

HIGH DYNAMIC RANGE IMAGING (HDR)

HDR is a technique that allows photos with different exposure levels to be merged to create a realistic image with increased detail in over-exposed and under-exposed areas using special software. Unfortunately, the same term is used to describe photos that are often “enhanced” with extra saturation, contrast, etc. Whether you like the results or not, it is too bad that photos that are created by these “enhancements” don’t have a different term to avoid confusion. I use Photomatix Essentials (download for \$39) and there is also a Photomatix Pro 5 (\$99) available, as well as many other brands of software.

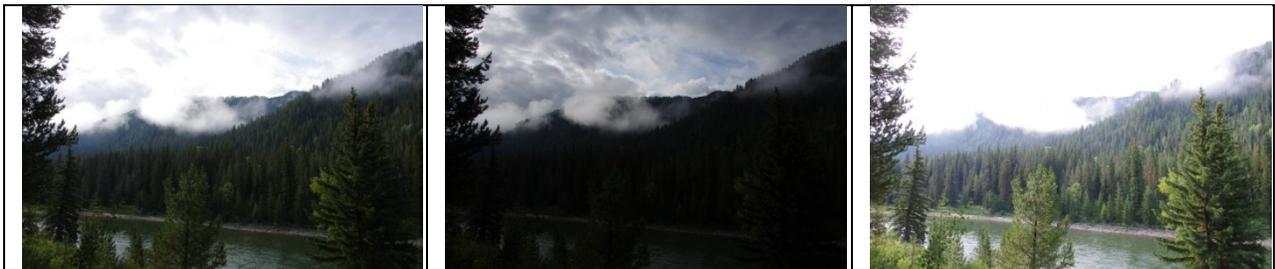
1. You need to change two settings on your camera:

A. Set up exposure bracketing. I suggest setting it for three photos. The settings should be, normal exposure, two stops underexposed, and two stops overexposed. You can leave the camera set like this even when not taking HDR photos.

B. When you are ready to take an HDR photo, change the camera from single shot to bracketing. Remember to change it back to single shot when done.

2. Choose a subject without movement. Waves, moving people, wind-blown flowers, etc. are not a good choice.

3. Press the shutter and the camera will take three photos with three exposures. Do not move the camera between exposures.



4. On your computer, start Photomatix and drag all of the photos onto the workspace. A preview will be generated.

5. Click “Next” and a popup will ask if you want ghosts removed. If there was no movement between the three photos, click “No”. An HDR photo will be displayed along with three work panels.

A. In the upper left you can select a preset. Select Natural, or one of the others for special effects.

B. In the center left, you can fine tune your photo in the Settings area. Hover your mouse over a selection and a description of the setting will be displayed. Typically, the only adjustment I make here is blending point, which gives more weight to the over or under-exposed photo.

C. On the right, if “Show Preset Thumbnails” is checked, are many more preset selections. I prefer the natural look unless there is a real reason for choosing something else. Many of these presets look artificial, overdone, and un-photographic to traditional photographers, and these are the techniques I wish had a different name to separate them from HDR.

6. When you are satisfied with the results, click “Process and Save”. Unfortunately, Photomatix will try to save the photo in the last location where a save was done, so you might need to select a different location. A popup asks if you want to reduce noise, which is recommended if you use RAW files, but I click “No” for JPGs.



The resulting photo should have detail in light and shadow areas where none existed in the original properly exposed image.

7. I recommend making finishing adjustments, like contrast or saturation, in your favorite editing program instead of Photomatix. I usually use Photoshop Elements version 12.