Making Something Out of Nothing by Joe Holler

Have you ever tried to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear? Have you ever taken a terrible picture and tried to rescue it? Here are a couple snap shots that I took that I would have normally discarded but something in them caught my eye and I decided to try to save them from the recycle bin.

I took this first picture while on a bus in Cairo. I saw this interesting looking man sitting at a bus stop. I just grabbed my camera and fired. There was no time even think about the camera settings let alone change them. There is really nothing good about the shot. It is very underexposed, a little out of focus and not composed well. But there was something in the man's expression that stirred my imagination and I decided to see what I could do with it in Photoshop.


Before – A Terrible Snapshot

After – An Award Winning Portait

Here is what I did.

- When you intend to make a print, it is generally a good idea, to crop the image last so that you can crop it to the proper dimensions for the print without being constrained by those dimensions while editing. But in this case I cropped it a little bigger than my final image because there was so much in the picture that I knew I wasn't going to use and I didn't want to be bothered to edit those parts just to cut them off later.
- Then I added a Levels Adjustment Layer by clicking on the icon in the adjustments palette and moving the highlights slider to the left to brighten up the image.
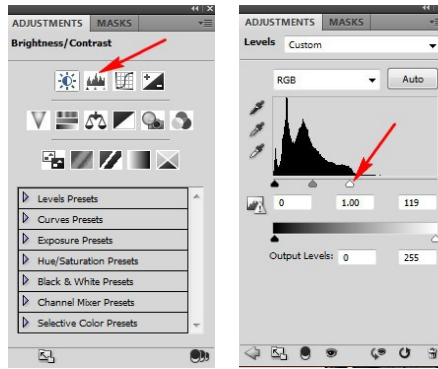
- Next, I made a new composite layer (A duplicate layer consisting of all the layers below it) (Ctrl + Alt + Shift + E), and made a selection of the background using a variety of selection tools.
- I refined that selection with the "Refine Edge" tool in Photoshop CS5, a wonderful tool. I feathered the selection by about 1 pixel and expanded the selection about 10%.
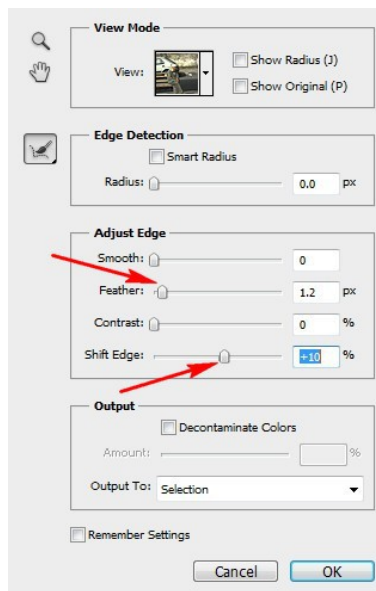
- I saved the selection because I knew I would need it later (Select | Save Selection). I named it "background".
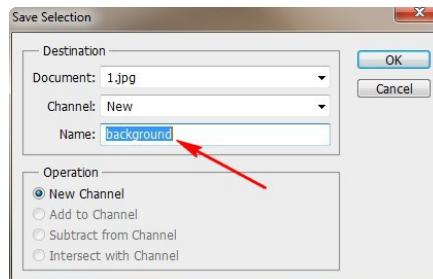
- I applied a Gaussian Blur to the background (Filter | Blur | Gaussian Blur), setting the slider to about 60 pixels.
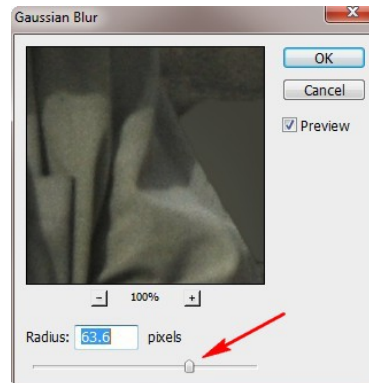
- Then I took a large soft brush, selected a color from the man's garment and lowered the opacity of the brush to about 10%, and painted a little of the background. I repeated this with several colors to obscure the background further and frame the man a little more.
- Next, I made another composite layer, loaded my selection again (Select | Load Selection) and inverted the selection to select the man instead of the background (Select | Inverse).
- To the man I applied 2 filters. First, I used a Topaz filter. Topaz Labs make outstanding Photoshop Plug-ins and can be obtained here: http://www.topazlabs.com/. I used the Adjust filter, starting with the "Spicify" preset and adjusting the sliders.


- Then I used Poster Edges (Filter | Artistic | Poster Edges). I set the edge thickness to 1, edge intensity to 1 and posterization to 6. This will apply the minimum amount of poster edging, but it was still too intense so I adjusted the opacity of the layer to about 20%.

- Lastly, I recropped the image to the dimensions of the print.

With a little creativity and experimentation, I was able to make an acceptable image out of a throw away snap shot.

Here is a picture of a Jaguar that I saved with Photoshop:
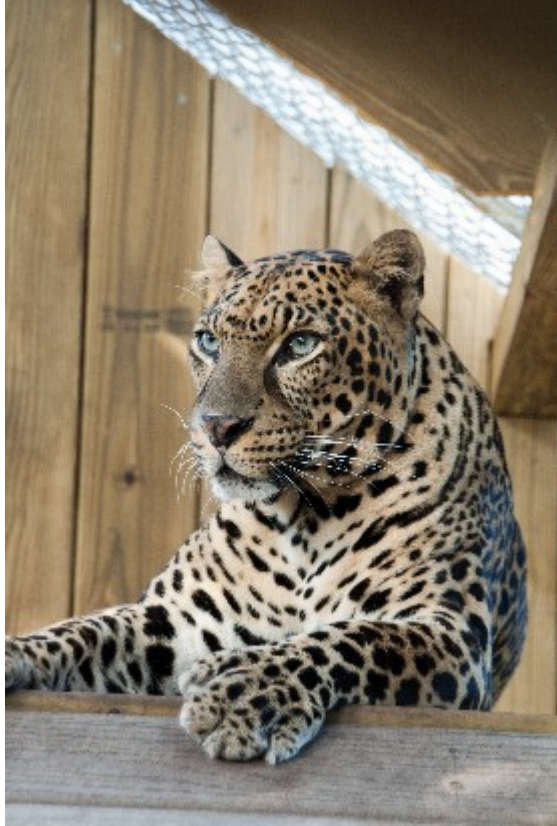
Before – An OK Snapshot

After – A First Place Winner

Although the starting point wasn't as bad as the first example, I still wanted the image to pop more.

- As in the first example, I did a rough crop, selected the background (saving the selection), blurred and painted it.
- Then, on separate layers, I applied two filters. Again I used Topaz | Adjust | Spicify and adjusted the sliders.
- Then I applied Pixel Bender, a free filter that can be download from Adboe Labs at: http://labs.adobe.com/technologies/pixelbenderplugin/, (Filter | Pixel Bender | Pixel Bender Gallery). I set the drop down menu to "Oil Paint" and experimented

with the slider so as to apply just a little of the effect.
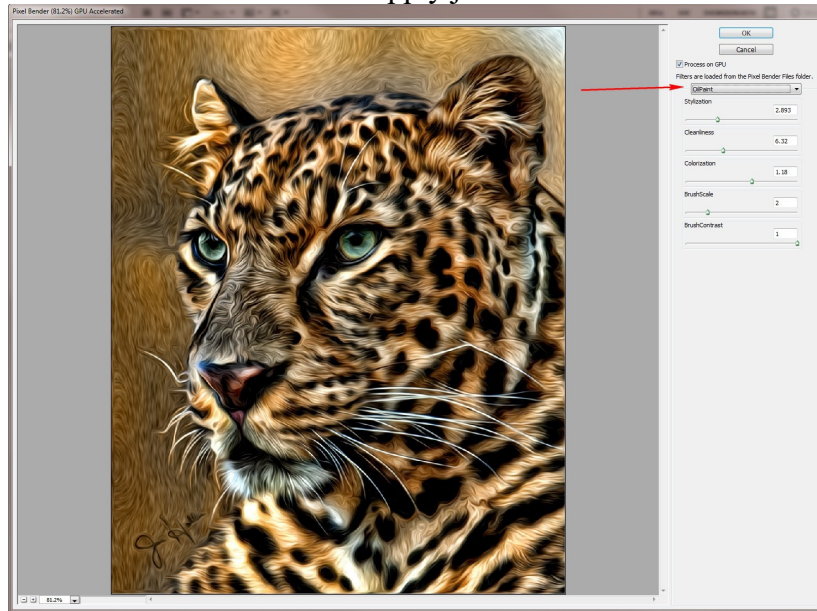
- Then I added a layer mask to the layer by clicking on the layer mask icon on the bottom of the layer palette (third from the left). Using a black brush I painted on the eyes to remove the pixel bender effects.
- Then I selected the eyes and increased the saturation.
- I recropped to print size and had a metallic print made of it. It almost jumps of the page.

Both of these images have won awards from the Florida Council of Camera Clubs. The Jaguar won fist place for 2011 in the color, amateur division. Before you decide to throw away those second rate images, try applying some filters and see what happens.