Brian Pawlowski

Image wizard

Amateur fine art photographer creates beautiful imagery using Adobe® Photoshop® CS2 software

By day, Brian Pawlowski designs high-end storage appliances for Network Appliance, creating solutions for major visual effects companies and other companies that require reliable high-performance storage. In his limited spare time, he is a passionate fine art photographer who says photography keeps him sane in a busy world. Adobe Photoshop CS2 software is his constant photography workmate and companion.

"I rely on Adobe Photoshop CS2 to process and manipulate all my photos," says Pawlowski. "Photoshop just keeps getting better. I get more excited about digital photography with each new version."
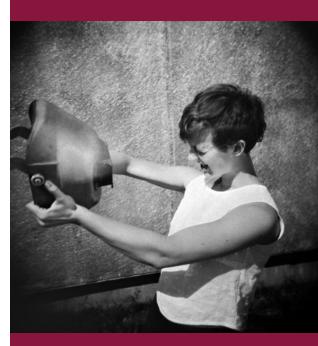
Creating minimalist imagery

Whether creating portraits in a studio or selecting and composing part of a landscape, Pawlowski views the process of making photographs as his interpretation of reality. His pictures are minimalistic. Fear, wonder, desire, and irreverence loom large in his work whether he is capturing a mood in a portrait or evoking an emotional response to the world around him. Pawlowski uses various cameras, from $10 plastic cameras to large-format view cameras.

"I sometimes stress my images during capture or post-exposure to introduce random elements into the process," says Pawlowski. "I look for the defining flaw. Other times I seek ironic juxtapositions in combining modern digital with traditional alternative techniques. Photoshop CS2 gives me a wide range of techniques and tools to achieve my artistic vision."

Igniting a passion for photography

Pawlowski became interested in photography as a child when he began using a Polaroid camera to take snapshots of his family. He taught himself darkroom work when he was in high school. He then started a hobby of astral photography, enlarging pictures of the stars and other astronomical bodies to satisfy his curiosity about the universe. In his late twenties, however, Pawlowski stopped taking photos altogether, arguing philosophically that photography was little more than a futile attempt to hold back time.

Then Pawlowski met his future wife, and they asked photographer and photojournalist Charles Gatewood to photograph the wedding. Pawlowski was so amazed by Gatewood's photos—Pawlowski declares he can't believe he was at the same place as Gatewood—that he asked Gatewood to teach him. Gatewood's tutelage ignited Pawlowski's serious passion for photography.

Pawlowski's interest in photography blossomed at a young age. When he was a child, he took snapshots of his family using a Polaroid camera. He taught himself darkroom techniques and also became passionate about astral photography. Below, Pawlowski sets up in Antarctica, where he went on a photo expedition.

Pawlowski often shoots in a studio. He then highlights important details, adjusts brightness and contrast, and performs other operations in Photoshop CS2 to bring out the best in each image.

"With Adobe Photoshop CS2, I can work with 32-bit, HDR images, so I start with the highest possible quality."

Brian Pawlowski,
amateur photographer

Pawlowski has since studied photography and digital darkroom techniques with the best, including Alain Briot, Katrin Eismann, John Paul Caponigro, Tracey Storer, Mark Nelson, Kim Weston, Joyce Tenneson, and Brigitte Carnochan. These mentors have helped shape Pawlowski's photographic style and form his digital workflow.

Digital all the way
Adobe Photoshop CS2 and Photoshop Camera Raw for processing images are at the heart of Pawlowski's workflow, even for large format film capture, in which his images are scanned and manipulated in the same manner as his direct digital captures.

From there, Pawlowski uses Photoshop CS2 and Photoshop Camera Raw to sharpen each image, set white and black points, and make initial brightness adjustments. He then further fine-tunes image brightness, sets local and global contrast, and dodges and burns each image. He may selectively employ this process, depending upon the image. He saves the images as Photoshop CS2 files, retaining 16-bit color depth.

Depending on the printing destination, Pawlowski sharpens his images for output. Most work is printed at home on his Epson printers using the ImagePrint raster image processor (RIP). Some work is sent to a professional bureau to print on Cymbolic Sciences LightJet printers onto Fujicolor Crystal Archive paper.

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Pawlowski creates a wide variety of fine art photography. He captured the landscape image at the left in Monument Valley. After scanning the image on his Imacon 646, he began processing the shot using Photoshop CS2. To create the streetscape above, Pawlowski started with an image captured with a Canon EOS 1DS Mark II digital camera fitted with a handmade pinhole lens.

Embracing the latest tools

To keep his processes and tools up-to-date, Pawlowski is quick to upgrade to each new version of Photoshop. He has found several new features in Photoshop CS2 that streamline his workflow and spur creativity. He uses Adobe Digital Negative (DNG) Specification, for instance, to archive his photos. And he takes advantage of support for High Dynamic Range (HDR) to bring more depth and richness to his landscape photos. Pawlowski also relies on Adobe Bridge to sort and organize his images.

"Enhancements in Photoshop CS2 such as Adobe Bridge and faster raw image processing make quick work of the more mundane aspects of digital image processing," says Pawlowski. "And with Adobe Photoshop CS2, I can work with 32-bit, HDR images, so I start with the highest possible quality."

For Pawlowski, Photoshop CS2 has become a critical tool in building and honing his skills as a digital artist. "Photoshop CS2 is my digital darkroom. It gives me the power to selectively bring out elements of images and apply artistic methods," says Pawlowski. "Adobe Photoshop CS2 is my creative toolkit and playground. I get so much satisfaction from sitting down every day and exploring what Photoshop CS2 has to offer."