



Recipes for Images

Start with a Photo

ONE of the best things about digital photography is that you can shoot to your heart's content. You never have to worry about trips to the drugstore for more film, or to the one-hour joint for processing, or to the mall for albums and tape and photo corners, or to the ATM to pay for all of that stuff. You can take lots of pictures, learning as you go and sharing the good ones with your family and friends.

And one of the worst things about digital photography is . . . that you can shoot to your heart's content. Now you've had your digital camera for a while, you've taken a few thousand pictures, and the shine has kind of worn off. The photos are piling up on your hard drive, and you don't know what to do with them any more. You've made a couple of Web pages and printed a few pictures of the kids to send to Grandma and burned a couple dozen CD-ROMs to make space for more images on your hard drive. Now what? More Web pages? More snapshots for Grandma? More CD-ROMs? Not necessarily. There's much more you can do, quickly and easily, to enhance your images and make them as fun and exciting as the day you took them. And that's what this book is about. We'll show you how you can get your digital images off your computer, out of your closet, and into the real world.

Your Photos: More Than Just Pictures

If you're like most people, when you think of the word "photograph," you probably think something like "in a book," "on a Web page," or "hung on the wall." But look around you. You will find pictorial images everywhere: on the sides of buses, on postcards, on T-shirts, on coffee mugs, in newsletters, on shopping bags, on rubber stamps, you name it. They might not look like it, but many of those images, even the ones that look like handmade drawings, may have started out as photographs. In this chapter, we'll introduce some of the interesting ways you can turn your own photos into real-world objects that are both useful and decorative.

Turning Photos into Real-Life Objects

The first step in turning your photos into something more than fodder for those albums you keep in the front closet is to discover something you'd like to do. Last time you walked through the mall, maybe you saw one of those pushcart merchants hawking T-shirts with photos of you or your kids on them. You may have been intimidated by the nice umbrella lights and fancy videocam the operator was using. Don't be. Your own pictures are equally good candidates for T-shirts. In fact, they're probably better, because you can keep shooting until you get one you like, even if it takes all weekend to get just the right gap-toothed grin from your seven-year-old—and you won't have to pay the inflated prices those operators get. A little work with your image-editing program, and you can put that picture on as many shirts as you like.

Or maybe you just came home from the vacation of your dreams and wish you'd sent postcards to all your friends to show them all where you were. You *did* take your digital camera, didn't you? Well, you can use your own snapshots to make postcards that look as if they came off a rack in a tawdry souvenir shop—or a nice one—in Marrakech (if that's where you went, that is).

Or maybe you're the newsletter editor for a club of people who have adopted retired racing greyhounds. You'd like to come up with a new banner for the top of the newsletter you send out to announce each month's amateur race meet—a fun activity for "retired" greyhounds who aren't quite ready to stay on their couches. If you've taken your camera along with you to some meets, you're bound to have taken some good pictures of dogs coming out of the starting box or flying headlong across the finish line. It's a cinch to turn one of those pictures into a "line drawing" that will copy well and look really professional.

This is really all there is to coming up with ideas. Look around you some more, and you'll have more ideas than you'll ever have time for. In the following sections, we'll show you some different ways you can print photos and work with the results.

Printing on Paper and Other Materials

Most of us normally think of printing on paper. And that's most of the printing we do; we print letters, pictures, spreadsheets, and so on. But it's also possible to print directly onto other materials. In this section, we'll talk briefly about papers and other things to print on. We're mostly concerned with inkjet printers; laser printers are not well suited to the kinds of things we're going to show you in this book.

You probably know that there are many kinds of paper that are suitable for printing, but you may not know what makes one paper better than another for a particular use. Papers are made of wood pulp, of cotton or linen "rag" stock, or of both wood and cloth fibers. Paper for laser printers or photocopiers has long fibers for the toner powder to stick to and lodge between until it's fused to the paper. This kind of paper is nice and cheap, but it's too absorbent for use with inkjets. Inkjet paper is made with shorter fibers that are pressed more tightly together, and it's also coated with clay for a smoother finish and less absorbency. That's why it costs more than laser paper, and it's also why inkjet printouts look so much better on inkjet paper. They're sharper because they don't bleed or blur the way they would on laser paper.

flash



Don't cheap out when you're buying paper and ink for special projects. Be sure to buy paper labeled for the kind of printer you're using, and stay away from refilled ink cartridges—they can leak and ruin your printouts

But even ordinary inkjet paper leaves something to be desired when you're printing high-quality images. Paper for printing photographs is nonabsorbent and is specially coated with gelatin instead of the clay that's used on ordinary inkjet paper. When you print in photo mode, you're telling your printer to use a lot more ink. The gelatin on special photo paper for inkjets traps the extra ink and holds it in suspension where it can contribute to the image instead of being absorbed into the paper where it won't show. This is why images printed on photo paper are so much more vibrant than those printed on ordinary paper.

But you're not restricted to printing on paper. Printing on fabric can be lots of fun; you can make those T-shirts we mentioned earlier, or pillows like the one in Figure 1.1, or neckties, or more. A few years ago, we even made a baby quilt by scanning family pictures, printing them in black and white on colored squares of cotton, and piecing the squares together. Then we sent the pieced quilt top away to the baby's grandmother to be quilted.

The easiest way to put a picture on a piece of fabric is to use commercial iron-on transfer sheets that you can get at craft shops. You print on the sheet, lay the sheet face down on the fabric, and pass a hot iron over the sheet. This results in a print that looks and feels like commercial rubberized T-shirt transfers. The thing to remember when working with transfer sheets is that your image will be reversed during the transfer process, so before you print it you will need to flip it horizontally in your image-editing program.

You can also print directly on a piece of fabric. To do this, you iron a sheet of freezer paper (obtainable at kitchen stores) onto the back of the fabric and then run the combined sheet through your printer, with the fabric side facing the ink heads. One advantage this technique has over the transfer technique is that you don't have to flip your picture before printing it. Also, direct printing won't change the way the fabric feels in your hand the way the transfer will. Obviously, you are limited to pieces of cloth the size that your printer can handle. You're also limited pretty much to silk or cotton, because other materials won't absorb the ink well.

FIGURE 1.1

This decorative pillow features a 1906 image of Father Christmas that was scanned from an antique postcard and printed on silk.

You could make a similar pillow using a close-up photo of your showiest garden rose or a portrait of your kitten.



flash



Before you print on cloth, you should wash it in a product such as Bubble Jet Set 2000 to make it less subject to fading in the wash. Like the printing itself, this product works best on silk or cotton fabric. You can buy it at craft and quilt stores or on the Web; we get ours from Dharma Trading Company (www.dharmatrading.com).

You can also buy specialty fabric items such as neckties that are specifically intended for printing; for most of these you'd use the iron-on transfer technique. (We've never tried to run a necktie through a printer, and we don't want to think about it.) You can find tons of information about how to do these things by searching the Web.

focus

Several Web sites can get you started printing on exotic materials. The BryerPatch Studio (www.bryerpatch.com/faq/bjs_q&a_page.htm) features a comprehensive list of questions and answers about printing on fabric with Bubble Jet Set 2000 from textile artist Caryl Bryer Fallert. At June Tailor's Computer Printer Fabric (www.compuquilt.com/jtprntfab.htm), you can buy letter-size pieces of cotton fabric already treated for inkjet printing—just open the package and load up your printer. For photo paper, transfer paper, CD/DVD labels, printable magnet sheets, and printable blanks for greeting and business cards, try MyInks.com (www.myinks.com). You'll find even more exotic printing materials at Printer Supply Shop (www.printersupplyshop.com/shop/novelty.htm), where you'll find puzzle blanks, bumper stickers, even silver film for a mirror-like effect. And the Imagination Gallery (www.paper-paper.com) has fuzzy paper (for printing your own velvet Elvises and dollhouse carpets) and shrink film for making your own Shrinky-Dinks—flash back to the '70s! Be sure to check out the outlet page for cool bargains.

Embellishing Printed Images

We don't want to turn this into just another craft book, but we are talking about making your pictures into real-world objects, so let's look at a few possibilities beyond plain printing.

First, you might take a fresh look at rubber stamps. Most people have rubber stamps made with their return addresses, "For Deposit Only," or a similar text message. But there's no rule that says you can't put a wild and crazy picture on one. Craft people print remarkable things with rubber stamps; they'll stamp a complicated picture and then hand-color it, or add glitter or braid or other decoration, or emboss it or frame it. You can use commercial stamps from a stamp or craft store, but you can also take any

image, preferably one that looks like a line drawing, to a rubber-stamp maker or an office-supply outlet like Staples, and have it made into a custom rubber stamp. We'll show you ways you can convert your photos into stampable images in Chapter 10, "Simple Gifts: Having More Fun with Fewer Colors."

The idea of combining rubber stamps with glitter or braid and so on, opens up the intriguing possibility of using commercial rubber stamps and combining them with your own printed images. Figure 1.2 shows two holiday cards that we made using rubber stamps. One shows a photo of Richard's front door that we converted to a line drawing, together with a rubber-stamped red "Merry Christmas." The other has a printed village combined with rubber-stamped images covered with embossing powder that you melt with a heat gun to produce a print that looks like the thick, glossy printing on some commercial greeting cards.

Of course, once you start thinking about it, there are all sorts of other materials you can apply to printed images. The Web is full of tips and techniques you can adapt to your own projects, and craft stores are a great place to visit for inspiration. At craft shops like Michaels (www.michaels.com) or A. C. Moore (www.acmoore.com), you'll find cool things like spray glitter, fake jewels, paint pens, spray "granite," braid and lace, even finger paints. Scrapbooking materials and techniques are especially adaptable for use with printed digital photos. Let your mind wander, and see what happens!



FIGURE 1.2

These holiday cards combine inkjet prints with rubber stamping.

flash



Use a piece of cardboard to mask the central portion of your printout so that you can spray glitter or other stuff around its edges without obscuring the photo itself.

Measuring and Conforming to Regulations

Most of the time you can design your projects at any size you want—or at any size your printer can accommodate, anyway. But if you’re creating a piece that you’ll want to mail—like the postcard we made for Chapter 13, “What I Did on My Summer Vacation: Combining Text and Images in a Postcard”—or something that needs to fit into an existing location such as a Rolodex or a brochure display rack, it’s important to take good measurements and stick to them.

Postal regulations are especially strict about sizes and weights. In the U.S., you can get all the information you need about mailing regulations at the United States Postal Service’s Web site (www.usps.gov); other countries have similar Web sites (for example, check out www.koreapost.go.kr in Korea). Or you can inquire at your local post office. If mailing pieces are too small or too large, or if they’re too thick or weigh too much, you’ll be charged extra postage, or your piece may not even be accepted for mailing. Be particularly sure to check ahead of time if you’re planning on doing a large mailing—such as wedding invitations—to make sure you don’t have to redo your project at the last minute.

flash



If you’re creating a piece that you plan to fold into thirds, such as a brochure, be sure to make the middle panel and the cover panel wider than the third panel so that the paper folds neatly with no unsightly bulges.

How to Take a Good Picture

Most cameras come with instructions telling you how to take a picture, but very few of them actually tell you how to take a *good* picture. With a digital camera, it’s easy to get the exposure right, and most digital cameras even correct for color balance, but that’s not all there is to it. In this section, we’ll give you a few tips that will help you to improve your picture-taking skills so that fewer of your shots fall victim to the Delete button.

Plan the Composition

The first and most important rule about taking a good picture is, *Never put your subject in the exact center of the picture.* That sounds strange, but how many really boring snapshots of Aunt Griselda or Uncle Homer have you seen? Too many, we'll warrant, and a big part of why those snapshots are boring is that they're flat, dull, and lifeless. The subject is just standing there smack in the middle of the frame, staring at the camera with a forced smile and looking very posed.

Spend a few minutes looking at some great art. You can see the paintings we describe on the Web at the Artchive (www.artchive.com).

Start with the *Mona Lisa*. She's in the middle of the picture, isn't she? No, she's not. Her face is well above the center, slightly to the left, and not aimed straight at the "camera." What's in the exact center of the picture? The middle of her chest. Not exactly the life of the party, is it? But her face, now, that's magnetic. You can't resist it. And her hands are at the bottom, perfectly balancing her face in the frame. The overall effect is one of great peace and serenity.

Now look at *Christina's World* by Andrew Wyeth and observe the composition. Christina is low and to the left, about a third of the way in from the left side and about a third of the way up from the bottom. This composition follows the rule of thirds, which is a good rule for composing pictures. Put the most important object at one of the four "one-third in, one-third up or down" points, with its position and angle leading the viewer's eye toward (or maybe through) the center of the frame. In this picture, your eye is drawn toward the distant house at the top of the picture. This particular composition radiates tension and separation.

Another picture that follows the rule of thirds, but without seeming to, is Eugene Delacroix' *Liberty Leading the People*. Here, the figure of Liberty and the young man to the right of her combine to become the primary object, and they're just where they ought to be: one third of the way from the right and (follow your eyes here) one third of the way down from the top. Liberty's pose draws your eye irresistibly toward the other side of the frame, where the mass of people balances her and the one man well. This is a dramatic composition, full of fire and very much alive.

Now, we don't expect you to go out and start taking photographs as great as these paintings. We can't do it ourselves, either. But we can, and do, think about composition. Figure 1.3 shows one of the photos that have resulted from our care to compose pictures well.

**FIGURE 1.3**

*Richard made this photo, titled *The East Tower*, to resemble art photos created by his grandfather, Paul L. Anderson, a noted pictorialist who worked in the early part of the 20th century. The picture has the appearance of an antique hand-worked “bromoil” print.*

flash



Remember to pay attention to what’s in your picture besides the thing you’re actually photographing. If you’re shooting a person, for example, don’t stand the person so that a telephone pole appears to be growing out of his or her head. For Figure 1.3, Richard waited a whole year for the fog to be just thick enough to hide the pair of 14-story apartment towers that you can’t see beyond the trees.

Pay Attention to Lighting

Lighting is a complex subject that artists spend years, even lifetimes studying. We can’t give you a lifetime of experience working with light in just a few paragraphs, but we can offer two guidelines to improve nearly every photo.

To start with, remember that most pictures are more interesting if the light doesn’t fall on the subject from directly behind the photographer. Look again at the three paintings we talked about before (see the preceding section, “Plan the Composition”). In all of them, the light falls obliquely across the field of view. This gives the objects in the picture shape and

depth; they're three-dimensional, not flat as they would be with the light coming from the middle of the viewer's forehead. Figure 1.4 illustrates how oblique lighting improves a picture.

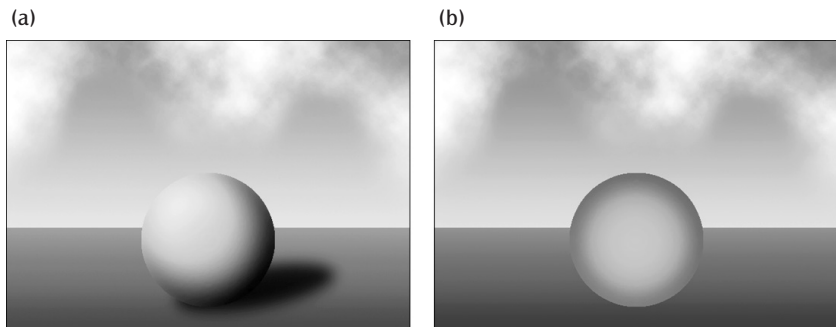
Second, consider what kind of light you're dealing with. There are two basic kinds of lighting: point-source lighting and diffused lighting. The sun is a point source. It casts sharp shadows that don't blur much even if they're being cast by an airplane hundreds of feet in the air. Pretty much everything else is a diffused source. Now, a single light bulb isn't very diffused, and you can often use a single light bulb to simulate a point source indoors; but the more bulbs you add, or the more reflective surfaces there are in the room, the more diffused your lighting becomes. Shadows under diffused lighting are blurry, and the farther the object is from the surface on which its shadow falls, the blurrier the shadow will be. You can use differences in lighting to achieve different effects; strong contrasts and shadows are more alive, while diffused shadows are usually more restful.

Taking Outdoor Photos

Believe it or not, most professional photographers prefer shooting outdoors when it's somewhat overcast, rather than bright and sunny. When you shoot directly under a really bright sun, the contrast is usually excessive. So, if it's sunny, try to find a bright shaded spot. For interest, try to get some clouds into the sky; but if you can't, you can always fake them in later. Use a polarizer lens, if your camera can accept one, to cut glare; it will also enhance contrast, especially in the sky. And, if you plan to desaturate your image later on—remove its color to make it a grayscale image—you can get much more dramatic skies in the final image by taking your picture with a yellow or red filter; they'll make the blue darker, with a red filter doing more than a yellow one.

FIGURE 1.4

These two simulations show a ball under different lighting. Note how much more realistic the ball appears under oblique lighting (a) than under straight-on lighting (b).



Taking Indoor Photos

When you're shooting indoors, you need to use a flash, right? Wrong. Remember how we discussed oblique lighting (see "Pay Attention to Lighting" earlier in this chapter)? For the best lighting, you want the scene to be lit at an angle, rather than with light that appears to come straight on. Unfortunately, the middle of the viewer's forehead is where most cameras' flash units are—so you need to learn to take indoor pictures using available light. Read your camera's manual and experiment with the flash turned off to see how you can get the best results from your particular camera. You can often achieve gorgeous available-light photos during the day using just the light that's coming in through your windows.

If you're using available light—no flash—you'll probably find that you need to immobilize your camera while it takes the photo, either with a tripod or by bracing it against something (a doorframe, the back of a chair, whatever's handy). With point-and-shoot cameras, the shutter speed automatically slows way down when the light's low, to make sure enough light gets to the film to create the image. And with this slow shutter speed, moving the camera even a little bit results in a blurred image.

Unlike a film camera, your digital camera will usually do a wonderful job of correcting for color balance problems. With film cameras, photos taken in ordinary room light usually have a reddish cast if the lights are incandescent or a blue-green cast if the lights are fluorescent. Digital photos rarely suffer these problems. (But if they do, you can correct them in your image-editing program.)

Finally, you can hang light-colored sheets, towels, or pieces of paper or poster board and bounce lights off them to provide very diffused lighting on your subject and reduce shadows to the minimum. This technique can also simply reduce contrast between brightly lit and shadowed areas of the image—what's called "fill" lighting—allowing the unlighted side of your object to be seen better but still appear in shadow. And it works great with that daylight we mentioned, too: just hang a sheet over the window and presto! Instant diffused lighting. Many of the pros use a sheet of insulating Styrofoam for fill lighting because it's light in weight, rigid, and *very* white.

One last idea, and we can move on to the next chapter. You don't always have to make your lighting look natural. "Unnatural" lighting (as opposed to artificial light) can give you some spectacular photos. For example, you can get some really interesting lighting effects by using aluminum foil or shiny colored foil gift wrap, crumpled and then spread out again. Try reflecting a bright light from this so that the irregular reflections illuminate a small object. You can use the foil alone, or you can use it to produce highlights in combination with other lighting. Get creative!