

Photographic Critique *Jay O'Brien*

Images by photographer Jay O'Brien, Text by Raymond Klass



I would like to thank Jay for allowing me to critique his images, and all of us to learn from his experiences. These two images were submitted via E-Mail, and as low-resolution files so we all could download them in a reasonable amount of time. Thanks for being such a willing participant.

This beach scene struck me from the minute I downloaded the file. The foreground and background have strong elements, and are well balanced to allow the viewer to travel into and throughout the scene. I like that you included just enough of the sky to showcase the beautiful sunrise or set, but did not forego the incredible patterns in the sand. These strong leading lines elevate this image beyond a simplistic approach to just the sea and sky.

I am guessing that a split filter or graduated filter was used to balance the sky and foreground. If so it was used well here and appropriate for the scene. I note this so others reading may want to look into a graduated filter if they are having difficulty balancing the sky and foreground in this type of scene.

For me the leading lines of the sand are really the highlight of this image. Below, I have used some targeted correction curves along with masking in photoshop to bring out some detail and contrast on the left side of the beach. In addition, I lighted the left side of the sky to better balance the right and left sides. I also lightened and added a bit of contrast to the reflections of the sky on the beach. All this detail was part of the original capture, and just as technicians dodge and burn in the darkroom, sometimes it is useful to experiment with the dodging and burning capabilities of the computer. It is important to note that neither image is more correct, they are simply a matter of personal taste.

I believe the little bit of lightening and contrast helps the viewer better engage in the entire area of the foreground, rather than entering only from the bottom right. The lines in the sand radiate outward to form a great pattern from the right to the left when we're allowed to fully enjoy them. The image at the bottom also has been slightly rotated and cropped to straighten the horizon line. I should note that it was only very slightly off, and may not even be noticeable at this size.

Thank you for sharing this beautiful image. Perhaps more importantly than any technical note, when I look at this image I can imagine myself on some beach in California or Oregon, and isn't that what truly defines a successful image.



Original Submission



Image with crop and masking



Despite the simple elements in this image, reflection images that rely on ripples and changing patterns for both foreground and background elements often take a lot of time to execute well. Here the contrast in color and tone of the swooping reflection in the foreground really plays into the great motion and tension held by the white-water of the background. In addition, the contrast between the brighter reflections of the foreground, and the more orange stripes of the background create a motion for the eye to follow that compliments the natural movement of the water.

I like that you have chosen to include just these two simple elements instead of a wide array of waves and reflections. It keeps the image focused and the viewer engaged in only what is important.

I should note for those of you looking to experiment with the techniques Jay is using here, it is often helpful to try an image at a variety of shutter speeds. This

will allow you to achieve different blurring effects, and therefore different patterns in the reflections and movement of the water.

In terms of composition, I might have tried leaving just a little more room above the wave on the top of this image. I know it is difficult to plan for because the size of these elements is always changing. This is where if you are shooting digitally there is a big advantage, as you can see the result right on the back of the camera. I think the two dark patches on the left of the image, and the bit of gray flowing into the foreground really elevate this image beyond a simple composition of running water.

Overall this image has a fun playful feel to it, and you have used your photographic tools well to compliment the natural movement present.

Thank you for submitting these images for us all to learn from.