

The Art of Editing

by Photographer Raymond Klass

It seems like recently we've given a lot of attention to the software and hardware options available for the photographer editing images from a past shoot. We've talked about labels, ratings, Bridge, Aperture, Lightroom, backing up images, but how often do these discussions go beyond the technical side of things. Editing is an art, and it's one of the most important ways you can improve your photography.

This article isn't about what software you use to edit, or how you choose to organize or backup your files – there are plenty of good articles out there on those topics. Rather, this

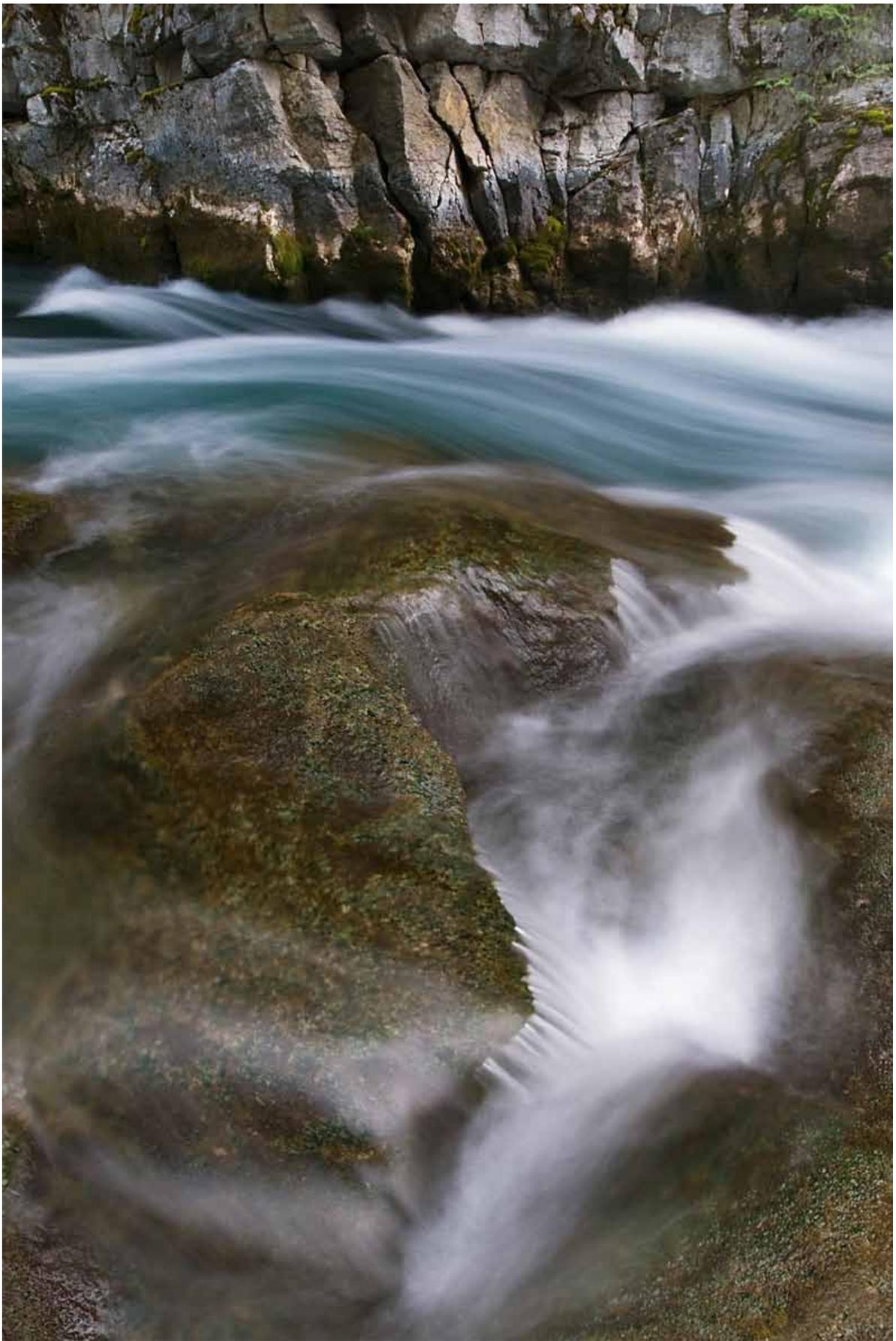
is about how you can use the editing process to provide yourself with useful feedback that can help make you a better photographer. We'll explore beyond the good shot, bad shot labels.

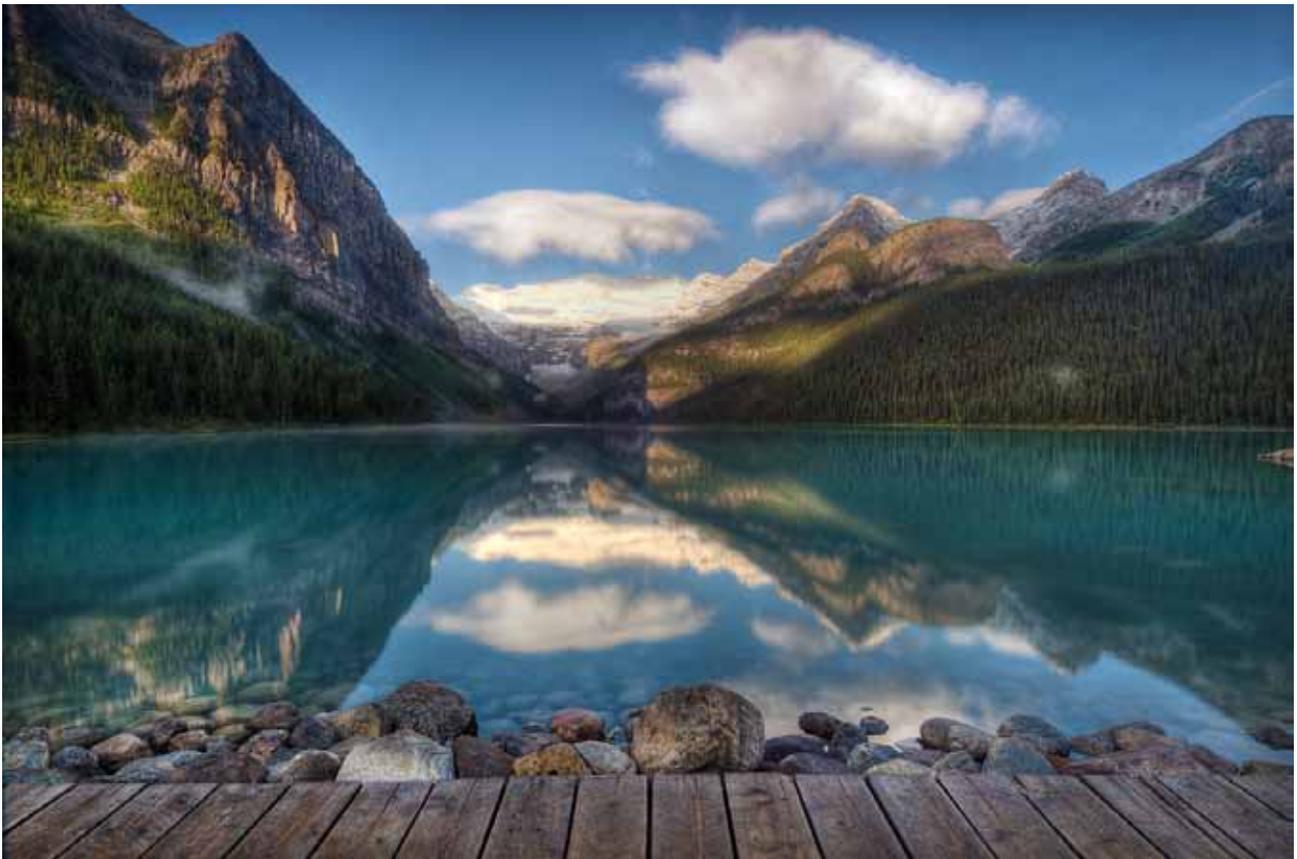


I sat down with a good friend, and National Geographic editor, who related a short story to me. When photographers are on assignment for Geographic, they're required to submit unedited RAW files that are then edited by the Geographic staff. One of the surprising tidbits is that most of the images shot by these photographers, arguable the best in the world, are pretty uninspired – rather what she looks for is not a photographer that gets things right all of the time, but one that can work the situation and build up to that amazing shot.

Just think about it – a Nat Geo photographer might shoot 10,000 images, but only have 10 or 15 published in the magazine – that means they shot 9985 rejected photos. The lesson here is not to get discouraged. Often what separates an amazing image from an ordinary one is that the photographer was willing to put in the time to work the situation. By this I mean they tried different angles, different perspectives, things they thought would work, and others they might have had no idea whether they would be successful with.

Avoid labeling image as either successful or unsuccessful – rather both help you to push yourself forward; both provide a platform from which you can develop your eye. Realize that photography is a process – it's about continually building upon the skills you develop as you continue to explore with your camera. The single biggest secret to becoming the best photographer that you can be is to embrace this idea of continued growth – continued development.

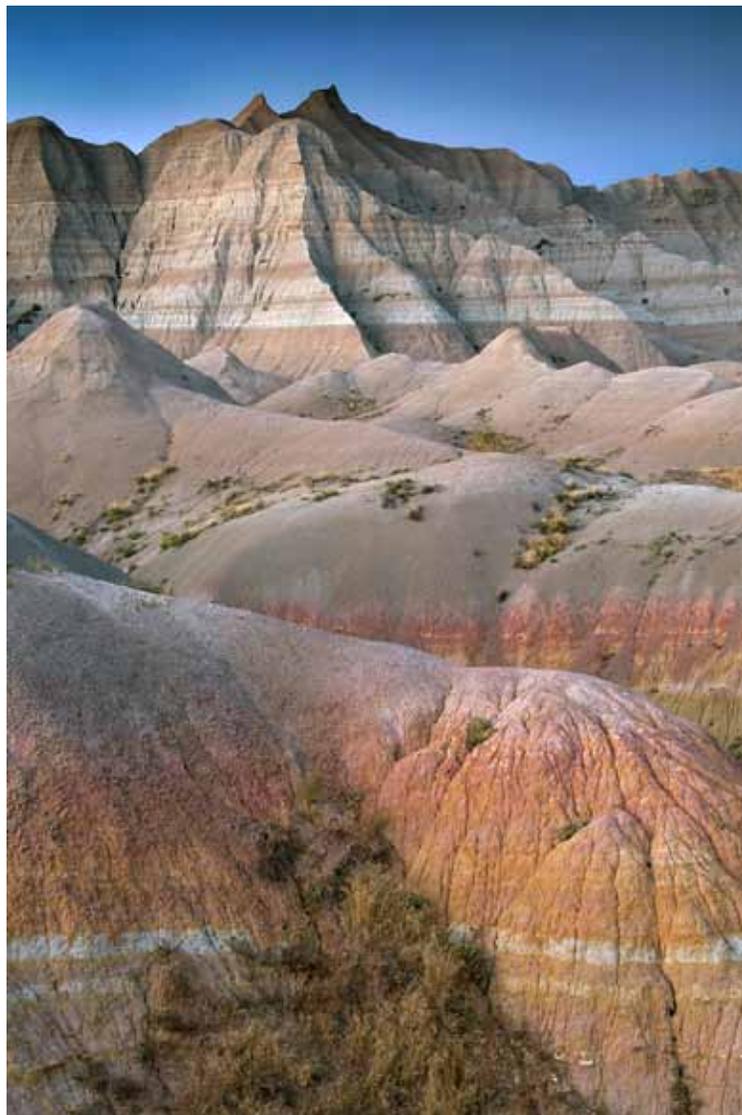




Before I edit my images, I often take a break between after shooting. I find that a week or two can help to focus one in on what has been recorded, and detach them from the experience of shooting the image. I think we've all had that moment that was amazing to be a part of, but the images don't do it justice. I remember vividly my brother describing this photograph of a moose in New Hampshire – which he was sure was an astounding shot. It turned out that the moose was no less than a quarter mile away, hidden by a forest, and if you looked at just the right spot, you could see a single brown pixel that represented the enormous animal – for anyone but him, it was an awful image. By separating yourself from the experience, you can be a much more critical editor.

It can be difficult to be a critical editor if you've decided that your value as a photographer is linked to the aesthetics of your image. I see all too many people who think that if their image is unsuccessful, than they are a poor photographer. This simply isn't true, you shouldn't be afraid to be critical of your image – it's the only way that you'll recognize what works and what could be improved.

I asked a friend once if wanted to join a group of us that went regularly to the gym, and he told me that he was to out-of-shape to go. It occurs to me that some photographers suffer from this dilemma. I often hear



that people avoid a particular lens because they "can't" make a good shot with it. When you avoid a technique because you don't feel confident at it, how do you ever expect to get better at it. I learned a long time ago that the person you respect at the gym isn't necessarily the most fit – it's the person whose trying the hardest, for mustering the effort to make a difference is much more difficult than continuing down the same old path.

In photography, there's no right or wrong, no good or bad, rather it's the people trying for the truly unique image that I have the most respect for. Learning the tried and true techniques is important, but pushing beyond them is vital if you intend to capture inspiring images. The art of editing is a time to reflect not on whether you're a good or bad photographer, but whether what you tried work, and how you can prepare to move one step further next time. Some photographers get upset with themselves when they see an image they aren't pleased with, what we need to learn as artists is that this is merely an opportunity to push yourself – you should come back excited from editing your images for the possibilities you will explore your next time behind the lens.