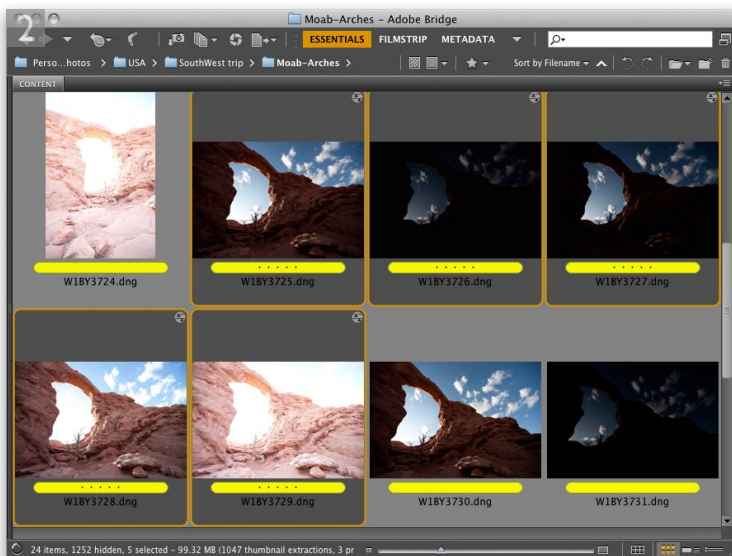**Movie 7**

Merge to HDR Pro

Merge to HDR Pro

When shooting photographs with the intention of using Merge to HDR Pro to merge them I suggest you choose an easy subject to shoot first and follow the advice in Chapter 7 about bracketing and using a tripod with a cable release. You can certainly get successful results from shooting JPEG images, so don't feel you have to use raw, but in my view raw gives you more options, like the ability to pre-sharpen correctly and ensure the white balance is synchronized. The Merge to HDR Pro command can be accessed via the File ➯ Automate menu in Photoshop or via the Tools ➯ Photoshop menu in Bridge. I usually find it best to open via Bridge, since the image alignment is applied there automatically.

Response curve

Each time you load a set of bracketed images, Merge to HDR Pro automatically stores a response curve in Photoshop's preferences for every camera it encounters. As you merge more images from the same camera, Merge to HDR Pro updates the response curve to improve its accuracy. If consistency is important when using Merge to HDR Pro to process files over a period of time, you might find it useful to save a response curve (see Step 3) and reuse the saved curve when merging images in the future.

1 The original pictures were bracketed using different time exposures at two exposure values (EV) apart. I began by opening a selection of five raw digital capture images via Camera Raw. It was important that all auto adjustments were switched off. In this example, I made sure the Camera Raw Defaults were applied to the first image and synchronized this setting across all the other selected images (you'll definitely need to check the white balance is included in the synchronization if the camera was set to use an auto white balance setting).

2 I kept the images selected in Bridge and went to the Tools menu and chose Photoshop ⇨ Merge to HDR Pro.

3 This shows the Merge to HDR Pro dialog in 16-bit mode. Providing the 8-bit or 16-bit mode is selected you will see the HDR toning options shown here. These allow you to apply an HDR to LDR conversion in one step (the HDR toning controls are described more fully on pages 410–413). If you prefer at this stage to simply save the image as a 32-bit master HDR file, you should select the 32-bit mode, where the only option available is to adjust the exposure value for the image preview. There is also a fly-out menu in the Merge to HDR Pro dialog (circled below) where you can deselect the Automatic Response curve mode and also choose to save or load a custom response curve (see sidebar on previous page).
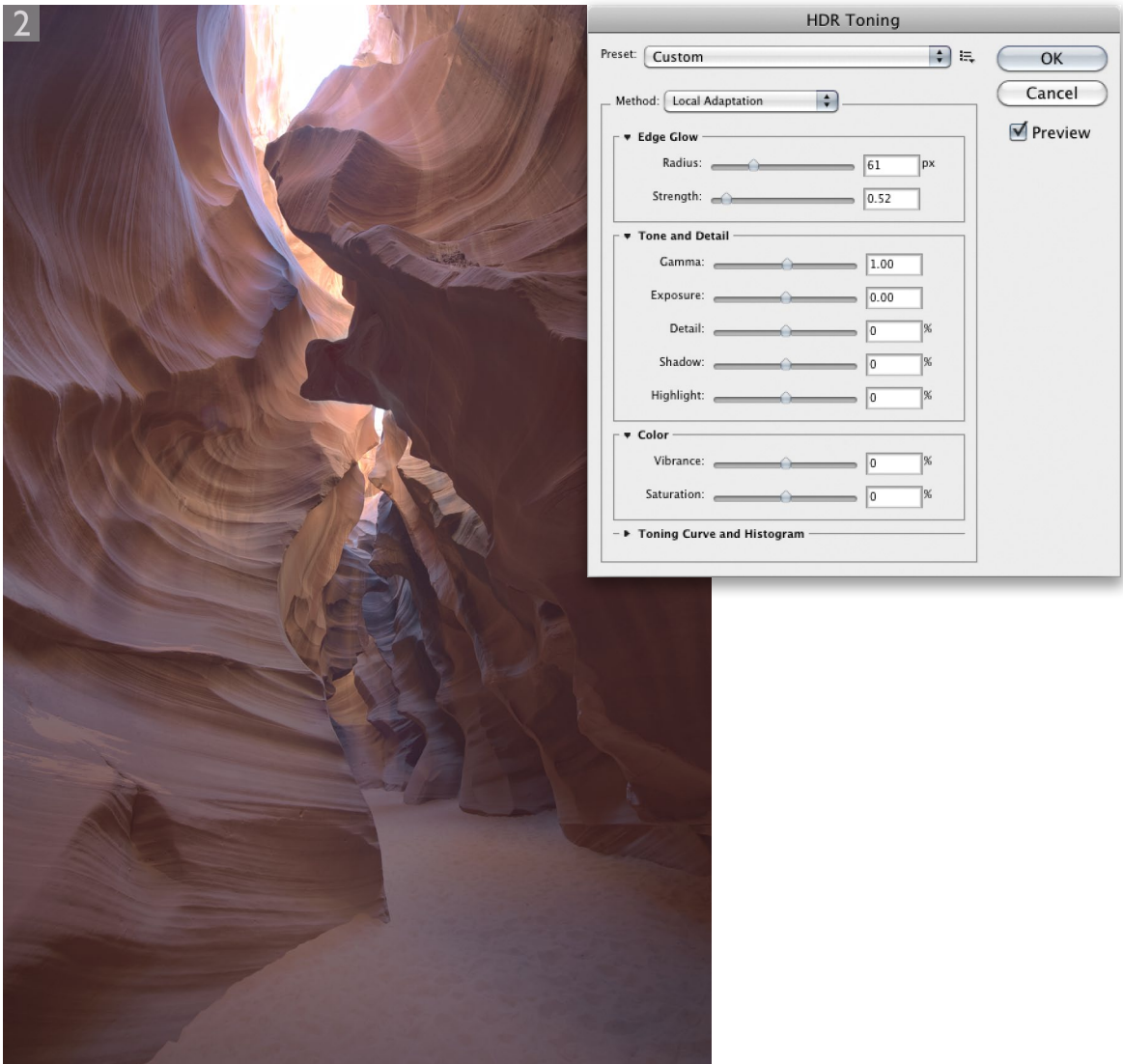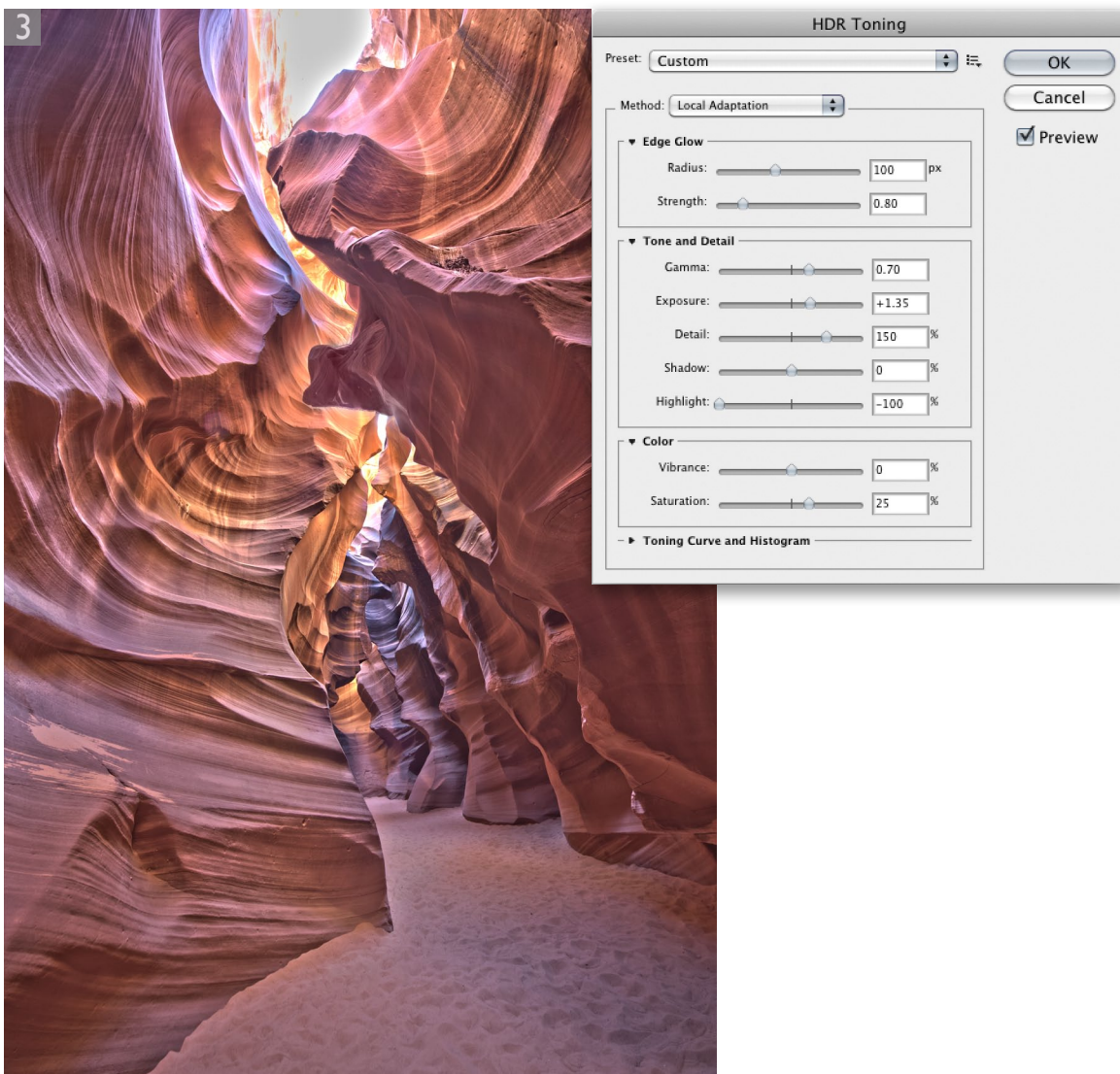
3

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Exposure slider

It is impossible to represent an HDR image on a standard computer display, which is why the Exposure slider is available as a slider at the bottom of the document window. It allows you to inspect an HDR image at different brightness levels. Since the display you are using is most likely limited to a bit depth of 8-bits, this is the only way one can actually 'see' what is contained in a high dynamic range 32-bit image.

1 I began here with an HDR image that was produced by merging together a bracketed sequence of three photographs, shot at 2 EVs apart. To reduce any movement in the individual exposures, the camera was mounted on a tripod and the pictures were taken using a cable release. This first screen shot shows the merged HDR file as it appeared in Photoshop in 32-bit per channel mode with the Exposure slider adjusted so that I got to see a reasonably good view of the HDR image. In 32-bit per channel mode one can use the Exposure slider to preview the HDR image at different levels of brightness. Here, the Exposure slider allowed me to adjust the preview as I focused on retouching different parts of the picture using the clone stamp tool prior to making the HDR tone conversion.
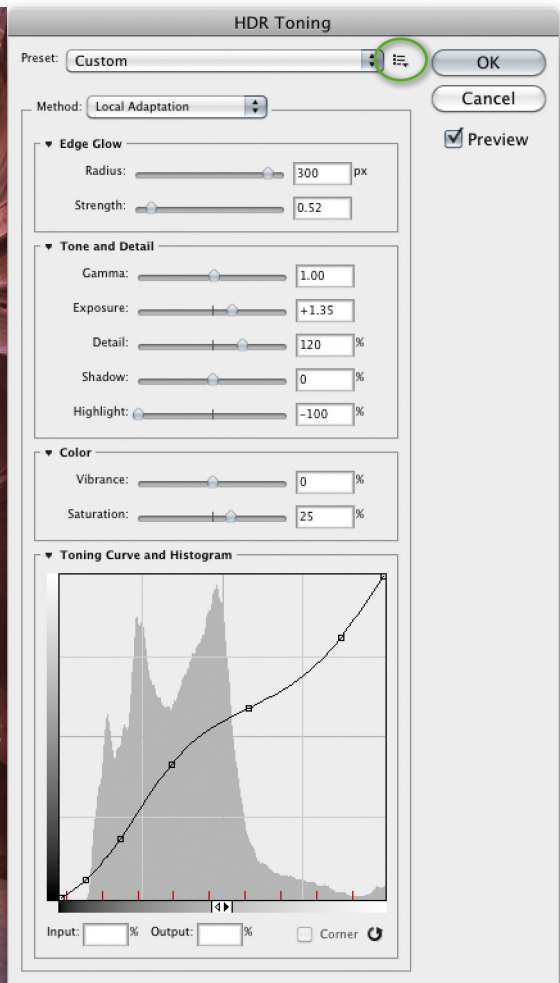
2 To convert this high dynamic range image into a low dynamic range version I had two options. I could go to the Image ⇨ Mode submenu and chose 16-bits / Channel, or choose Image ⇨ HDR Toning… Either of these methods would open the HDR Toning dialog shown here. Of the four tone mapping options that are available in this dialog, I find that the Local Adaptation method usually works the best and in this screen shot I left all the sliders at their default positions. Although the image doesn't look all that great just yet, this is certainly quite an improvement upon how the default HDR converted image preview looked in previous versions of Photoshop.
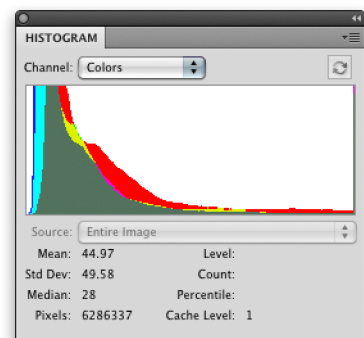
3 Here I adjusted the HDR Toning sliders to produce what might be called the 'illustration look' that is favored by many HDR photography enthusiasts. If this is the type of effect you are after I don't think the Photoshop HDR Toning adjustment is really as capable as say, Photomatix Pro, nor is it as simple to configure, but Photoshop CS5 can now be made to produce the rather obvious 'HDR toned effect'. Looking at the settings shown here, I set the Radius slider to 100 pixels and raised the Strength to 0.80. I took the Gamma slider to 0.7, set the Exposure slider to +1.35 and the Detail slider to 150%. I then reduced the Highlight slider to −100% and increased the Saturation slightly, setting it to 25%.

4 In this last step the aim was to produce a more natural-looking result. To start with I set the Radius slider to 300%. This was done to create much wider halo edges. I also took the Strength slider back to it's previous default setting of 0.52 and the Gamma slider back to the default 1.00 setting. I reduced the Detail slider to 120% and the other settings, including the Exposure, Highlight and Saturation sliders were left at the same positions as in Step 3. I then adjusted the Toning curve to fine-tune the final tone mapping and was able to refer to the Histogram panel in Photoshop as I did this. Lastly, I clicked on the HDR Toning options button (circled), selected 'Save Preset…' and saved the Local Adaptation settings as a new preset, since this might serve as a useful starting point for future HDR conversions.

Adobe™ Photoshop™ CS5 for Photographers

This PDF on keyboard shortcuts is supplied on the DVD that comes with Martin Evening's book: Adobe Photoshop CS5 for Photographers. This latest update in the Adobe Photoshop for Photographers series contains 768 pages in full color, plus a DVD containing video tutorials. The book layout has been further improved to make navigation easier and contains updated advice on everything you need to know about using Photoshop, from digital capture to print output, as well as all that is new in Adobe Photoshop CS5.
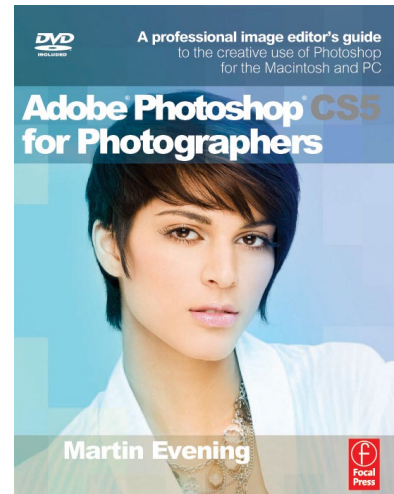
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