middle of the green way between the two plowed fields and the top line along the horizon. The **Exposure** was increased by half a stop and the **Brightness, Contrast, Saturation** and **Clarity** were increased considerably. Finally, a golden color was selected with the **Color** eyedropper to boost the appearance of the center field.

Image #5

To darken the field in the foreground, a third **Graduated Filter** was dragged up from the bottom with the center line along the far edge of the field and the two outer lines fairly close together to compress the transition. The exposure was decreased a full stop while the **Contrast, Saturation, Clarity** and **Sharpness** were all increased moderately.

Image #6

To darken the far hillside the **Adjustment Brush** was used with one stop decrease in **Exposure** and large increases in the **Contrast, Saturation, Clarity** and **Sharpness.** This was painted with the **Adjustment Brush** along the entire ridge line.

Image #7

In this final step, the overall image was tweaked to render a dramatic calendar shot of the British countryside. First, the **Presence** was enhanced by reducing the **Clarity** until the clouds looked like an approaching storm while the **Vibrance** and **Saturation** were set at +33 and +5 respectively. Then the **Tone Curve** was set in a classical **S** curve by boosting the **Highlights** to 63, the **Lights** to 26, **Darks** to 5

and the **Shadows** to – 20. The final touch was made by boosting the **Luminance sliders** for **Orange** and **Yellow** to produce a golden hour appearance just before the approaching storm arrives.

The settings above are approximate and they will never be the same, even for the same image, because they are very subjective. Artistic license was used to demonstrate what can be created with the tools available, so it will always be seasoned to one's personal taste to create the image that the maker envisions.

 A third tool, the **Radial Filter**, has recently been introduced to augment the coverage of the **Graduated Filter**. It allows customizable circles and ellipses to cover target area with the same array of sliders, thus providing greater flexibility in adjusting areas where the **Graduated Filter** would not be useful.

For comparison with the original, select the **Y-Y** view that shows side-by-side, before/after views. Is the finished image true to the actual appearance? Is it overly enhanced? Is it an appealing depiction of a place that you would like to visit? Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so enjoy the creativity of these versatile tools.