

Photoshop CS4: Essential Skills Cover

Mark Galer tracks the development of the concept and image that appears on the cover for the Photoshop CS4 Essential Skills book, the fourth version of the best selling 'how-to' book published by Focal Press.

The birth of the concept

The concept of placing three balls in a landscape was used for the first Photoshop Essential Skills book 'Photoshop CS: Essential Skills' back in 2004 and has been an on-going theme for subsequent versions of the book. The concept was inspired by a landmark album cover design back in 1971 for the band Nice for their album 'Elegy'. This album cover was created by a company

called Hipgnosis and was part of a revival of surrealism in advertising (think of any Pink Floyd album cover from the 70s and the surreal work of Benson and Hedges in the 70s and early 80s that changed advertising forever).

Coming from a commercial background I am not hung up on creating something with a completely original concept. I am, instead, more than happy to process and build upon the imagery that I have been

The original cover design image for Photoshop CS: Essential Skills



exposed to and influenced by, rather than locking myself away in a darkened room (devoid of inspirational sources) to await that rare Eureka moment. Many of the students I teach have a fear of copying work that they have seen. They often fail to realise that the work they admire must act as their inspiration. This is essential if they are to mature into creative individuals who can work in the photographic industry. Stop and think for a second how original The Beatles would



The cover image for Photoshop CS4: Essential Skills by Mark Galer and Philip Andrews

have been if they had not started by covering the artists they most admired.

The concept of introducing foreign objects into a natural landscape may have inspired others too, take for instance photographers such as Thomas Höpker working in the deserts of Algeria in 1976 creating his surreal landscapes. The work of artist Andy Goldsworthy and the Belgian surrealist painter Magritte, whose work I have also admired for a couple of decades, may have served to inspire my

original cover design. The cover image for the Photoshop book therefore pays homage to the work I have admired from the age of 13 but also helps the potential reader to quickly identify that this book is about photography, creativity and of course post-production editing. The cover image takes a thematic approach so that customers who have purchased a previous version will instantly recognise that this is the new book due to its similarities. The cover must be

sufficiently different, however, so that the reader does not mistake the book for the old version that they currently own – in short the cover image must be a signature design that is immediately recognisable. The original CS title saw the balls traversing desert dunes that I captured just outside Dubai in the Middle East back in 1986. The release of Photoshop CS was a landmark release for me as a photographer as I had, up to that moment in time, been shooting and



The cover image for *Photoshop CS2: Essential Skills* by Mark Galer and Philip Andrews

scanning film. The release of Photoshop CS, however, saw me retire my Nikon film cameras and sell my medium format Mamiya camera. The Raw plugin that was made available for Photoshop 7 was now fully integrated into CS enabling easy access to the quality contained by the Raw format. With CS we also had 16 Bits/Channel multi-layered editing and the introduction of Bridge which made handling digital files so much easier than ever before. Film for me had effectively been consigned to history with the release of Photoshop CS. The desert image used on the cover, however, paid

homage to my photographic background and was scanned from film. The landscape was modified by applying a tri-tone effect and an additional technique called the 'digital stocking filter' was also applied. The Digital Stocking Filter technique was originally adapted for Photoshop users by Max Ferguson in his book *Max Ferguson's Digital Darkroom Masterclass* published back in 2000 by Focal Press. These two techniques are still featured in the current version of the book using the same image (the only project that has retained the same image used in the original CS book and one of only three images scanned

from film). The balls that appeared on the cover image were completely fabricated inside of Photoshop and took on the appearance of the blue gel layer style that was all the rage for Apple Mac users at this time. Shadows were added using a modified drop shadow (separated onto its own layer and transformed into perspective) while the ripples of sand appearing behind the ball were distorted using the 'Spherize' filter.

Less than a year after the publication of the book we were looking for a new design once again (the book spends approximately 6 months in production). The original publication had been an instant success with its simple 'no-nonsense' approach to teaching Photoshop users how to 'skill-up' quickly and easily. The next version of the title would see an expansion of both the text and the support materials (providing a support CD in addition to the supporting website). This allowed us to be more ambitious with the amount of movies we could now distribute without burdening some of the readers' download speed or capacity.

For the CS2 cover image I first experimented with just changing the balls and toning the sand dunes with different colours but the publisher wanted to see



The cover for image *Photoshop CS3: Essential Skills* by Mark Galer and Philip Andrews

how far we could push the design and still retain a signature image. The sand dunes were replaced for a dramatic seascape image quite late in the production cycle (a panoramic stitch taken by Orien Harvey - one of my students at RMIT University). The landscape was compressed horizontally to increase the drama (changing a beach into a bay) and the balls were transformed from blue transparent plastic balls sitting on sand to yellow carved stone balls hovering above the water. After the first ball was crafted the layers were converted into a smart object and duplicated. Each ball could now be scaled multiple times and still retain the quality of the first ball. Photoshop CS2 was around a little longer than most versions of Photoshop, due in part to Adobe's acquisition of Macromedia and Apple moving to Intel processors. The big changes for the content in the Photoshop CS3 book was another 64 pages, 50% different content (due to changes in workflow courtesy of Smart Objects and Smart Filters) and the move to a DVD instead of a CD. This gave us the freedom to supply large high-quality movies for every project (over 8 hours in total) together with full-resolution TIFF images and even the source Raw images.

Now that a pattern for change and similarity had been set, the third cover design came together very quickly after the treatment of the balls was decided upon. Another seascape was used (this time captured by Rod Owen using a long exposure). The framing of the rocks



Replacing the sky using the channel masking technique from the CS4 book

created the drama that was required and the signature balls caught fire and became flaming planets. The balls were

crafted in a matter of seconds using a fantastic action I discovered online at <http://share.studio.adobe.com>. The most time-consuming part of this montage was pushing the warm glow onto the misty water beneath the balls.

Another 18 months and this time we have the release of Photoshop CS4. With a completely new interface and performance enhancing non-modal workflows the changes have kept both Philip Andrews and myself busy. Again this cover design was locked down early in the production cycle of the book. I decided this time to use balls with a reflective quality for this cover and also decided to incorporate planet earth as part of design on the ball. A chrome ball (iStock_000002761951Medium.jpg) and the landscape image (iStock_000005528322Large.jpg) were both downloaded from iStockphoto.com. The result is a fairly apocalyptic and surreal landscape that reflects the fact that



*Stock images from iStockphoto and NASA
<http://www.istockphoto.com>
<http://visibleearth.nasa.gov>
 Planet earth (globe_west_2048.jpg) was downloaded for free from a NASA website providing royalty-free high-res images of our beautiful earth.*



The chrome ball and planet earth are merged and then introduced into the host landscape

the state I live in has been in drought for nearly a decade.

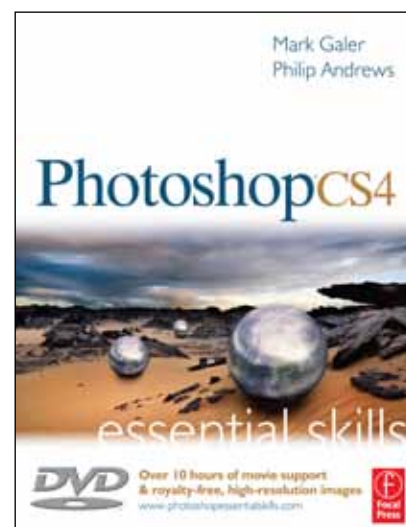
Although the original sky is very dramatic I felt it needed to be replaced so that the balls, and not the sky, would be the focal point of the image. The alpha channel masking technique features in the book was used to make fast work of selecting and masking the old sky. The new sky that I chose serves to reduce the colour palette for the final image. A Vibrance adjustment (new to CS4) was used to increase the intensity of the rich colours in the sand and a linear gradient was also applied to darken both the top and bottom of the image. The central portion of the image was treated with the 'tonal mapping' technique from the 'Advanced Retouching' chapter of the book. This lightens and expands the



localised contrast in the dark rocks.

Planet Earth was placed on a layer above the chrome ball and set to the soft light blend mode. The opacity of the layer was also dropped. The chrome ball stock image was chosen for its reflective qualities (the lighter area at the top of the sphere is consistent with the lighter sky in the landscape). The layers of the ball were converted to a smart object and the smart object was then duplicated twice. Each smart object could then be transformed and moved to a new location. The smart object enabled each ball to be scaled multiple times without the risk of lowering the quality.

A non-destructive dodge and burn layer was used to add shading underneath each ball and drop shadows were also added so that each ball appeared to be



touching the surface of the sand. Some cloning was also required in front of the dominant ball in the foreground to clean up the host image in this area.

The finished result as it appears on the cover of the new book. The new edition contains 32 additional pages, a brand new DVD interface, over 10 hours of movies (2 more than CS3), and 40% new content including new Raw workflows (smart workflows for even smarter photographers).



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Mark Galer
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Photoshop CS4: Essential Skills

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