

Apogee Photo Magazine

What HDR *Really* Stands For:

How to Depict Reality

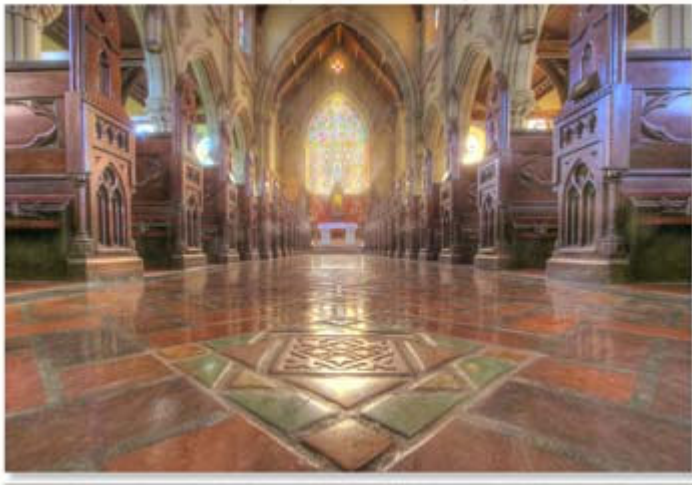
by Jim Austin, M.A., A.C.E.

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How to Depict Reality, a primary question for two centuries of photography, is a meaningful question for high dynamic range photographers. Here, five reasons for photographers to try high dynamic range photography, HDR for short, are offered. HDR can expand your skills as it widens the dynamic range of your imaging.

HDR images, despite heated controversy about how unreal they make scenes appear, are here to stay. HDR shots show up in magazines, advertising and everywhere online. Teaching this popular technique since 2005, I have invented acronyms for the three letters of HDR to help people visualize its assets.

In the camera, you take different exposures of the same scene — but at different shutter speeds — to get an HDR image. *The results* - shots emerge with better whites and blacks than possible from a single image. Working with HDR software lets you handle back- and side-lighting. You get all the highlights and shadow detail you want in high contrast scenes and dimly lit places. Read on for five key advantages of How to Depict Reality.



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Reason one: Highlight Detail Results

HDR makes you aware of highlight details. Many photographers are drawn to light through stained glass.

St. Mary's church in Newport Rhode Island, at right, had colorful liquid light

pouring through its windows. HDR preserved subtle color details in its stained glass even on a cloudy day. You will see highlight detail results

return to your compositions.



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*Reason two:
How Detail Returns
to the shadows*

This photo at right shows the tail fin of a 1957 Chevy Bel Air. Although the car is backlit, shadows are open and detailed. Without multiple exposures, these shadow areas would have lost their detail. “[The Beauty of Black and White](#)

[HDR](#),” my June 2007 article, explores this advantage and shows more HDR artistry in B/W.

*Reason three:
Hold Down Rock-solid*

Using a tripod mounted camera greatly helps to align all your exposures. Since the tripod and camera must be rock solid as you bracket your exposures, you have to place your tripod carefully; as you think about this positioning, the pace of your image making slows down. This makes your compositions immensely more attentive. No more snap shots.

Slowing down to compose is a fertile practice. As I compose a scene, I shift the angle of my view to get a second or third perspective, one that is unlike the way it was first envisioned. Why does HDR facilitate this? When you make multiple exposures of the same scene without any moving subjects, you will want to wait for people to move out of the scene. Patience is needed for high dynamic range photography and, as a result, practice with the HDR process has intensified my seeing as it slows the pace of the work.

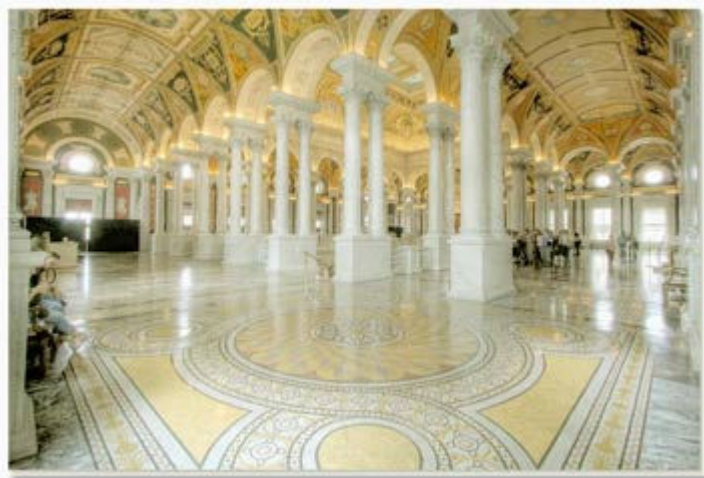
The scene below, from three exposures shot on tripod, illustrates this. A reflecting pool at Flagler College in downtown Saint Augustine, Florida— an area usually crowded with visitors – became free of people for just long enough to take three shots just before sundown. Later, in Photomatix®, these three exposures were merged together to get all the details of the scene reflecting in the fountain pool.



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Reason four:
Highly
Disposed to
Radiance

Highly
 Disposed to
 Radiance
 means details
 of surface
 highlights
 glow under
 skilled HDR
 processing.
 Capturing
 small



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luminous details of light striking marble, ceramic tile, and other polished surfaces is astonishing. None of the bright reflections would show up this sharply on film, due to the inability of film to handle the contrast. The high contrast scene at left shows daylight reflecting off a marble floor in the Temple of Knowledge at the Jefferson Building in the Library of Congress, located next to the Capitol in Washington D.C.

Reason five :
Hello outDooRs !

Why use HDR for outdoor
 and nature photography
 subjects? For macro or
 flash fill, a photo looks like
 it was made with a single
 exposure, even as it
 captures a wider color
 palette and detail. Catching
 these colors gives you the

same joy as seeing your first rainbow.

Fortunately, the half-inch tall grasshopper, at left, did not move when visited by a macro lens and a tripod. Three exposures were made on an overcast morning in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia. In Photomatix Pro ® software, these shots were combined with saturation, detail and contrast settings keyed in to match the original scene. Photoshop was helpful as well for final touch up.



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When processing HDR, software allows you to choose “How Devoted to Reality” vs. how extreme you want your results. The grasshopper here looks as I first saw it, but I made painterly versions also.

So, there are 5 quick reasons to try HDR. But that’s not all. You can use it with portraits, panoramas and Photoshop effects. Check back here for more on these cutting edge topics in HDR.

Bottom line - HDR possesses the power and potential to deepen *How you Depict Reality*.

An Adobe Certified Expert, Jim Austin has many HDR articles on Apogee, and teaches Photoshop for Photographers at the [Apogee Online Campus](#). His HDR work is also featured at www.flickr.com/jimagesdigital/sets.

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