# Beckham Digital

## April 2016

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# Google Nik Filters for FREE

It seems that Google have released their Google Nik Collection to everyone, for free.

The Nik Collection is comprised of seven desktop plug-ins that provide a powerful range of photo editing capabilities. They include those to improve colour correction, retouching, creative effects, image sharpening and the ability to make adjustments to the colour and tonality of images.

Starting March 24, 2016, the latest Nik Collection will be freely available to download: Analog Efex Pro, Color Efex Pro, Silver Efex Pro, Viveza, HDR Efex Pro, Sharpener Pro and Dfine. If you purchased the Nik Collection in 2016, you will receive a full refund, which Google will automatically issue back to you in the coming days.

This seems like a great deal to me and I have been using Google Nik filters recently, particularly their black and white Silver Efex Pro filters with my Infra-Red images.  I take the images as far as I can in Camera Raw, but I often see what the Silver Efex Pro filters can do to the image. Often I am surprised and pleased with the results

These filters are well worth having and they download and install easily

# April Newsletter Video – PicturesToExe Slide Styles

Slide Styles were the big new thing when PicturesToExe 8 was launched and rightly so. They allow us to make a neat animated style for an image and not only save it, but use it again on just one image in another show or a hundred images and all with just a few clicks.

I have noticed with some of the questions asked about PicturesToExe that many users don't even know Slide Styles exist. Even those who do are often confused, so here we have a demo on how

we can create a Slide Style.



Once created, our Slide Style can be saved, we can create a derivative, we can share it with others and as I have said above. Add that Slide Style to one image or a hundred images in any of your other slide shows.  It makes sense that when we create some animation that we particularly like, save it as a style even if you don't have an immediate reason to re-use it.

Don't forget, once a Slide Style has been added to an image, you can adjust the animation it creates. Even if we only used Slide Styles to save a little time, they are well worth it.

For a more detailed set of tutorials on Slide Styles, just click one of the links I have created in this section.

Download our Newsletter Video HERE

## Computer Hard Drives – Size Matters

Given the fact that I often need a particular image to demonstrate a technique or that I may suddenly get the idea to create a slide show. For both of those options I need a fair few images



easy to hand, from which to choose the ones I want, or those best suited for the slide show.

In fact, it's also very nice and convenient too, when you just feel like browsing back a few years at images we shot 8 or 10 years ago. I like to do that and I am sure I am not unique there.

The Hard Drives available for our computers are now large capacity and affordable. In my last PC I decided to install 3 gig internal drives and it's so convenient to be able to store my entire image collection going back over 10 years.

I use a solid state 500mb drive for the operating system and programs, but image storage, both Raw and Completed are on seperate 3 Gig drives. Remember, that installing extra drives in your PC is quick and easy, but if you need extra cabling or don't feel confident, get your local PC Doctor to help out.

I am sure it will not be too long when all drives are solid state, but until they become as cheap as our standard SATA drives, then adding extra drives in your PC or using large capacity drives is a great option.

However, from time to time these drives may fail, after all, they do contain moving parts. These days S.M.A.R.T technology will often tell you the drive is about to fail, before it actually does.

I have experienced this twice over the past 5 years and it works. If one of your hard drives does fail, go to the manufacturers web site and you may find that if you type in the serial number, the web page will tell you if that drive is still in warranty. (some warranties are 5 years) and if it is, they will replace it.

## My Software meets all my needs – Or does it?

This is a phrase I have heard hundreds of times and I read the same thing constantly in photographic forums. In many circumstances I think that policy works fine and I follow it myself with a lot of software that I have been using unchanged for some years, but not all.



Take the image on the left, which was shot in May 2008 and in those days I was using Photoshop CS-3. The exposure here is correct from the cameras point of view, but in fact the image is over-exposed.

Why does a sophisticated camera get exposure wrong?

It doesn't, we do! Here the exposure required human intervention because the light meter was being overly effected by the dark tones in the lower part of the scene. The result is clear that we have great exposure on the bottom half of the image, but not the top half.

I am going to suggest that had I tried to do the same manipulation with the image below back in May 2008 with CS-3, I would have struggled. Those who say. *My software meets all my needs* is OK if your needs are back in 2008. However, the rest of us and photography in general have moved onto 2016.

Of course when an upgrade is launched with almost any software, we as consumers demand new gizmos and clever improvements, but we tend to only look at what is on the surface. New sharpening tools, new blur tools, but we ignore the more important changes in the engine room.

Photoshop now allows us far more control of exposure and contrast today than it could in 2008 with CS-3. Exposure and contrast are the two most important battles we have with our images, so we need all the help we can get.

These facts were brought home to me while taking a class with a number of people using different version of Photoshop on their laptops. I supplied the images, but when we got to the section on manipulating Raw images, those using CS-2 and CS-3 could not achieve what I could with the latest

version of Photoshop. How do I know this?



I assumed the differences were user error from those who were there to learn and I went to their laptop and Photoshop version to assist them, but I couldn't quite reach the same level and sohpistication in the manipulation as I could with the latest version. That was quite an eye opener, because we rarely do the sort of comparison, which show up these improvements.

So, does your version of Photoshop meet all your needs? And are you sure of that?

Photoshop for Photographers – Tutorials for the demanding Photographer

## Digital Doodling – Photoshop Master Class Video

This is a term I started using back in the very early days of digital photography to describe a method of image creation via Photoshop. It's when we sit down at the computer and browse our images, sometimes looking back on older ones we shot a few years ago.  When we do that we often see something that we didn't see at the time they were shot.

The Digital Doodling process describes a situation where we start a manipulation of an image having no real idea where we are going with it. Just like doodling with a pencil or pen, we allow ourselves to wander, try a few processes we don't usually use, play with tonal range, layers and filters. There is almost no limits to digital doodling.

OK, sometime we head in a direction that leads us to a dead end, but that happens at times even when we are not digital doodling. The image below was created just as I describe above.   It helps that I have a lot of my images stored on that big 3gig drive I spoke about above.

This image was shot in May 2007, back then I would have been using Photoshop CS-2, possibly CS-

3. Remember when you view this image here, that you're not seeing it at its best. That is due to the fact that the filters were applied at a higher resolution and the image was then downsized for the newsletter. Generally when we do that, something can be lost in an image.



If you look at the image below, you can see where the Digital Doodling started. (raw image-no manipulation) The composition is OK and it is a very recognisable skyline, but it's hardly a stand



alone powerful image. So what is it that I saw in this picture to make me choose it to doodle with?

To be honest, I am not sure I can easily answer that question. Maybe it was the content, composition and the skyline rather than the very flat and almost colourless image you see here. Even our mood at the time will influence what image we select.

The most vital point of Digital Doodling is that you have to develop the ability to look past what you see in that thumbnail as it appears alongside maybe a hundred others. You need to see it as something else, albeit that when you start, you're not sure what that something else is.

So, we follow our nose and using Camera Raw I decided right away that the colour added nothing



to the image and with all the evidence of cranes in the skyline it sort of reminded me of those old wartime images you see with balloons tethered above London.

Throughout the digital doodling, we must still apply the usual good sense rules we always use to create good images

So, the colour could go. My method is simply to slide the colour slider in Camera Raw all the way down and then

use the other sliders in the *Basic* section of Camera Raw to get the contrast and impact that I wanted. I don't tend to use the HSL sliders and the convert to grayscale option.

I tried to give the image as much contrast and impact I could and add a gritty feel to the black and white and perhaps that was because I still had idea of an old wartime image. However, it still didn't jump off the screen at me.  I had just heard that the Google Nik filters were now available free and although I already had them, perhaps this prompted me to run the image through the Nik Silver Efex Pro filters, which added an extra punch that I liked.

I then started to try one or two Topaz Impression filters but I never apply filters without making a layer copy first. Impressionist filters can unpredictable and obliterate fine detail like the cranes for example. We need to have ways to temper the effect and we can do that easily with a layer mask either globally or in strategic locations. This is where the charm and extra appeal seemed to appear.

Finally I gave the edges of the images a dark vignette and that hold the attention of the viewers right in the centre of the image where I want them. So an old image, taken 9 years ago, has given me a result that I am very pleased with.  One of the hardest parts of Digital Doodling is knowing when to stop



Check out our video HERE
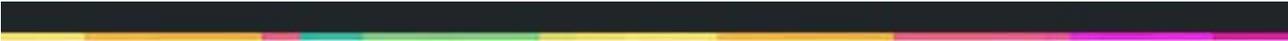
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