

Photoshop Elements SIG - June 13, 2007

by John Durrett

Integrating 2006 - 2007

We have covered a lot in the past 9 months, and this time we are going to integrate almost everything we have learned into creating one picture. We will start with a photo of a parakeet, courtesy of Sonja of Computer Booters. Here is the original.



This is a great natural photo, if a little dark. So here is the plan:

- isolate the bird from the background
- blur the background
- lighten up and brighten the bird
- vignette the bird
- add a color textured background
- add a frame

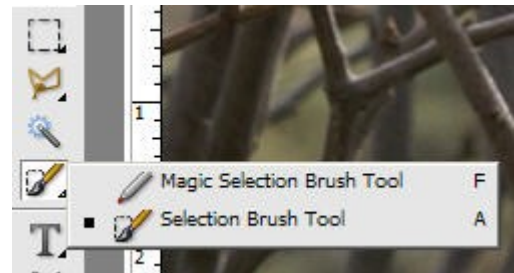
Our goal is to look something like this, the first time I did this project.



Ok, let's get started.

Isolate the Bird

Take the original jpeg file and save it as a PSD file in Photoshop Elements. From the Tool Bar on the left, find and select the Selection Brush Tool.

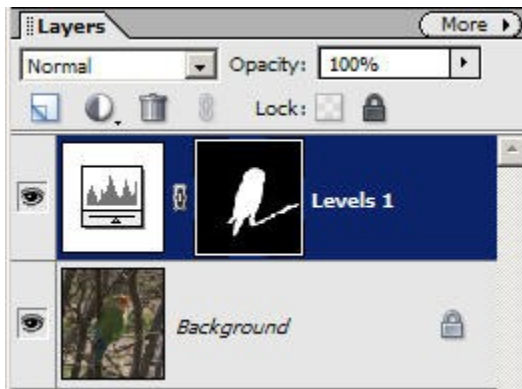


Now take that **Selection Brush** and paint over the bird and the limb he is sitting on. I used a 10 pixel Selection Brush. This is the start

of my selection, where I had painted over the bird's head and part of the back. Notice the selection lines.



I went on to finish selecting the bird and the limb. Now, and **IMPORTANT**, with the bird and limb selected, add a Levels Layer, and click Ok. Your Layers Palette will look like this.



Your selection of the bird and limb is now embedded within the mask on the Levels layer. **Save** your file.

Blur the Background

The next step is to reclaim your selection of the bird. Hold down the **Control** key and **Click on the Mask** on the Levels layer. You will see your marching ant outline of the bird and limb. Now, invert that selection by choosing **Select > Inverse**. The selection may look the same, but now the marching ant selection lines go around the border of the photo as well as the bird and limb. You have a nice selection of the background of the bird in the picture.

Grab the bottom layer (the background layer) and duplicate that layer. With the selection of the bird's background still active, select **Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur**. A setting of 4.0 pixels worked for me as a Radius of the filter. Click Ok. **Rename the layer** that we just filtered as "blur filter 4.0". That is a reminder to tell us what we did on this layer. The bird now stands out a little bit better from his blurred background. Deselect the background selection using **Ctrl + D**.

Lighten Up and Brighten the Bird

This is a multiple step process that depends a lot on the real photo. Go back to that **Levels Layer** and **double click** on the **Layer Thumbnail** on the left of the layer to open the levels settings. **Adjust the endpoints** to improve the contrast of the bird a bit.

Second step - **Ctrl + Click** the mask on the Levels layer to select the bird and limb. **Add a Hue/Saturation layer**. **Increase the Saturation** by moving the handle to the right (+35 worked for this picture).



We have a nice bird with a faded background.

Merged Visible Layer

Before we create a vignette, we need to integrate everything we have done in the layers palette into one layer. We call that a Merged Visible layer. First click on the topmost layer and make it active. Now hold down the **Control, Shift and Alt** keys with the left hand and press **N** with the right hand. Then, still holding down **Ctrl, Shift and Alt** keys with the left hand, press **E** with the right hand. You have a new layer at the top of your stack that is a Merged Visible layer. Everything in all the visible layers below it are merged onto one new layer. Rename that top layer as "merged visible" or "mv".

Vignette the Bird

Now we can vignette the bird. With the top mv layer active, do the following.

- select the Elliptical Marquee Selection tool and, with a little bit of feather (I set this to 5 px for this photo), draw a selection around the bird. (you don't have to include the entire limb)
- choose **Select > Inverse** so you have selected all in the picture except the oval with the bird.
- choose **Delete** to remove the background outside the oval on the mv layer.
- deselect using **Ctrl + D**.

Everything looks the same, until you look at your mv layer. Only the bird within the oval is showing. Turn off the visibility of all the layers beneath the mv layer to see vignette bird.

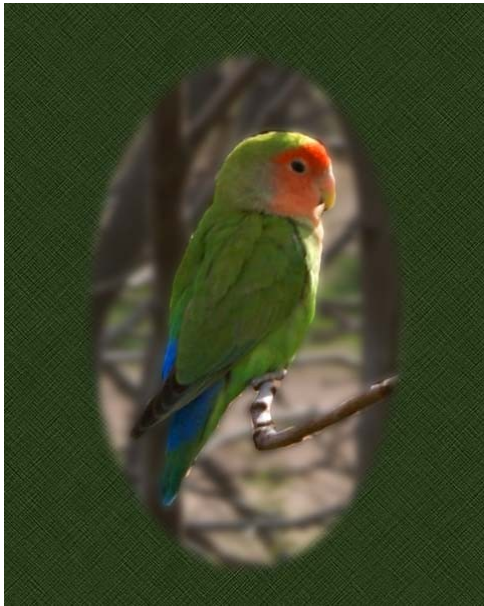
Add Colored Texture Background

Add a New Layer and rename it "textured background". Drag that "textured background" layer beneath the mv layer. Use the Eyedropper Tool from the Tool Bar on the left to select a color from the photo to use as a background color. I clicked over the deeper green on the back of the bird. That puts the dark green in as the Foreground Color. Use either **Alt+Backspace** or **Edit > Fill Layer** to fill the textured background layer with the dark green (You can choose any other color from the photo and it will work. Just play around).

To add the texture, be sure you are on the textured background layer, and

- select **Filter > Noise > Gaussian** (5% works here). Then add the texture
- using **Filter > Brush Strokes > Crosshatch** (my settings were 17, 5, 1).

The background is finished, and looks like the following picture.



Add a Frame

The last step is to create a frame for our project. To do this, first enlarge the canvas so we have room to add the frame. Select **Image > Resize > Canvas Size**, put a check mark in **Relative**, enter 2 inches in the width and height, **Canvas Extension Color** as **White**, and click **OK**. Now we have room for the frame.

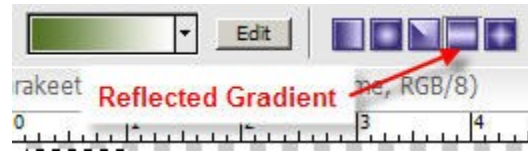
To make the first edge of the frame,

- add a new layer, and
- use the **Rectangular Marquee Selection Tool** and draw a rectangle along the left side of the mat.

Choose a complementary color for the frame using the **Eyedropper**, such as a light green for this picture.

- select the **Gradient Tool** from the Tool Bar.

- choose **Reflected Gradient** icon



Click and drag from the center of the frame element to the outside of the frame. The color should go from white to the light green, with the white in the middle of the frame. If that is not so, then put a check mark beside **Reverse**, and drag a new gradient. When you have white in the middle of the frame going to green at the outside then you are good. A section of the frame will look like this.



Part of the darker green mat is on the right. Remove the selection lines by typing **Ctrl+D**.

Next, **make three additional copies** of the layer that contains the frame element. Rename these four sections of the frame left, right, top, and bottom.

Right frame section:

- **Click** on the layer named right,
- Select the **Move Tool**,
- Type **Ctrl+T** to start a Free Transform,
- Hold down the **Shift key**, and **move the frame section** to the right side of the mat,
- Guide the curser to the top of the frame segment until the curser becomes a **double rotating arrow**,

- **Rotate** the top of the **frame section** until it is at the bottom (the number in the angle section should read 180 degrees - if not, then just type in 180).
- Click on the **Check Mark to set the Transform**.

Other Frame Sections:

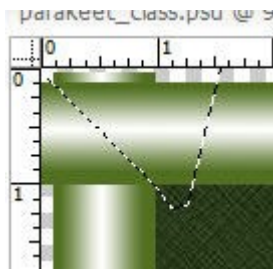
Using similar methods, move and position the other two frame sections along the top, and bottom.

Trim the Frame Corners:

The sections of the frame are in the right place, but the corners need to be trimmed. To **trim each corner along 45 degree lines**, use the **Polygonal Lasso Selection Tool**.

- Start just inside each corner,
- **Click** and hold down the **Shift key**, and
- **Drag** outside the corner of the frame,
- **Complete** selecting the part of the frame to throw away and **Delete** the unwanted segment.

This is what the upper left corner looks like before the deletion.



Make similar adjustments to each corner of the frame sections to delete the extra

lengths and get that 45 degree angle at the corners. The final picture will look like this.



Final Thoughts

You may be viewing this as a black and white handout. If that is the case, then go to Computer Booters and download the Photoshop Elements handout for June 2007. It is easier to understand in color. Looking at the final version, I might go back and redo the mat background into a lighter green the next time. The great thing about working with Photoshop Elements and all those layers, we can go back and redo with relative ease. But now it is time to be off to the printers for this handout.

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