Creating Photo-Grid Posters

After you've separated your photos into five-, four-, and three-star ratings in Adobe Bridge, you pretty much know which ones are going to wind up in your portfolio and which will never see the light of day. Well, this is a great technique for giving some of those three-star photos a new life, by close-cropping them and arranging them on a grid to create a poster-style layout. Again, don't waste your best shots on this technique, but it's an ideal way to save the ones that "got away."

Step One:
In Photoshop, go under the File menu and choose New. In the resulting dialog, choose Photo from the Preset pop-up menu, then choose Portrait, 8x10 from the Size pop-up menu, and click OK to create a blank 8x10" document (I'm using the default 300-ppi resolution here, but you can enter any resolution you want at this point).

Step Two:
Now, open nine of your three-star-rated photos from a recent shoot (technically, these should all be from the same location or of the same basic subject, like "trip to Bermuda" or "close-up shots of baby," etc.).
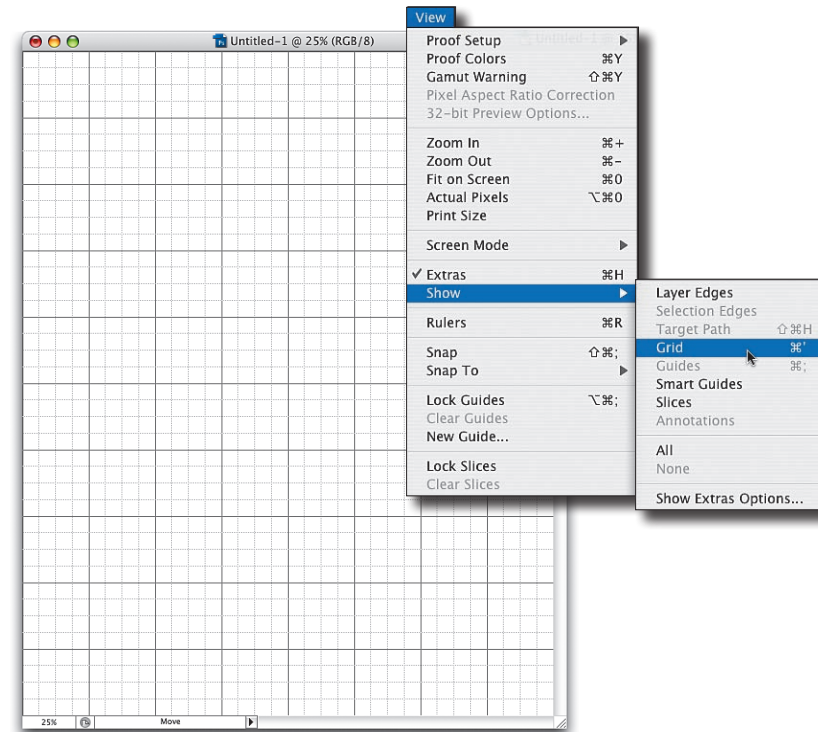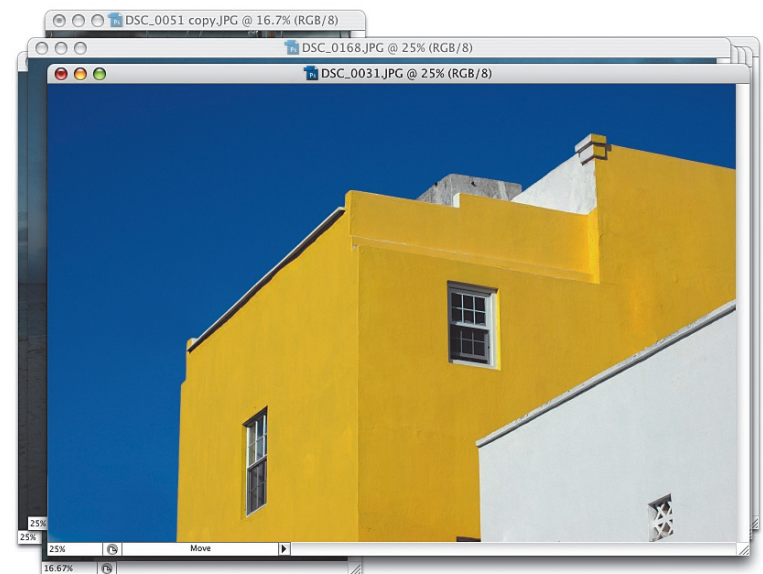
Step Three:
Click back on your 8x10" document to make it active (if you can't see it to click on it, choose it from the bottom of the Window menu; it's likely named "Untitled-1"). Then, go under the View menu, under Show, and choose Grid (if you don't see the grid appear over your blank document, go back under the View menu and choose Extras). An alignment grid will appear over your blank document. This grid is just there to help you align things, so don't worry—it won't appear on your photo when you print it out.
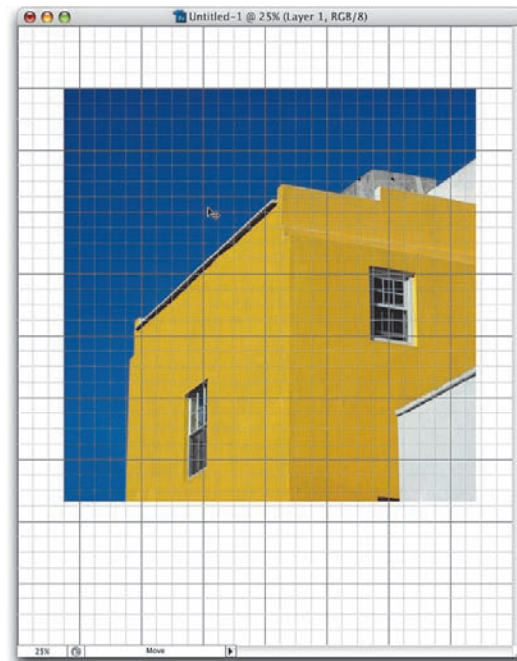
Step Four:
Switch to the first photo you want to place on your grid (choose it from the bottom of the Window menu if needed). From a design standpoint, one of the key points to this technique is that all the photos appear perfectly square, so press M to get the Rectangular Marquee tool, press-and-hold the Shift key, and drag out a perfectly square selection (this will be your cropping border, so choose an area that you want to appear within your poster).
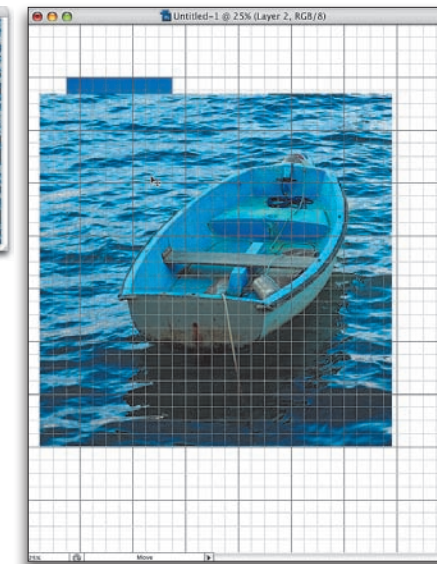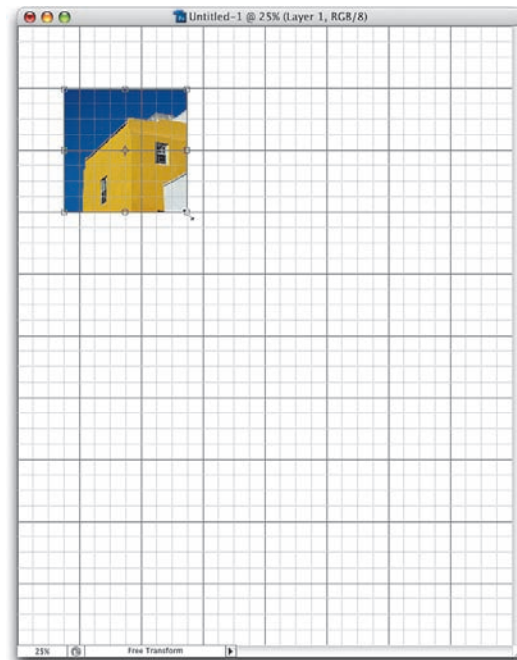
Continued

Step Five:
Press V to get the Move tool and drag-and-drop your photo onto your 8x10" grid document. Depending on the size of your original, when you drag it over, it may appear really large (or really small), so you'll need to scale it to fit on the grid with eight other photos (which you'll do in the next step).

Step Seven:
Choose the second photo you want to appear on the grid from the Window menu. Again, switch to the Rectangular Marquee tool, press-and-hold the Shift key, and drag a perfectly square selection around the focal point of your image. Switch to the Move tool again, click within the selected area, and drag-and-drop it onto your grid document.
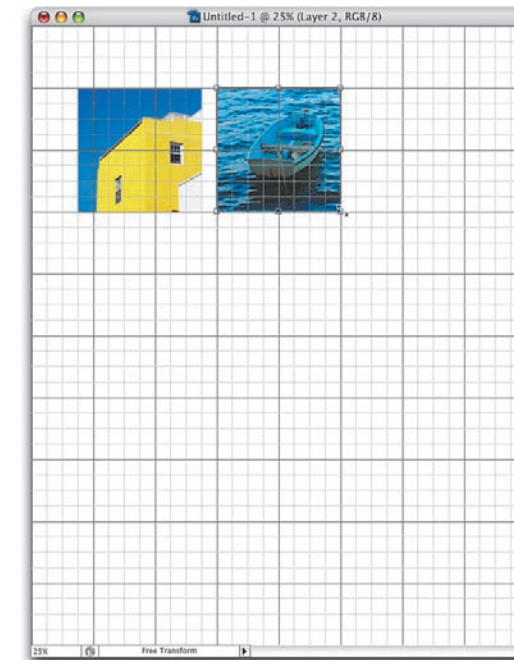
SCOTT KELBY

Step Six:
Press Command-T (PC: Ctrl-T) to bring up Free Transform. Hold the Shift key, grab the bottom-right corner point and drag inward to scale your photo in size. Once you get it close to the size you see here, you'll need to move your cursor inside the Free Transform bounding box and position it so there are three grid squares to the left of the photo, four grid squares above it, and then ensure the image itself is eight squares wide. (*Note:* When dragging within the Free Transform bounding box, avoid clicking on the bounding box's center point.) When it's lined up and sized to fit, press Return (PC: Enter) to lock in your transformation. Now, if that seemed like a lot of "grid-square counting," don't worry—much of the rest of this resizing process is automated (as you'll see in a moment).
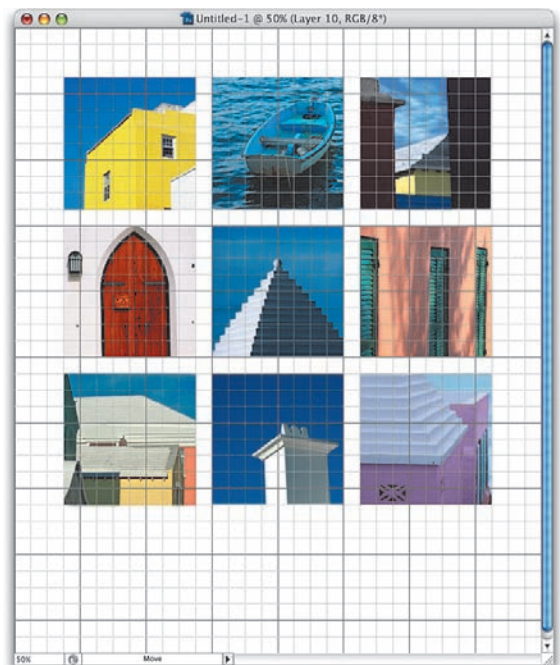
Step Eight:
Since you've already used Free Transform to scale the first photo, you can now take advantage of a Photoshop command called Transform Again. Just press Command-Shift-T (PC: Ctrl-Shift-T), and the exact same resizing that was applied to the previous photo will be applied to this one. Just press Return (PC: Enter) to lock in your transformation, and then use the Move tool to position this photo to the right of your first photo, with just one grid square separating them.

Continued

Step Nine:

Now all you have to do is repeat this process with the remaining seven photos: Open a photo, make a square selection over the best part of the photo, drag it onto your grid document, press the Transform Again keyboard shortcut, and then position the photo on the grid, leaving one space between photos and one grid space between vertical rows. *Note:* The Transform Again command can get rather lazy, so you may have to use Free Transform on another image to refresh the command's settings. Also, it sizes images based on their physical size, so if you drag in a smaller-sized image, the Transform Again command may adjust the image incorrectly—just use Free Transform (while holding the Shift key if needed) to adjust them accordingly.

Step Ten:

Once you've got all nine photos placed on the grid, you don't need the grid anymore, so you can turn it off by going back under the View menu, under Show, and choose Grid. Now, to give it the full "poster" effect, you can add a title at the bottom (the font used here is Gil Sans Light). To complete the effect, I also added the date and a credit under the bottom corners of the grid using the font ITC Grimshaw Hand. Now, getting color photos to work well together in a layout like this can sometimes be a real challenge, but I've got a trick that will get around that if you want to take it a few steps further…


THE COLORS OF BERMUDA
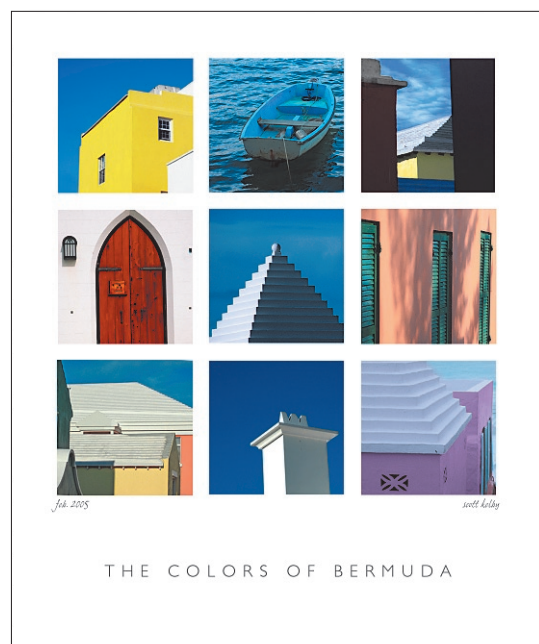
Step Eleven:

Here's another example of the nine-photo grid technique, using close-up shots of my cute little niece, Sarah. Although the color is fairly similar in the images, the composition looks kind of flat overall because the colors are so neutral. To fix that, we're going to convert it to black and white to give it more of an artistic look. In the Layers panel, ensure the top layer is active, then choose Channel Mixer from the Create New Adjustment Layer pop-up menu at the bottom of the Layers panel. When the dialog appears, turn on the Monochrome checkbox.
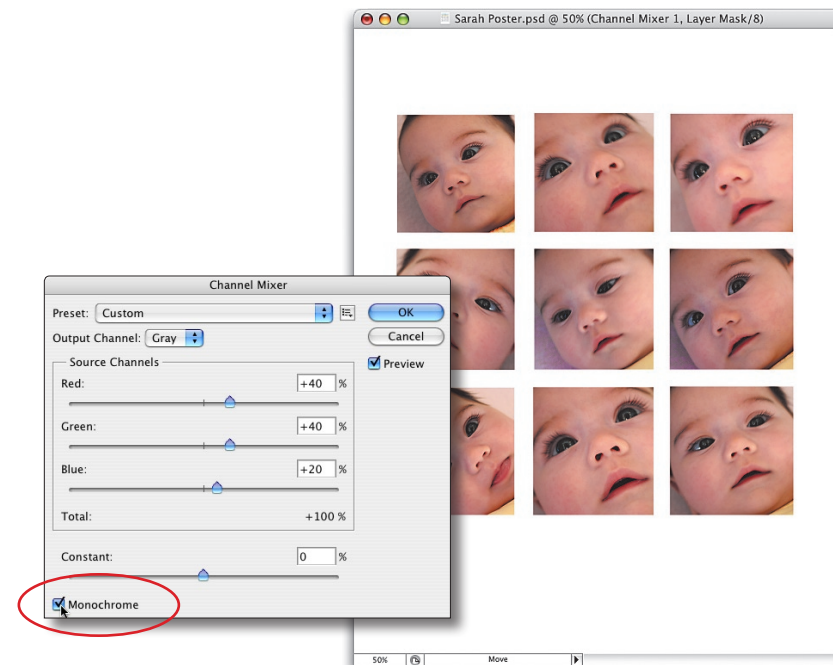

Step Twelve:

When you click OK, all the photos appear in black and white, giving the composition that unifying little "something" that just makes it work. Although it works well here, you'll find it even more useful when trying to combine photos where the colors don't match up nicely. Just add that grayscale Channel Mixer adjustment layer, and suddenly everything just "works."


SARAH MCKENNA CRIST
Mother's Day • April 9, 2004
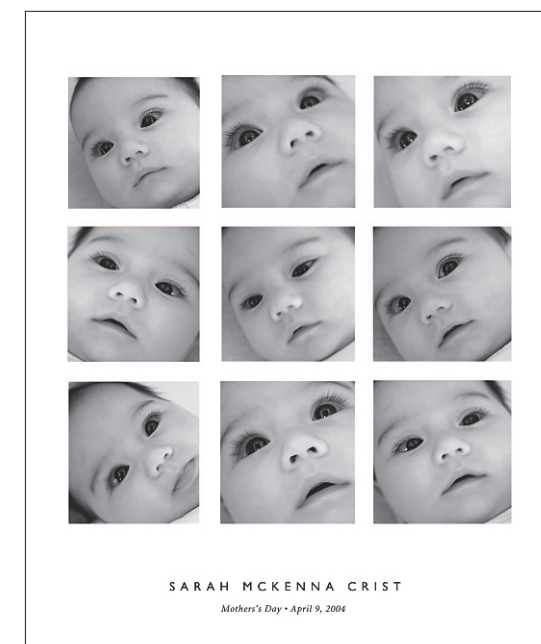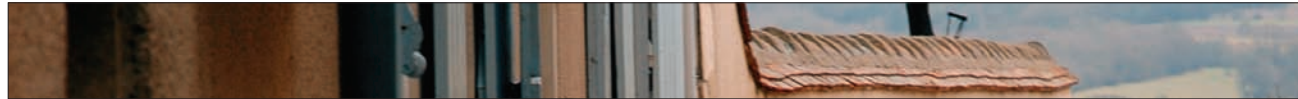
Medium Format Frames

This is a popular technique that brings a real "pro-photographer" style to showing your work, as it incorporates the look of a slide. I've seen this used everywhere from photographers' online galleries and postcards for studios, to prints in wedding albums, and although it's got a few steps, it's very easy to do.

Step One:
From the File menu, create a new document set at approximately 9x7" at 300 ppi. Create a new layer by clicking on the Create a New Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. Press M to get the Rectangular Marquee tool, press-and-hold the Shift key, and draw a square selection in the center of the image area.
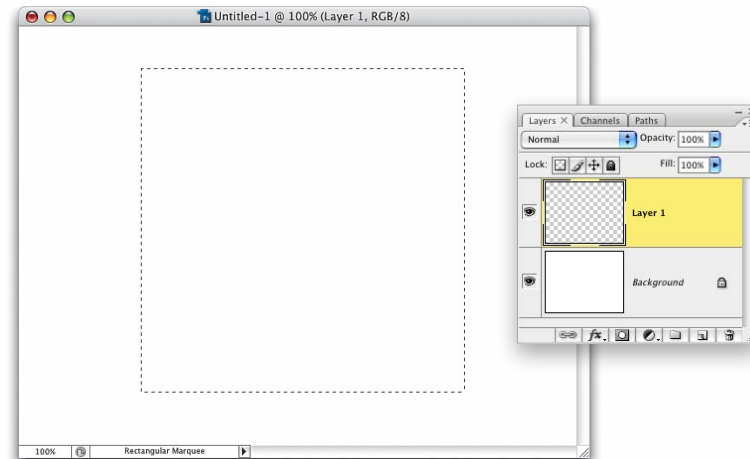
Step Two:
Press D to set your Foreground color to black, and then press Option-Delete (PC: Alt-Backspace) to fill your square selection with black. Deselect by pressing Command-D (PC: Ctrl-D). Now, you'll need to make another square selection using the Rectangular Marquee tool inside the borders of your black square. Just for the sake of authenticity, I usually make this selection a little off-center, with a tiny bit more space on the left side than the right (which comes in handy later when you're adding text).
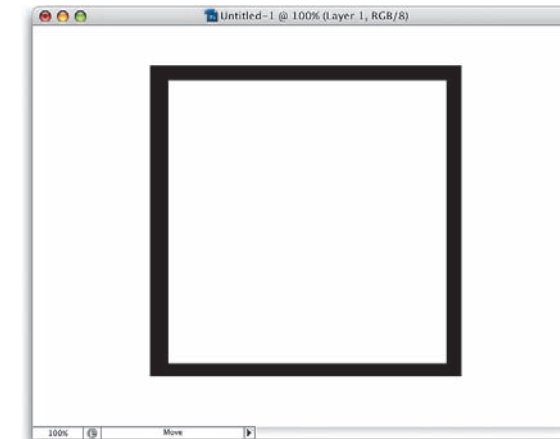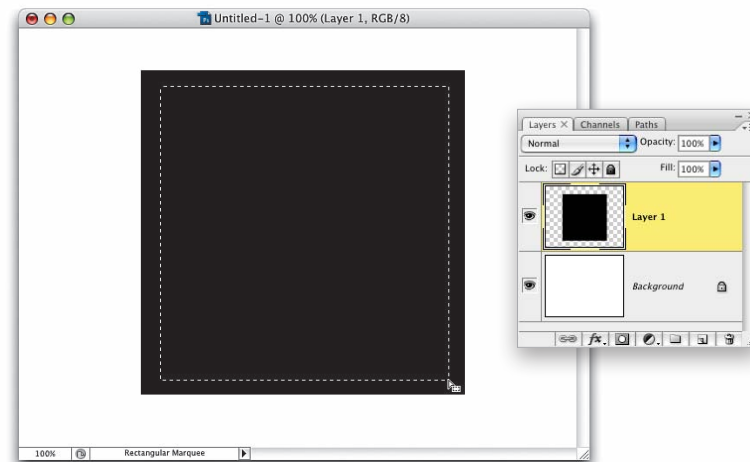
Step Three:
Press Delete (PC: Backspace) to knock a hole out of your black square, and then press Command-D (PC: Ctrl-D) to deselect. To make it into a realistic-looking image slide, you're going to add text in the next step, but first, click on your Foreground color swatch and choose a dirty yellowish color in the Color Picker (I used R: 199, G: 185, B: 91).

Step Four:
Press T to get the Type tool, and in the Font pop-up menu in the Options Bar, choose either Helvetica Bold or Arial Bold as your font, and then choose a small size in the Font Size pop-up menu (adjust your tracking if needed in the Character panel, found under the Window menu). Now, click near the left side of your frame and type any two-digit number as your frame number (I chose 21). Press the Spacebar eight or nine times, type "KODAK VHC-2456," and then hit the Spacebar another eight or nine times and type the sequential two-digit number (22 in this case). Press Command-Return (PC: Ctrl-Enter) to set your type.
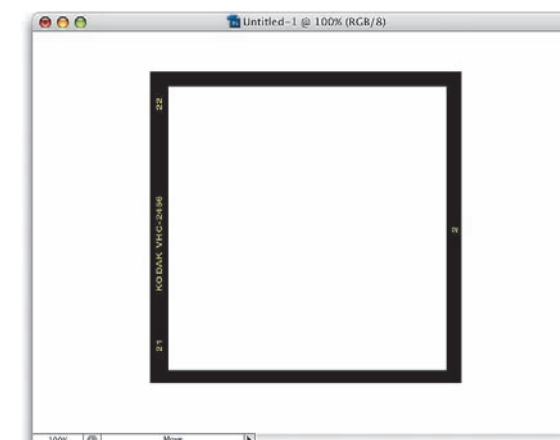
Step Five:
Go under the Edit menu, under Transform, and choose Rotate 90° CCW. This turns your type vertically. Press V to get the Move tool, and then position your type over the left side of the frame. Then, get the Type tool again, type the number "2," set your type, rotate it 90° CCW, and use the Move tool again to position it on the right side of your frame.

Continued
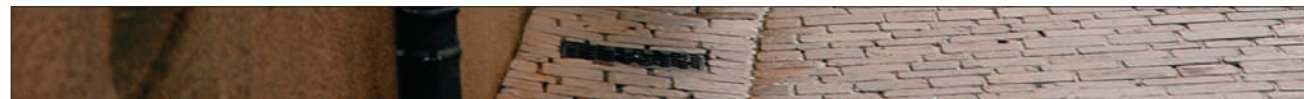
Step Six:

Click on the Create a New Layer icon in the Layers panel. Press Shift-L until you have the Polygonal Lasso tool, and then draw a tiny triangle pointing upward on the right side of your frame below the number 2. Press Option-Delete (PC: Alt-Backspace) to fill it with your Foreground color, and then press Command-J (PC: Ctrl-J) to duplicate it. Using the Move tool, drag this second triangle near the top-right side of your frame. Now, you're going to merge all those Type and triangle layers into just one layer—the frame layer. Hide the Background layer from view by clicking on its Eye icon, and then, in the Layers panel's flyout menu, choose Merge Visible.
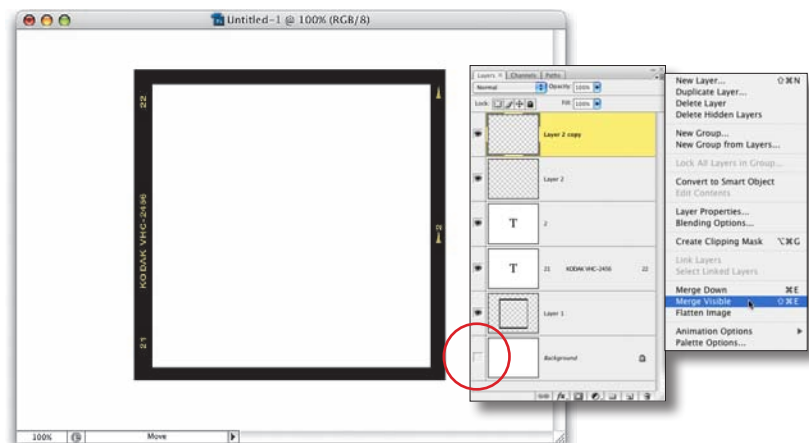
Step Seven:

Open the photo you want to apply the effect to. Go back to your frame document, get the Move tool, and drag-and-drop your frame onto your photo. Press Command-T (PC: Ctrl-T) to get Free Transform, press-and-hold the Shift key, and scale the frame down within the document (if needed, press Command-0 [zero] [PC: Ctrl-0] to see your bounding box). Click inside your frame to drag it into position, and then move your cursor outside the bounding box to rotate the frame a little. Press Return (PC: Enter).

Step Eight:

Press Command-J (PC: Ctrl-J) two more times to create the other two frames. Use Free Transform to reposition and rotate them slightly in opposite directions. Press Return (PC: Enter) to lock in your transformation. *Note:* Make sure all three frames overlap a bit.

Step Nine:

Get the Polygonal Lasso tool again, click somewhere within one of the black frames, and begin tracing around the outside of your frames. You just click once, move your mouse to the next corner, click again, and the tool draws a straight line between the two points. You want to click around all the frame edges, avoiding the areas where the frames intersect in the center. Once you get all the way around to the first point where you started, you'll see a tiny circle appear in the bottom right-hand corner of your Polygonal Lasso cursor, letting you know "you've come full circle." Click on that first point, and the lines will join to create a selection (you will have all the frames and their contents selected). Now, go under the Select menu and choose Inverse, so you have everything *but* the frame selected.

Step Ten:

In the Layers panel, click on the Background layer, and then hit Delete (PC: Backspace) to remove all of the background photo surrounding your frames, which creates the impression that you've pieced together three medium format images to create this one image. Press Command-D (PC: Ctrl-D) to deselect. See, I told you this was gonna be easy.

SCOTT KELBY

Showing a Client Your Work on Your Computer

Any time I'm showing clients my work onscreen, I use this technique because it quickly tucks Photoshop out of the way so the palettes, menus, etc., don't distract the clients. They can focus on just the image, and not on the software I'm using. Also, it does a nice job of presenting each photo in almost a museum setting—perfectly centered on a black background with no distractions.

Step One:
Open the photo you want to show to your client in Photoshop.

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Step Two:
Press the letter F key three times and then press the Tab key. The first F centers your photo onscreen, surrounding it with gray canvas area. The second time you press F hides the panel wells. With the third F, the background changes to black, and Photoshop's menu bar is hidden. Then, when you press Tab, Photoshop hides the Toolbox, Options Bar, and any open panels, presenting your photo onscreen.
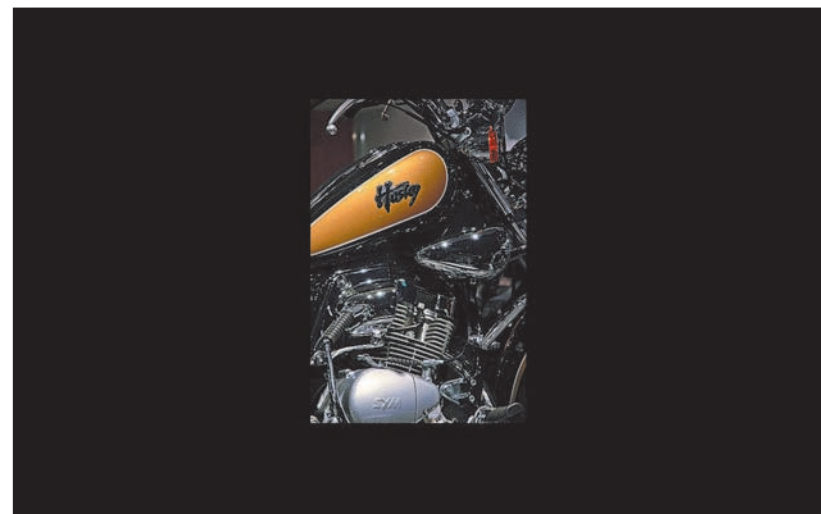
Step Three:
To return quickly to your normal display layout, just press F, then Tab. Now that you know these two shortcuts, you can use a variation of them to create a slide show right within Photoshop.
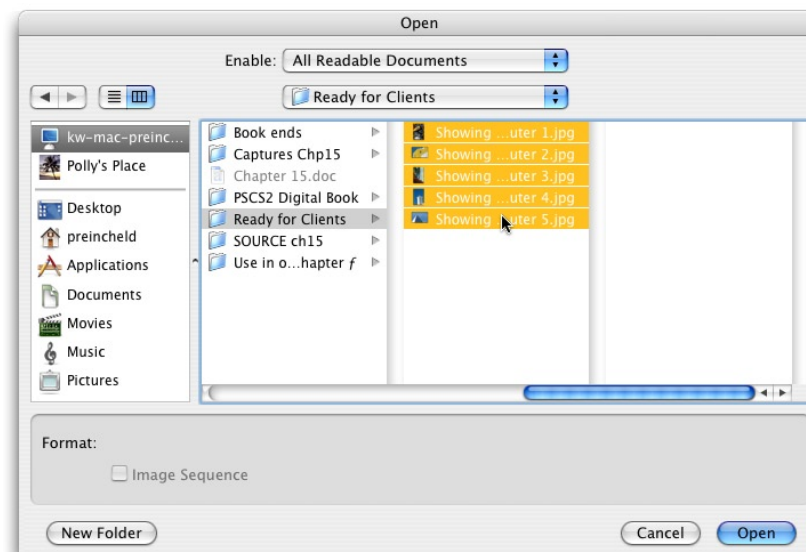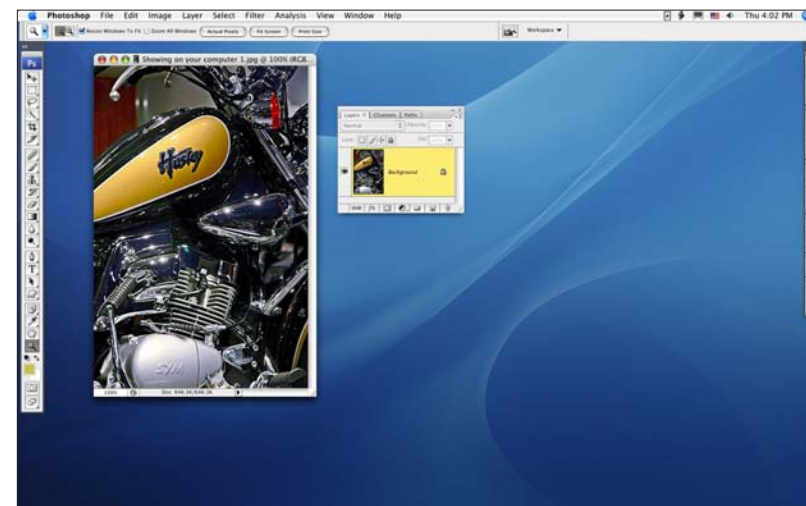

Step Four:
Go under the File menu and choose Open. In the Open dialog, click on the first new photo you want to open, press-and-hold the Command key (PC: Ctrl key), and then click on all the other photos you want to open. *Note:* If the images that you want to open are contiguous, simply hold the Shift key and then click on the first and last image in the Open dialog to select them all.

Continued

Step Five:

Click the Open button and Photoshop will open all the photos, one right after the other. Once all the photos you want in your slide show are open, press-and-hold the Shift key and click on the Change Screen Mode icon at the bottom of the Toolbox (it's shown circled here).

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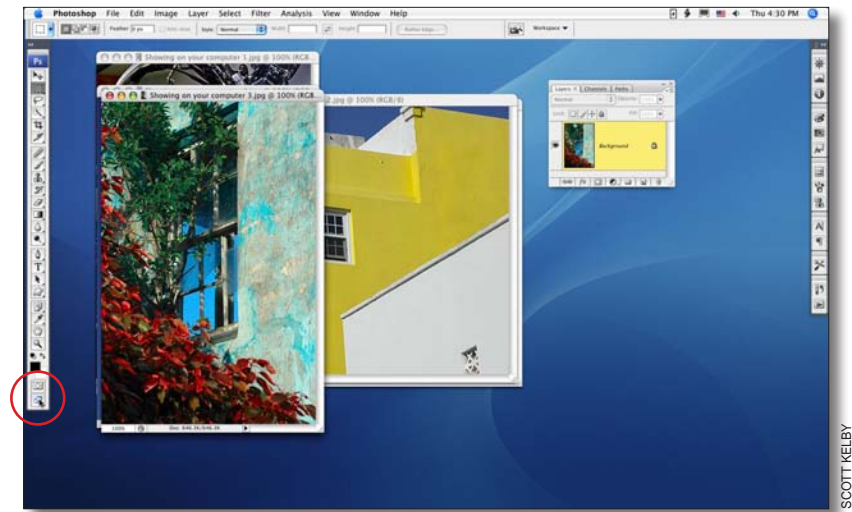
Step Six:

Shift-clicking the Change Screen Mode icon centers all the open photos and puts them on a black background (starting with the top photo in the stack), but your panels and Options Bar will still be visible, so press the Tab key to hide them.
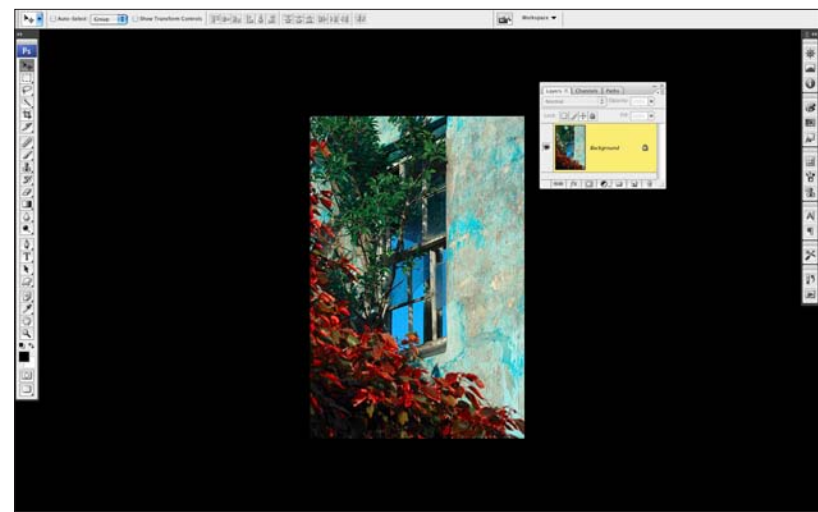

Step Seven:

Once your panels are hidden, your slide show is ready. To view the next "slide," just press Ctrl-Tab and the next photo in the stack will open. Because you held the Shift key when you switched to Full Screen mode, the previous picture will automatically be hidden when the next photo appears. Continue through the stack by pressing Ctrl-Tab. The slide show will automatically loop, so scroll through as many times as you'd like.

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Step Eight:

When you're done with your slide show and want to return to the standard Photoshop interface, press the Tab key to make the Toolbox visible again, and then click on the Change Screen Mode icon at the bottom of the Toolbox (it's circled in red here).
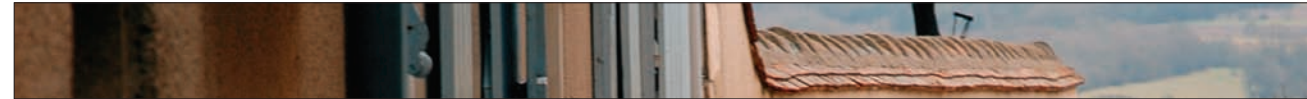
Sending a Portfolio Presentation to a Client

In Photoshop CS3, there's a feature that takes a folder full of images, creates a slide show (complete with transitions), and compresses it into PDF format so you can email it easily to a client for proofing. This is perfect for showing your portfolio to clients, sending clients proofs of wedding shots or portrait sittings, and any of a dozen other uses, none of which I can happen to think of right at this particular moment, but I'm sure later today, when I'm at the mall or driving to the office, they'll come to me.

Step One:
Open the photos you want to use in your PDF presentation (you actually have the choice of using photos you already have open in Photoshop or choosing a folder, but for this example, we'll start by simply opening a few photos).


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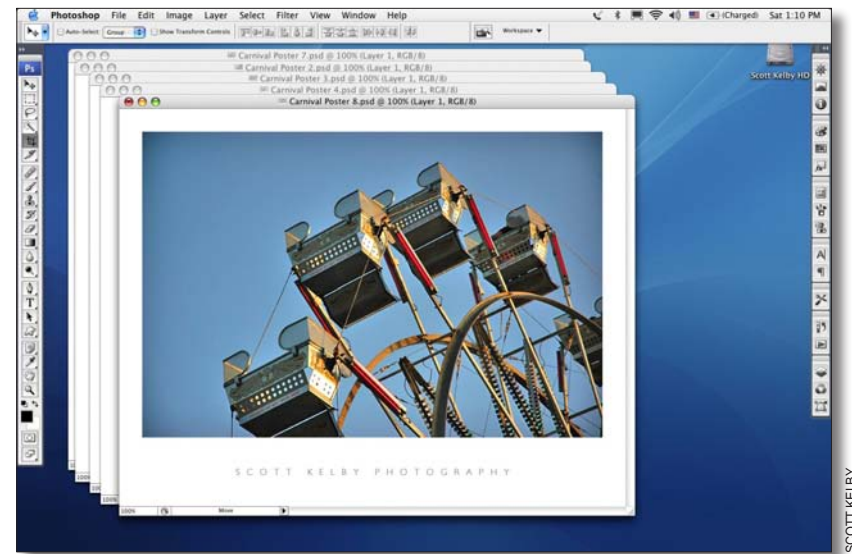
Step Two:
There are two ways to access PDF Presentation: (1) Go under Photoshop's File menu, under Automate, and choose PDF Presentation (as I chose here), or (2) choose PDF Presentation from within Bridge by going under the Tools menu, under Photoshop, and choosing PDF Presentation.
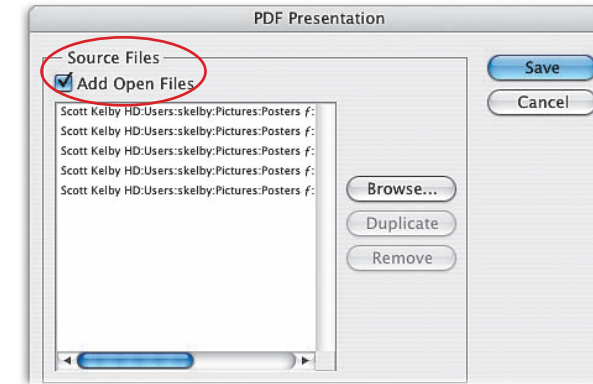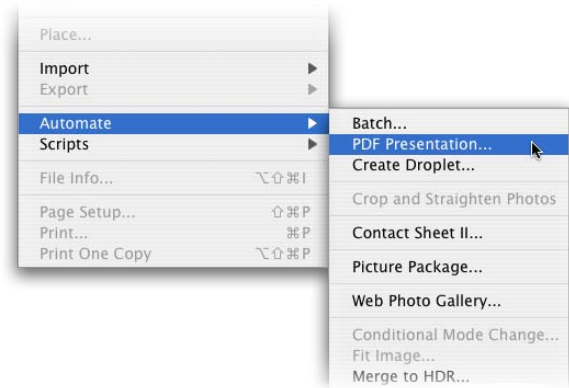
Step Three:
This brings up the PDF Presentation dialog. To create a presentation using the photos you already have open in Photoshop, turn on the Add Open Files checkbox at the top of the dialog, and a list of your open files will appear in the window by default. If you have a photo open that you don't want in your presentation, just click on the photo (in the list) and then click the Remove button (you can also add an image by clicking on the Browse button).
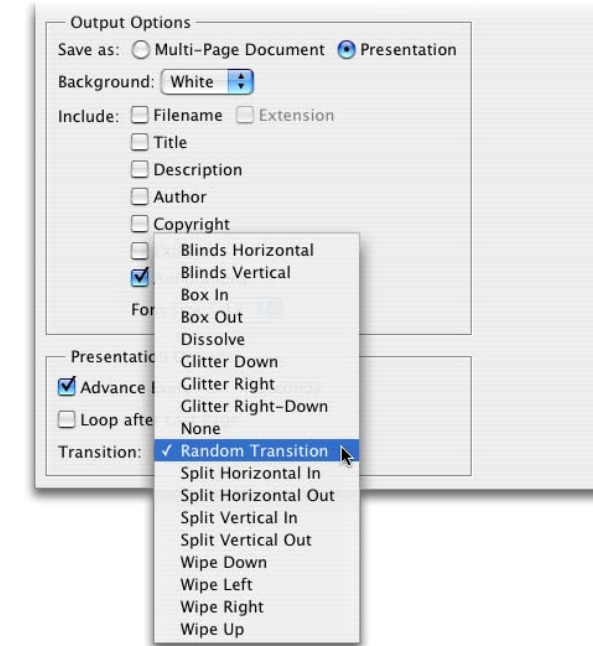

Step Four:
In the Output Options section of the dialog, click on the Presentation radio button. Under the Presentation Options section of the dialog is one of the coolest things about the PDF Presentation: You can choose a transition between slides, and they've got a pretty decent selection. A good way to find out which ones you like best is to create a test presentation and choose Random Transition from the Transition pop-up menu. That way, once you take a look at your test presentation, you'll quickly know which ones fit your style. In this Options section, you can also choose how many seconds you want each image to appear onscreen before advancing to the next image, and you can choose whether you want the presentation to loop (repeat) when it reaches the end.
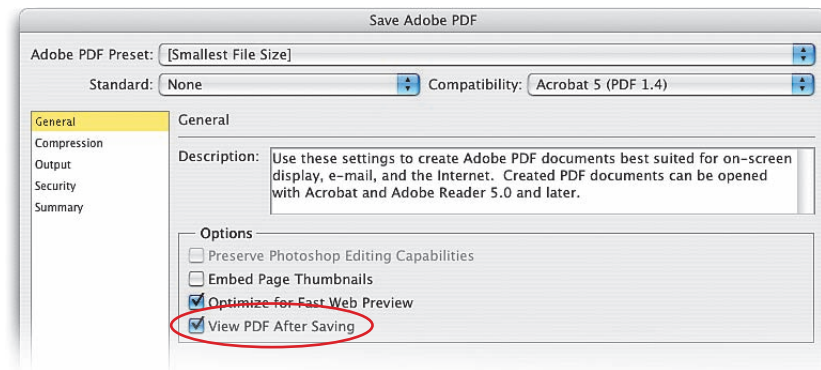

Continued

Step Five:

When you click the Save button, a standard Save dialog appears, where you need to name your file. Now, you'd think this is where the story ends, but actually clicking the Save button here brings up another dialog.
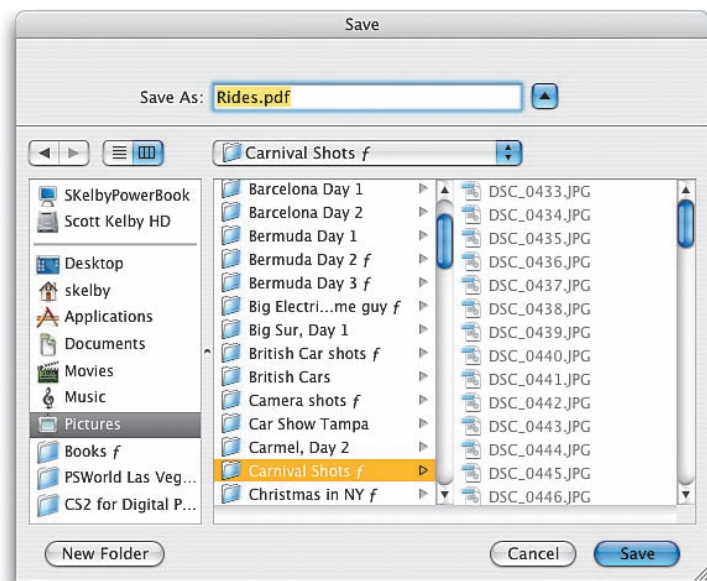
Step Six:

When the Save Adobe PDF dialog appears, from the Adobe PDF Preset pop-up menu, choose Smallest File Size (since you're sending these to a client via email, you probably want to keep your file size small so it transfers quickly, and so the email doesn't bounce back because your attachment is too large). Also, I would turn on the View PDF After Saving checkbox (under the General Options section). You don't have to view the PDF after saving, but it's always a good idea to see exactly what you're sending the client before you send it, just in case something didn't come out the way you wanted.

Step Seven:

In the list of categories on the left side of the dialog, click on Compression. This category shows the quality of the JPEG images that your client will see. Because we chose Smallest File Size in the previous step, the Image Quality is automatically set to Low. Although this setting doesn't create the cleanest, most pristine images, that's okay because we don't want to send final high-res images this way. (Remember, this is just for proofing—if you sent high-quality images, your client might find a way to cut you out of the picture, so to speak, because the proofs are "good enough.")
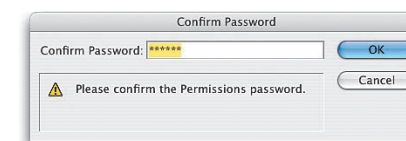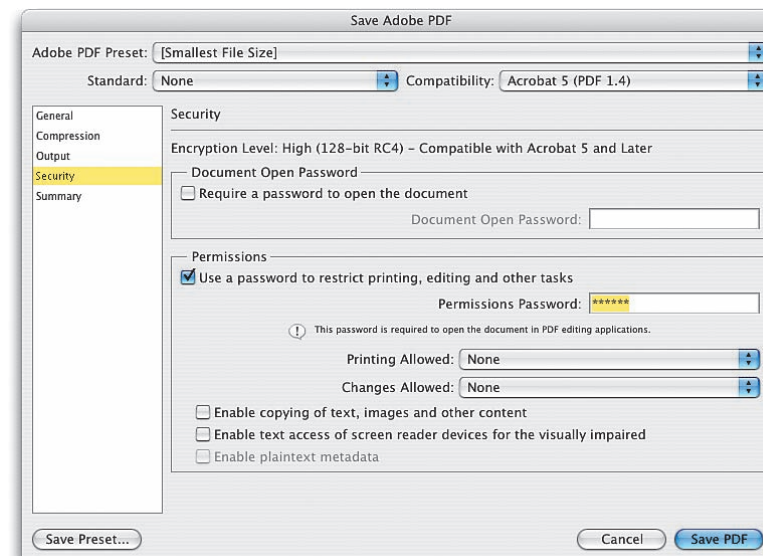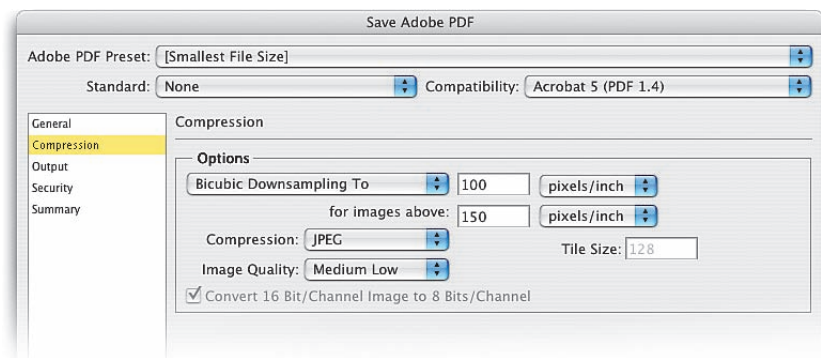
Step Eight:

Return to the list of categories on the left side of the dialog and click on Security. Since you're emailing this presentation to clients, it's important to protect your images from being "liberated" by your clients, which lets them sidestep any payment to you, the photographer. So, in the Permissions section, I recommend turning on the checkbox that reads "Use a password to restrict printing, editing and other tasks," and then enter a password in the Permissions Password field. Then, from the Printing Allowed pop-up menu, choose None. By doing this, you're protecting yourself because now your clients can't just print out full-color prints of your PDF to their color inkjet, or copy your photographs out of the PDF and place them into another application for printing. It pretty much ensures that your low-res proofs remain in your PDF and that you get paid for your work.

Step Nine:

When you click on the Save PDF button, a dialog will appear asking you to confirm your password. Enter it, click OK, and Photoshop CS3 creates a PDF file for you, ready to email to your clients. When your clients open your emailed PDF, it launches Adobe Reader, asks to go into Full Screen mode (displaying your photos on a black background), and when your clients click Yes, the presentation begins. Because you set up security preferences on this PDF, your clients won't be able to access the printing and photo-editing options in Reader. (*Note:* To return to Adobe Reader and end your slide show, just press the Escape key on your keyboard.)

The capture here shows the first slide in a PDF presentation, right before it transitioned to the next photo.

Creating Your Own Custom Picture Package Layouts

As cool as Picture Package is, I don't think there's a Photoshop user alive who hasn't used it and thought, "This is cool, I just wish there was a layout that had…." In other words, although most of the popular layout choices are already there as presets, the one you really want isn't there, because that's just the way life works. Although technically you could edit the text file that controlled these presets back in Photoshop 7, it was a tricky, tedious task. Not so in Photoshop CS3, thanks to a clever visual layout editor.

Step One:

Open a photo (it doesn't matter which one; you're just using it as a placeholder to build your template), and then go under the File menu, under Automate, and choose Picture Package. (*Note:* You can also access Picture Package from directly within Bridge by choosing Tools and going under the Photoshop sub-menu.) When the Picture Package dialog opens, click on the Edit Layout button (located in the bottom-right corner of the Layout section).


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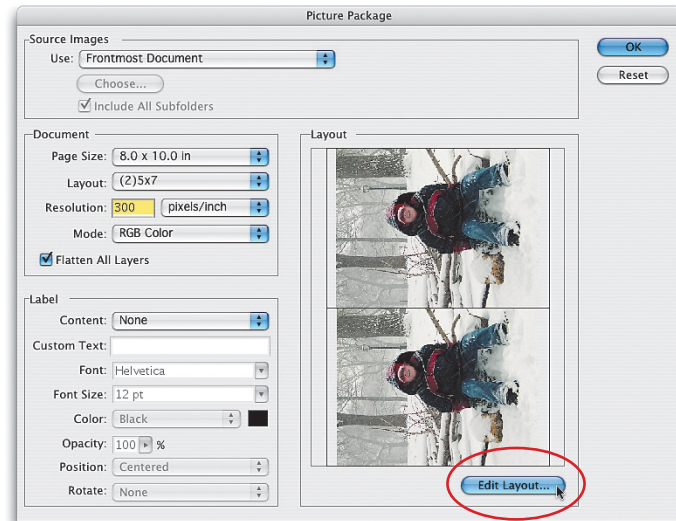
Step Two:

When the Picture Package Edit Layout dialog opens, go to the Layout section in the top-left corner and give your new custom layout a name (this name will later appear in the pop-up menu of preset layouts within the Picture Package dialog). Choose your page size and your desired ruler units from this Layout section.
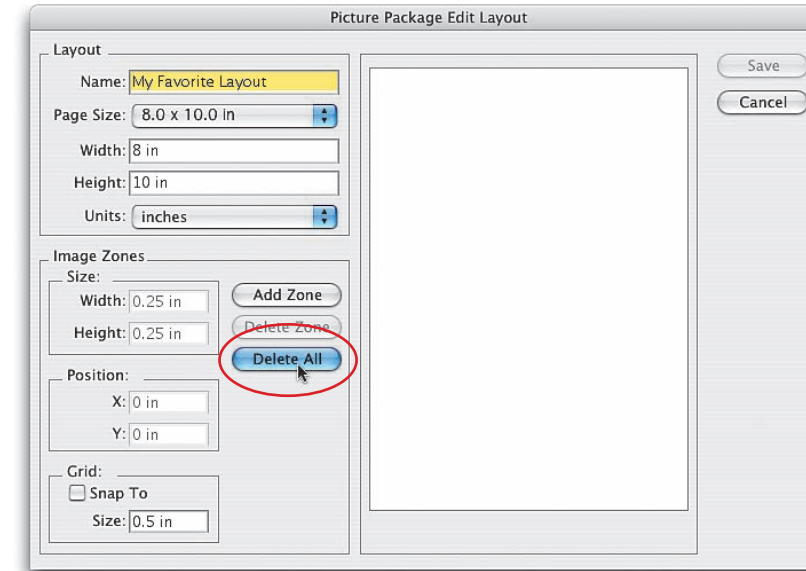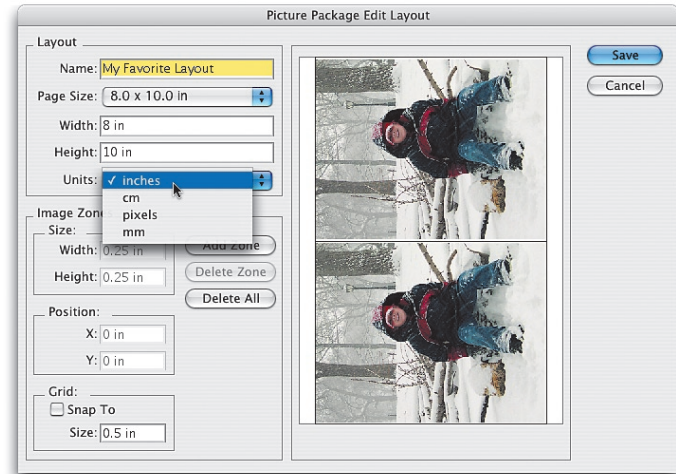
Step Three:

You'll probably find it easier to create your custom layout if you start from scratch (unless the layout you're creating is very similar to an existing layout, in which case, choose that layout before you click the Edit Layout button). To start from scratch, click the Delete All button to remove all the existing photo thumbnails from the preview window. (*Note:* Adobe calls these areas "zones," so we might as well get used to calling them that too so we sound cool at Photoshop parties.)
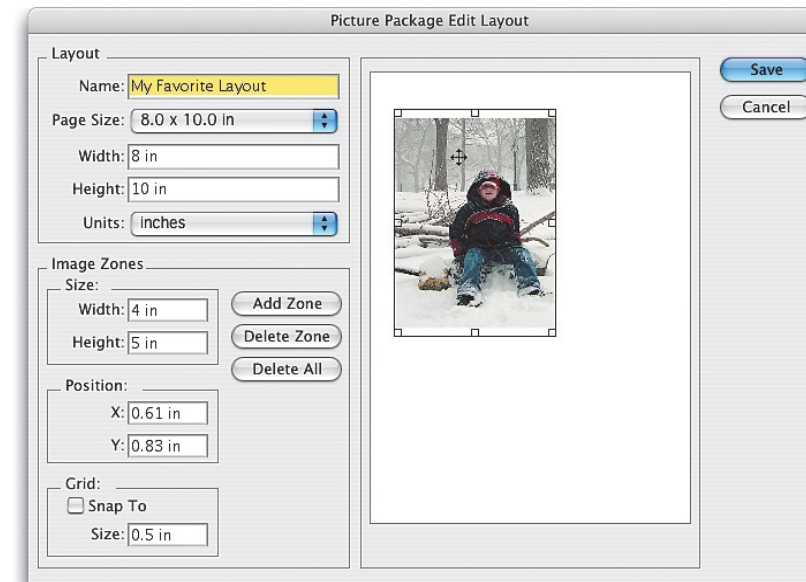

Step Four:

Click the Add Zone button to add your first zone. A bounding box appears around your photo, so you can resize your zone by dragging the adjustment handles that appear on the corners and sides of the bounding box. To move the zone around within the preview area, just click-and-drag inside the bounding box.


Continued

Step Five:

Since the idea behind Picture Package is "multiple copies of the same image on one page," it's easy to create duplicate zones. Just Option-click (PC: Alt-click) within a zone's bounding box and a contextual menu appears, where you can choose to duplicate the zone, delete the current zone, or create a duplicate of a zone in one of the preset sizes. Choosing one of these sizes from the contextual menu doesn't affect the current zone; it makes a duplicate in the size you choose.
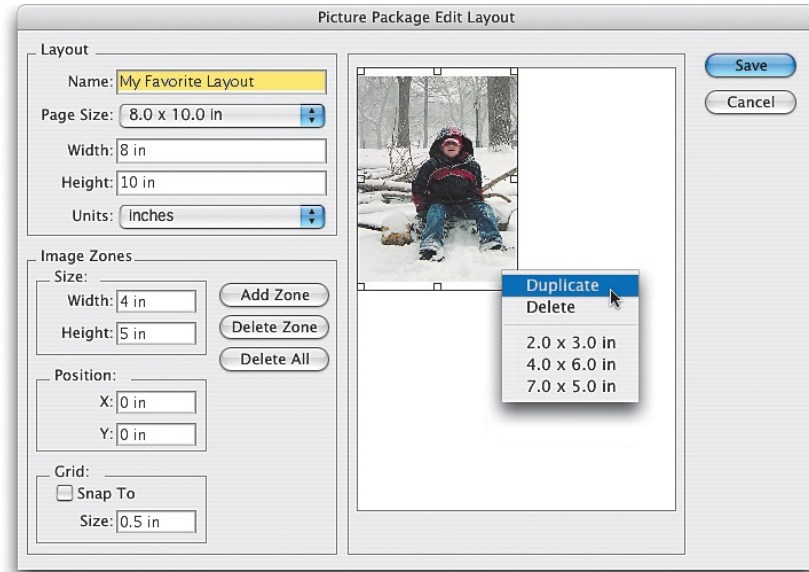
TIP:

If you've been looking in the dialog for a button called "Make Horizontal" or "Flip on Side," forget it—those are too descriptive, and if Adobe named buttons like that, you'd easily figure it out, and then where would we be? Instead, when you want to change the orientation of a photo from portrait to landscape, just click on a corner point and drag the box until it's wider than it is tall (or vice versa for landscape-to-portrait images). When you do this, the Layout Editor will automatically flip your photo on its side. It sounds clunky, but try it once and you'll see it's really not.
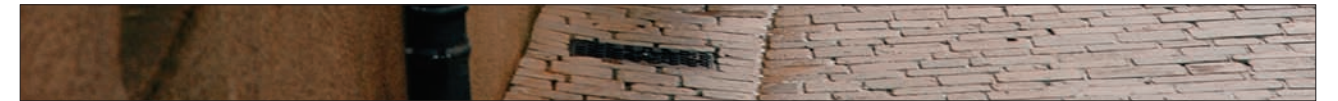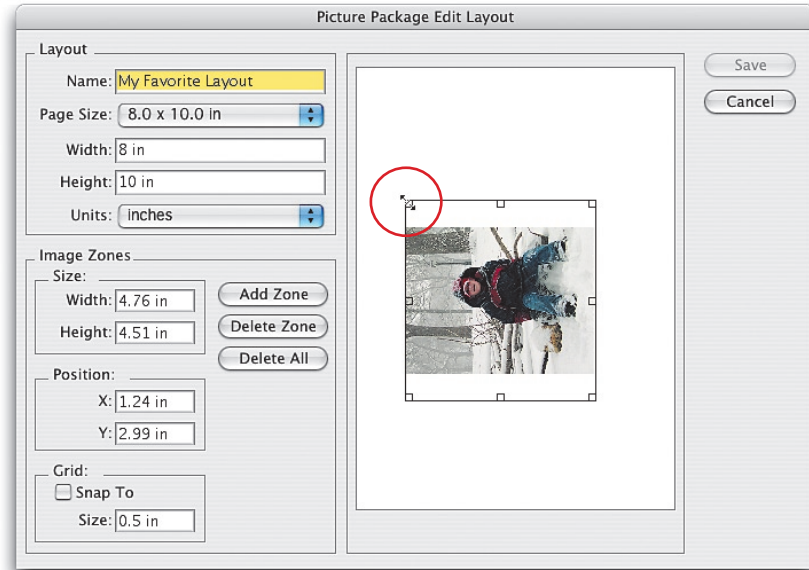
ANOTHER TIP:

Another thing you might find helpful when creating your layout is to turn on a placement grid. You do this at the bottom of the Image Zones section of the dialog (in the bottom-left corner) by turning on the Snap To option. This also makes your zones snap to the grid, which makes precise positioning much easier.
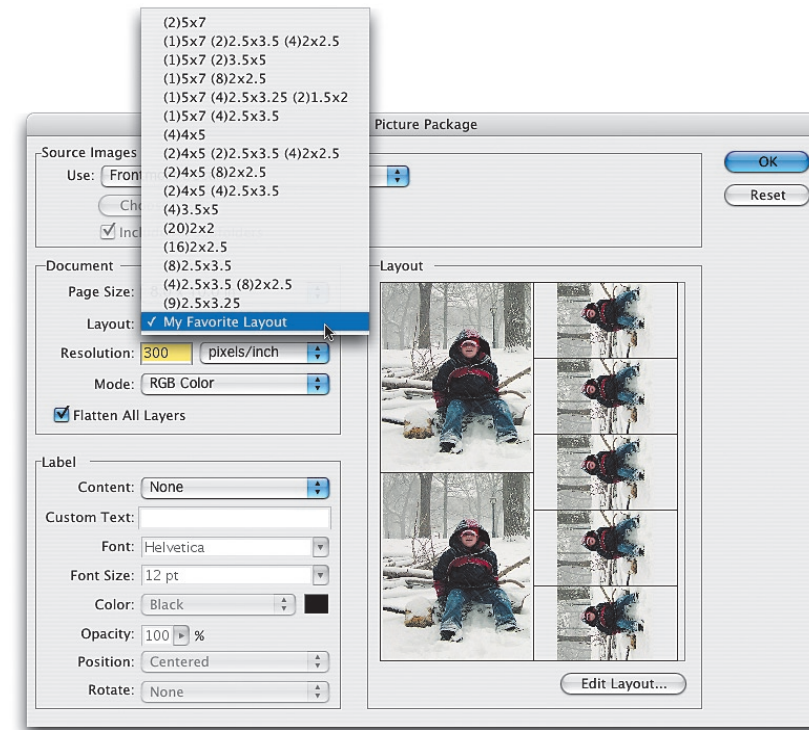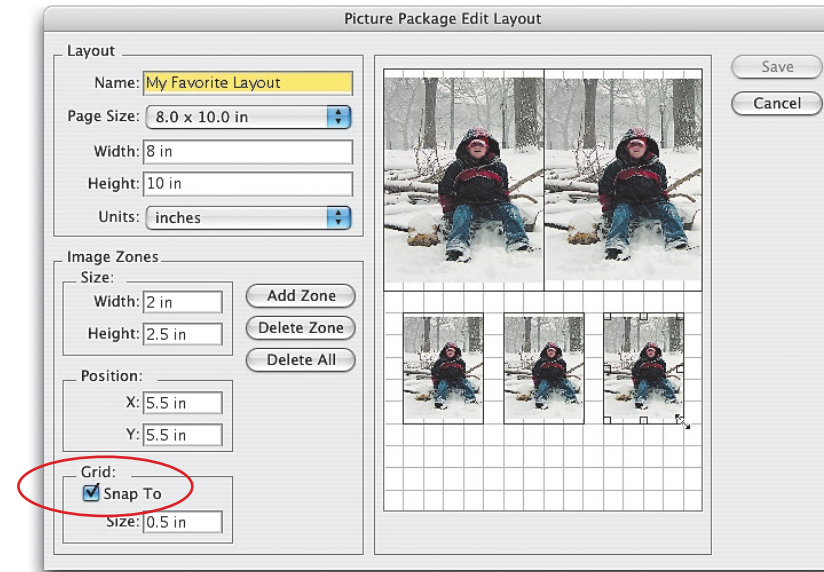
Step Six:

When you click Save, a standard Save-style dialog will appear, asking you to name your new layout. (This is just the name of the file on your hard drive, not the name that will appear in the Layout pop-up menu within Picture Package, so just give it a name that you'll recognize if you decide to delete this layout one day.) Click Save, and your newly named layout will now appear in the Layout pop-up menu of the Picture Package dialog, where you can access it anytime from here on out.

Creating a Custom Copyright or Signature Brush

If you want a quick way to apply your copyright watermark to an image, check out this trick I learned from portrait photographer (and Photoshop guru) Todd Morrison. He showed me how to turn your copyright info into a brush, so you're only one click away from applying your mark to any photo. My thanks to Todd for letting me share his ingenious technique.

Step One:

Create a new document, and then click on the Create a New Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel to create a new blank layer. Press Shift-U until you get the Custom Shape tool (it's in the flyout menu of Shape tools in the Toolbox). In the Options Bar (in the group of three icons), click on the third icon from the left (which creates your custom shape using pixels rather than paths). Then, press the Return (PC: Enter) key to bring up the Custom Shape Picker onscreen, and choose the Copyright symbol from the default set of shapes. Press the letter D to set black as your Foreground color and drag out a copyright symbol in the center of your document.
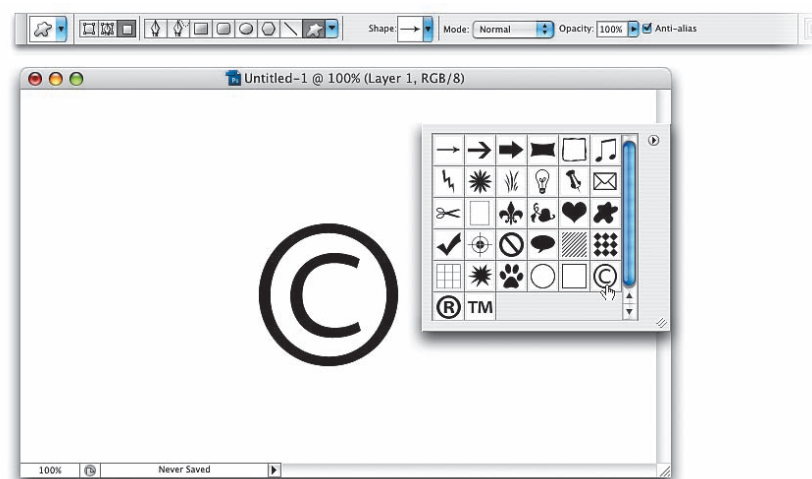
Step Two:

Press T to switch to the Type tool, and then type your copyright info. The Type tool will create a Type layer above the copyright layer. (*Note:* When you set your type, go up to the Options Bar and make sure your justification is set to Center Text [click on the center of the three align icons]). Then, type a few spaces between the copyright date and the name of your studio. This enables you to put the large copyright symbol in the center of your type.
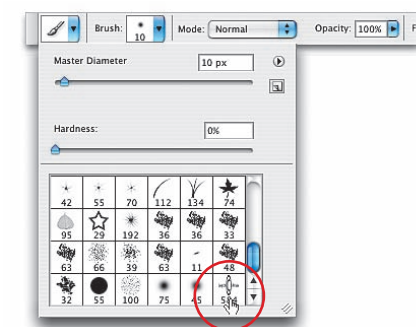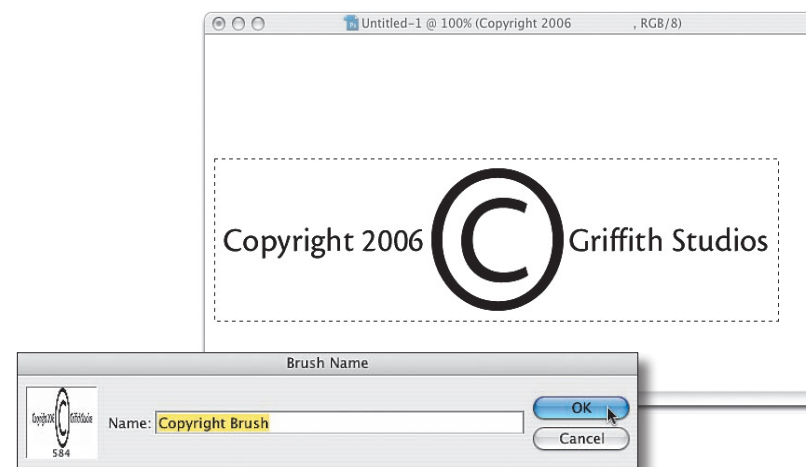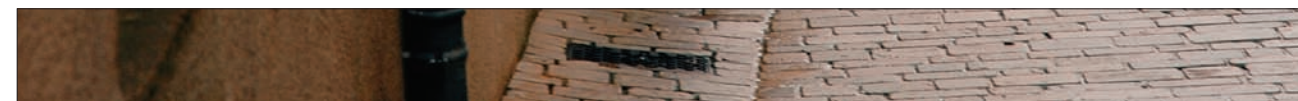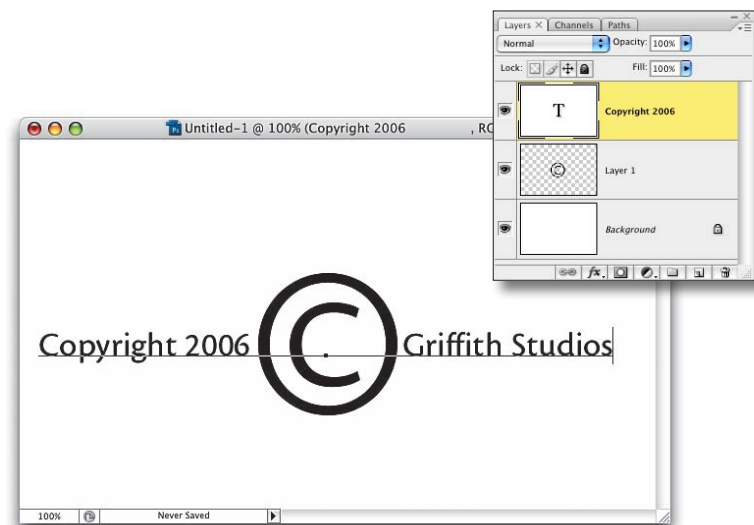
Step Three:

Press M to get the Rectangular Marquee tool, and click-and-drag a selection around your type and your copyright symbol. Then, go under the Edit menu and choose Define Brush Preset. When the Brush Name dialog appears, name your brush and click OK. This adds your type as a custom brush in your Brush Presets library. *Note:* Don't worry—the preview of the brush that appears in the Brush Name dialog may look squished, but the brush won't be.

Step Four:

Press B to get the Brush tool, and in the Options Bar, click on the thumbnail to the right of the word "Brush," and in the resulting Brush Picker, scroll to the bottom of the brushes. The last brush in the set is the custom copyright brush you just created.

Step Five:

Now that you've created your copyright brush, it's time to put it to use. Open a photo that you want to use as a client proof. Click on the Create a New Layer icon in the Layers panel, and then get the Brush tool, choose your copyright brush from the Brush Picker, and click once where you want your copyright info to appear. Lower the Opacity in the Layers panel to around 20% so you can see through the copyright. Two things to keep in mind: (1) If the photo is dark, try white as your Foreground color. (2) You can use the Brushes panel's or Brush Picker's Master Diameter slider to change the size of your brush.

SCOTT KELBY