

MICHAEL CLARK
PHOTOGRAPHY



NEWSLETTER



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fall 2006



FALL 2006 NEWSLETTER

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Staying Positive

In an ever changing industry, staying ahead of the curve is paramount



I have been reading a lot of talk about the “state of the photo industry”, most of it doom and gloom about how digital photography has changed our profession so much it might also be the death of it. While this might seem harsh there is some truth to it. But on the flip side is “what is good for the goose is good for the gander.” As a pro photographer the incredible new technology has allowed me to produce images I couldn’t have created with film - or at least not as easily. And certainly in terms of quality digital has taken our profession to a whole new level if and when digital is done right.

I think Richard Weisgrau in his recent post on stockphotographer.info had an insightful analysis of the stock photography world. He said, *“Print applications are beginning to take economic hits because of the Worldwide Web, and the Web is not craving the unique images that print does because Websites use other techniques to grab viewer attention. Demand for RM and RF stock diminishes and demand for Mircostock increases as the demand for high impact images decreases.”* Even outside the stock world, assignment photography has taken it’s hits as well with the Orphan Works legislation and ever decreasing day rates and creative fees.

So how does a professional photographer stay positive in light of the ever changing state of our profession? I think staying ahead of the curve is a big part of that. That means playing with the new software, learning how to use photoshop extensively, and working hard to make the new digital tools work to your advantage. Sadly, now is the time of the “creative geek” more than ever. As a former physicist I suppose I would fit into that category quite well. Photography is now the realm of those who can use both sides of the brain and still operate a business effectively. That is a tough combination of factors for most photographers, but I believe we are

starting to see those types of photographers rise to the top. There are already a number of well known photographers who fit into this category. I won’t name names but I think for the most part people know who they are because of their work and the style of work they create. And no disrespect to geeks, I am one of them - creative geeks unite!

Staying positive also means moving forward. This has been my best year yet and my business continues to grow every year, some years by leaps and bounds and some years just a little. I am working hard to make sure that trend continues but I also realize that I am not fully in control. **Security is a myth.** Many Americans shiver at the idea of that statement but that is reality and the rest of the world knows it all too well. As soon as we accept the fact that nothing is secure we can move on, adapt and change with the times.

I don’t like where the photo industry is headed but complaining about it certainly isn’t going to change anything. Now is the time to play and get more creative than you have ever been. Now is the time to differentiate yourself as a photographer more than ever before. Creativity and hard work still apply to every profession no matter what genre and it is no different with ours. There will always be a market for finely crafted creative images.

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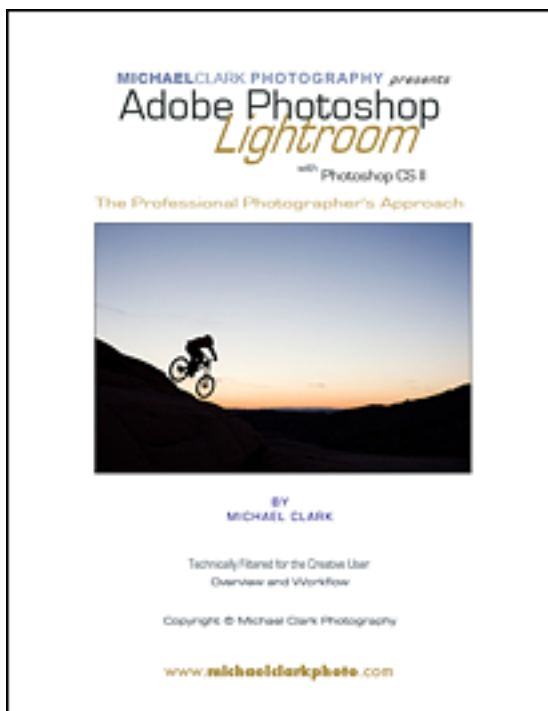
Nikon Ad

Michael featured in Nikon Advertorial for Digital Photo Pro Magazine

Nikon and Digital Photo Pro magazine featured Michael and his work in an advertorial in the November/December 2006 issue of Digital Photo Pro. The advertorial which appears on the inside back cover, also included an interview with some interesting questions such as “What turns you on creatively? What’s your dream photo assignment?” and “If you could have dinner with an artist from any era, who would it be?” One of the technical questions asked in the ad was “What is your favorite camera feature?” My response was: “The D2Xs has many incredible features but the white balance eye (Nikon calls it the Ambient Light Sensor) on the top of the camera is one feature that I use all the time. In a few seconds I can create a custom white balance for the light I am shooting in by just pressing two buttons and pointing the camera at the light source. It is a great feature for all lighting scenarios but especially when shooting at last light and the color temperature is changing every few minutes.” Also featured was the gear that I used to capture the image - a Nikon D2Xs and a 17-55mm DX Nikkor lens. The ad featured an image of Melisa Collett shot in Diablo Canyon just outside of Santa Fe, New Mexico on a route named “Evil” 5.10d/11a. My thanks to Nikon, Digital Photo Pro and to Eric Barth who shot the portrait image used in the ad.

New Adobe Lightroom Workflow

Michael has developed a new improved workflow with Lightroom



In this ever-changing world of digital tools, I have recently re-worked my digital workflow using Adobe Photoshop Lightroom. I chose Lightroom because of its intuitive and powerful controls as well as its user interface. I have found that 80% of what I do in post processing with careful shooting techniques can be done in Lightroom and can be done faster than using Adobe Bridge and Photoshop alone. Adobe Lightroom also has much more advanced image editing and RAW processing tools - allowing me to concentrate on the images and not on the technical details. Because I teach workshops and seminars on digital workflow I have put my workflow into an 89 page PDF e-book which covers everything from image capture to output using Lightroom and Photoshop. The e-book sells for \$29.95 and can be purchased at <http://www.sfdigitaldarkroom.com/DownloadsAndTutorials/45>. At \$29.95 you basically get an advanced digital workshop in book form.

RECENT CLIENTS: Nikon, Digital Photo Pro, Men's Journal, Red Pine Outdoors, Sharp End Publishing, and the Santa Fean Magazine.

inside

the photographer's studio

Michael Clark On Photography

What turns you on creatively?

An adventurous spirit. Wild angles. Creating an image that has never been shot before.

What turns you off creatively?

Sitting in front of my computer!

What's your dream photo assignment?

Photographing cheetahs running at full speed in the Serengeti. I'm not a wildlife photographer, but I've always dreamed about going to the Serengeti to photograph the animals and the landscapes there. It would be sweet to spend a few months living with the animals, getting to know them and create some stunning images.

If you could have dinner with an artist from any era, who would it be?

Salvador Dalí. He was out there and always created visually stunning art. He created art that you couldn't turn away from—it was completely new and original and done with incredible technical skill.

What's your favorite photograph not taken by you?

Steve McCurry's photograph of the Afghan girl that was on the cover of National Geographic years ago. Her green eyes are captivating and tell a story that goes well beyond a normal portrait. It's one of those few photographs where every time I see it, I'm mesmerized by her face, what she has been through and what she must have been thinking at that moment.

What profession other than photographer would you like to attempt?

Professional tennis player. I was never good enough to make it, but I still play as often as I can.

What's your favorite camera feature?

The D2xs has many incredible features, but the white balance eye (Nikon calls it the Ambient Light Sensor) on the top of the camera is one feature that I use all the time. In a few seconds, I can create a custom white balance for the light I'm shooting in by just pressing two buttons and pointing the camera at the light source. It's a great feature for all lighting scenarios, but especially when shooting at last light when the color temperature is changing every few minutes.

What's your favorite Nikon product, and how does it help you create better pictures or help you compete as a professional photographer?

My hands-down favorite is the D2xs. When coupled to a 17-55mm I have a great shooting setup. The D2xs is the finest camera Nikon has ever made and the range of the 17-55mm allows me to get some of my most dramatic shots. The D2xs is tough, and that becomes a nice feature when hanging from a rope and bashing my cameras up against the cliff face trying to get into position while shooting rock climbers. Add in the 17-55mm lens and Nikon's superb Speedlights, and it adds up to a system that allows me to get images I never could have gotten with film.



Michael Clark



17-55mm DX Nikkor



Nikon D2xs

Nikon D2xs

- Ultra-high-resolution, 12.4-megapixel DX-format CMOS sensor
- Solid magnesium-alloy construction to withstand the rigors of professional use
- 5 fps shooting speed at full resolution or 8 fps in unique High-Speed Crop mode
- Sharp, clear 2.5-inch TFT LCD with 170° wide-angle viewing

17-55mm f/2.8 ED-IF AF-S DX Nikkor

- Developed exclusively for the Nikon DX-format image sensors
- Versatile wide-angle to moderate telephoto zoom range
- Fast constant f/2.8 aperture
- 3 Extra-Low Dispersion (ED) glass elements minimize aberrations and color distortion



At the heart of the image.

The Nikkor AF-S 70-200mm f/2.8G VR

Nikon's latest version of the 80-200 adds Vibration Reduction. Is it the best yet?

With the advent of high resolution digital cameras, specifically Nikon's D2X and D200, the need for higher quality lenses and steady hands became a much bigger issue than it was with film cameras. I have owned almost every version of Nikon's top 80-200mm f/2.8 lenses over the past thirteen years. My last 80-200, the AF-S version was noticeably sharper than the previous one, and with this latest incarnation, the 70-200 AF-S VR the trend continues. With the Nikon D2X and its 12.4 MP sensor I noticed that any camera shake was magnified in the image and that forced me to shoot at higher shutter speeds than with previous digital or film cameras. After doing a resolution comparison last year and realizing that my 35mm D2X had the same resolution (or close to it) as my Hasselblad I started to understand why camera shake was a problem. To counter this problem I sold my 80-200 AF-S and upgraded to the 70-200 AF-S VR version earlier this year. I can't say that I have found the 70-200 any sharper than my old 80-200 AF-S but the Vibration Reduction (VR) has made a big difference in image quality with the Nikon D2X, especially in low light situations.

The addition of VR wasn't the only improvement. The new 70-200 adds 10 mm of range to the zoom, feels lighter and smaller (in diameter) and also has a much more stable tripod collar than the older 80-200. With the older 80-200 AF-S I found that even putting it on a tripod did not guarantee sharper images because of the wobble in the tripod collar. Nikon has solved that problem in the 70-200 thankfully. Since I use a Kirk BH-1 Arca Swiss style ballhead I also bought a replacement foot from Really Right Stuff (the LCF-10, see below) that replaces the Nikon foot and allows a direct connection to my tripod head with no wobble.

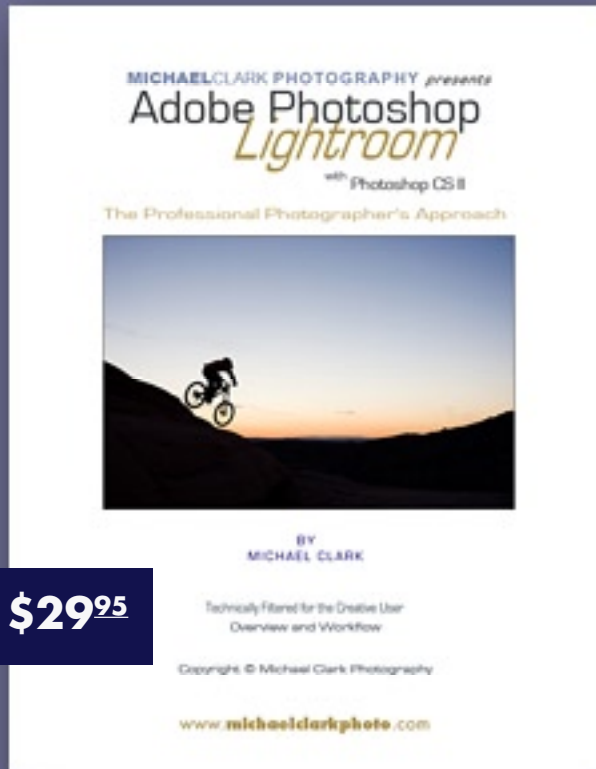
With the AF-S 70-200mm f/2.8G VR ED-IF (what a name?) and the Nikon D2X I have an incredibly versatile setup. The DX size sensor makes this lens the approximate equivalent of a 105 to 300mm f/2.8 zoom with vibration reduction, and further if I use the D2X's crop mode that equates roughly to a 140 to 400mm stabilized f/2.8 zoom. That is a lot of versatility.

The 70-200 is also a G lens which means it can only be used on newer cameras but that includes all of Nikons digital cameras these days so not a big deal - it does

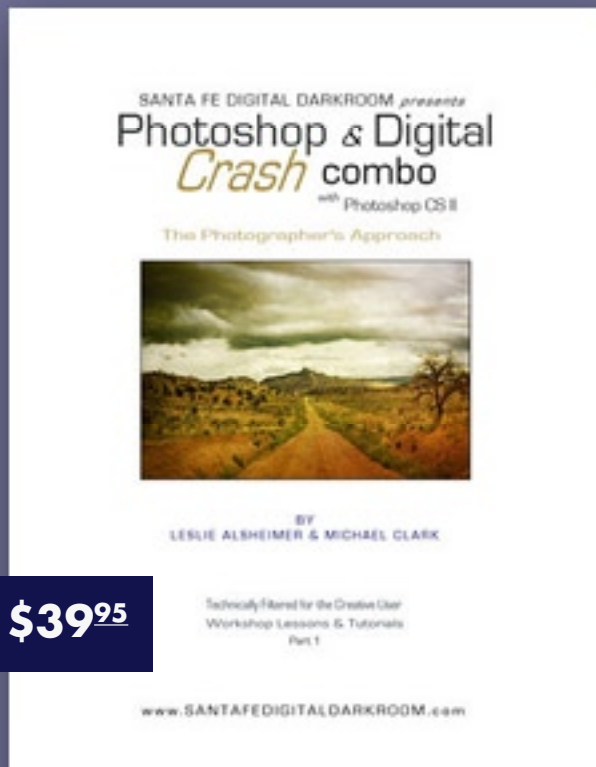


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equipment review

mean the camera and lens now have an electronic interface which makes it paramount to turn the camera off before changing lenses.

The big question with this lens when I bought it was how well does the Vibration Reduction work? The answer is extremely well. I find myself using it a lot and it has allowed me to regain shutter speeds I would not have used with my older 80-200 AF-S. With the older 80-200 AF-S anything below 1/500th a second was marginal in terms of critical sharpness, now with the VR I have been able to go down to 1/200th and even farther handheld with good results. The lens is also ideally suited for motion blurs.

In terms of image quality the lens is superb - and even with the VR turned on I have not noticed a difference in image quality unless I am pushing the limits of the VR and my handholding technique. For more information on this lens go to www.nikon.com and for an image quality review www.slrgear.com.

A WORD ON FILTERS

As I reported in my D2X and Hasselblad comparison last spring, the higher resolution of my Nikon D2X forced me to take all of my protective filters off my lenses. And with white balance control I no longer need the warming filters I had always used with film. Being an adventure sports photographer and spending a lot of time dangling from cliffs, I had to find filters that would not affect image quality and would protect my major investment in lenses.

After some research and experimentation, I have found B+W filters equal to the task. Now all of my lenses have B+W filters and my lenses don't feel completely naked while I'm hanging from a cliff anymore. It may sound like a small thing but for me it is critical that I protect the front element of my \$1500 lenses when I am putting them in harm's way - i.e. with mountain bikers flying past my camera only inches away, in the water with kayakers, and climbing with a camera hanging around my neck.

The B+W filters are not cheap - on average for my 77mm filters they run \$80 or so. But \$80 is cheaper than a new \$1500 lens. I heartily recommend these filters if you are shooting with a high resolution camera and still want to maintain the image quality a 10+ megapixel camera is capable of producing.

Nikon D2x Update

New Firmware for Nikon D2x offers big changes

On October 3, 2006, Nikon released Firmware 2.00 for the Nikon D2x to bring it up to par with the new version of this camera, the Nikon D2Xs.

This upgrade brought with it several notable improvements in the camera with no additional cost to the consumer - bravo Nikon! Most notable among the improvements are lower noise, the addition of one-third stops of ISO between 800 and 1600 ISO (.3 and .7), a black and white shooting mode, an easier to read font for the LCD menus, more accurate auto-focus and finally (thank you VERY much Nikon!) the option to clean the CMOS sensor without using the AC adapter. This is of course only a partial list of the items I found the most exciting.

Since upgrading the firmware almost a month ago, I have been shooting rock climbing in West Virginia under cloudy skies and had to crank up the ISO to get acceptably sharp images. Normally I wouldn't use anything higher than ISO 640, but when I downloaded the first batch of images shot at ISO 640 I noticed they had much less noise than images I had shot previously at that ISO. The next day it was raining but we were still shooting under an overhanging cliff and it was even darker out so I cranked it up to ISO 800 for one route and then ISO 1250 (HI .3) for the next. Once I downloaded the images I was amazed at how little noise the images had in comparison to my earlier tests. With the new firmware, images shot at up to ISO 1600 are now usable, especially with some help from Noise Ninja noise reduction software (www.picturecode.com). It isn't often that I shoot at ISO's above 800 but to know that they are usable for my work and my clients opens up a whole new world. I don't know how Nikon did it in a firmware upgrade but I am very impressed.

In my original review of the D2X, I berated Nikon for not allowing users the ability to clean the CMOS sensor using the camera's battery. They must have been listening because now we can. And on top of that they have added a much welcomed black and white shooting mode as well. The only difference now between the D2X and the D2Xs is that in the crop mode the D2Xs darkens the outer portions of the finder not in use - that isn't a big deal for me as I like being able to see what is coming into and going out of the cropped frame.

This firmware upgrade bodes well for Nikon professionals because Nikon has shown us they can improve an existing camera through a firmware upgrade. It also tells us they are listening to what we need. All good things. Here is a partial list of the new features:

- ♦ H 0.3 (ISO 1000), H 0.5 (ISO 1100) and H 0.7 (ISO 1250) options have been added between ISO 800 and ISO 1600 settings.
- ♦ Subject acquisition and tracking performance with autofocus shooting is faster.
- ♦ A Black-and-white mode has been added.
- ♦ Up to 3 custom tone curves can now be downloaded to the camera for use with the Custom option in the shooting menu's Tone compensation item.
- ♦ An Image authentication item has been added to the setup menu. Optional Image Authentication Software is required to authenticate images.
- ♦ A Save/load settings item has been added to the setup menu.
- ♦ The Mirror lock-up item (for sensor cleaning) in the setup menu has been modified to function with battery power as well as AC-adapter power.
- ♦ The Lock-On item in the CSM menu now offers 4 options: Long, Normal (default), Short, and Off.
- ♦ Max. Sensitivity and Min. shutter speed options have been added to the ISO auto item in the CSM menu.
- ♦ The Maximum shots item in the CSM menu has been modified to support a maximum setting of 60 shots.
- ♦ The FUNC. button in the CSM menu has been divided into two separate items labeled FUNC. button and FUNC. + Command.
- ♦ A Recent settings item has been added to the setup menu.
- ♦ The amount of information shown on page 3 (shooting data 1) of the single-image playback photo-information display has been increased.
- ♦ Vibration reduction (on/off) is displayed if the image was captured with a VR lens.
- ♦ The information shown on page 5 (GPS data) of the single-image playback photo-information display has been modified.
- ♦ Latitude and Longitude information now shows up to three digits displayed for each segment.

Digital Workflow for Photo Buyers

A few ideas on how to deal with the deluge of images that come into your office everyday

Digital photography is changing so rapidly that it is hard to keep up with all of the latest and greatest software. I originally started this newsletter as a marketing tool, it has since morphed into a marketing tool and an educational outlet for both photographers and photo buyers. To that end, this issue I have decided to share with photo buyer how I would go about dealing with the hordes of images if I was a photo editor or art buyer. You have a tough job. Hopefully this will help make it just a bit easier - or at least give you a few ideas.

First I would find the fastest software browser I could so I didn't have to wait around as images loaded into a browser. That browser, as far as I know is called Photo Mechanic made by Camera Bits (<http://www.camerabits.com/>). It is by far the fastest browser I have ever used and would serve a photo buyer very well. Secondly, I would set up an FTP site so that I wouldn't have to deal with physical submissions anymore. FTP allows a photographer to upload their images directly to a photo buyer. In this day and age of high speed internet every photographer uses FTP on a regular basis and it has become one of the defacto standard methods for image delivery. Third, I would set guidelines for photographers to use when

“IN THIS DAY AND AGE OF HIGH SPEED INTERNET EVERY PHOTOGRAPHER USES
FTP AND IT HAS BECOME THE DEFACTO STANDARD METHOD FOR IMAGE DELIVERY.”

submitting images. I would ask that initial submissions consist of low resolution jpeg's. This would allow me to crank through submissions quickly and still see enough detail to make final decisions on an image. The perfect size for these submissions would vary but I have found the outdoor clothing company Patagonia's submission size requirements to be the best I have run into yet. They ask for images to be sized at 10" X 15", at 144 dpi, and saved as jpegs compressed at the quality of 10. This file size is easily submitted via FTP and is large enough to see quite a bit of image detail. It is also big enough that photographers might edit their submissions more strictly saving the photo editor time. Once an image was chosen, I would then have the photographer FTP the high resolution file.

Obviously one would have to set up a well thought out organizational structure to keep track of everyone's images and who was who. I would ask photographers to include their name in the file name of each image - then copy the images that I liked into a separate folder of selects, saving the "rejects" for future consideration and thus building my own stock of images. Obviously there is much more to think about but these are the basics of editing 1,000's of images.

Lastly, I would encourage photo buyers to publish their digital submissions guidelines on their websites so everyone knows how to make submissions. I'm know many of you are using a similar workflow, hopefully there are a few ideas here that will help you out.

Glossary:

Workflow - The movement of documents and/or tasks through a work process.

FTP = File Transfer Protocol. A method by which large amounts of data can be transferred via the internet.



[PORTFOLIO]

[PORTFOLIO]



Brave New Digital World

by Michael Clark

It is indeed a brave new digital world. As I sit and type this article the days when I shot film seem like decades ago, not just a few years back. In the fall of 2004 I wrote an article entitled “The Digital Backlash” for this section of the newsletter. That article spoke about the earlier days of digital’s acceptance or lack thereof and how editors were frustrated with digital and preferred film (at the time). These days, I don’t get that same feeling. Everyone asks for digital now. In fact, many photo editors prefer digital to film. Perhaps photo editors have just gotten used to it and have learned to deal with digital. Even so, I still see a lot of issues with the reproduction of digital images but not as many as in 2004. And in a few more years I am sure we’ll be much closer to having those issues dealt with entirely - or at least one can hope.

Digital imaging has changed photography radically. It has kicked

“I HIGHLY RECOMMEND THAT ANYONE WORKING WITH DIGITAL IMAGES, AMATEUR OR PROFESSIONAL - OR PHOTO BUYER, READ THE UPDIG DIGITAL GUIDELINES.”

open a whole new outlook on photography for amateur photographers. Where once film and the secret of exposing it correctly baffled the masses digital has done away with the mystery that film once held. For the amateur this is great news. For the professional it means that thousands upon thousands of would be amateur photographers are now trying to sell their images - and the stock photography world couldn’t be happier. This means they will get decent to excellent quality content for next to nothing and have all rights to the images in many cases. This is the reality of how digital has changed the landscape of photography - and it is only going to continue. The aim of the camera manufacturers is to create a camera that can take a photograph just as you see with your own eyes. And they are getting closer and closer to achieving that.

There is still a large gap between a professional and an amateur and that gap is hard work, creativity and focus. Digital might have simplified (or complicated) the image capture process but it hasn’t replaced composition, lighting, perspective and content. What it does allow all of us is the ability to see our image immediately and improve upon it. That fact alone has helped all of us, amateur or pro, to be able to capture the image we have in our mind much more easily. And it is only going to get better.

Recently UPDIG (Universal Photographic Digital Imaging Guidelines - www.updig.org) updated their guidelines for digital photography to Version 2.0. I highly recommend that anyone working with digital images, amateur or professional - or photo buyer, give the guidelines a read. Organizations like UPDIG, which is built up by ASMP, APA, EP and the like, are key to forming digital standards so that we can all move forward in this new era of photography.



Andrew Williams spreading out the fabric in his hot air balloon as it is being filled up
at the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta in Albuquerque, New Mexico.
Nikon D2x, Nikkor 17-35mm f/2.8 ED-IF, Sandisk Extreme III CF Card

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The Santa Fe Digital Darkroom provides professional and customized photography, Photoshop and creative imaging instruction, private coaching, weekend workshops, custom portfolio & promotional development, as well as the Digital Vacation Workshops. Working collaboratively with you, we specialize in helping photographers and artists transition into digital technology and processes with ease using the latest image processing and printing techniques in a calibrated workflow. Professional photographer, educator, and software beta tester Leslie Alsheimer brings a photography workshop learning environment to you. Or, come join Leslie Alsheimer and Michael Clark for one of our weekend Digital Vacation Workshops in Santa Fe and abroad!

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