Subtle Vignetting

By: Mark Hamilton
Ohio Valley Camera Club of WV

I thought I'd share my favorite way of adding subtle vignetting to a photo. A vignette does not have to be a deep dark oval like we see in those western dress-up photos. I sometimes darken the perimeter with a heavily feathered selection but recently Connie used a light vignette on a photo that I thought worked very well, so I might have been won over to that style too. Vignetting is a highly personal thing that is much like blur; some folks are very sensitive to them and will turn against a photo really quick while others just love it. I think a subtle touch is the key.

[Here's a link to the original photo](#) with a version about midway through the process and the final version. The middle image has been corrected for color balance and brightness plus the eyes have been worked on just a bit as even a cat portrait is a photo of the eyes when you get down to it. The last version has the vignette applied to it, plus the dark noisy area under the cat's chin has been desaturated to lessen the obvious color noise. It's unlikely that your monitor will match mine, so the color and brightness may not be 100% perfect on your screen, in fact it may be way off but you'll get the idea.

I call the cat "CAT" just because a grown man shouldn't be expected to stand at the front door and call for "Snookums".

Here's the process, which will require an editor like Paint Shop Pro or Photoshop, something that will allow selections and layers. Really simple though and Mike can demonstrate this at his workshop.

1. Choose the elliptical selection tool and set the feathering at 75 to 150 pixels wide, depending upon the resolution (or pixel width) of your image.
2. Pull out an oval egg-shaped selection around the main subject in your photo. No

need to be precise with this, the feathering will blend in the edges. Just clear your subject far enough that you don't darken a crucial part of the scene.

3.   Now invert the selection so that everything but that central ovalized area has been selected. (With CS2, from the top menu click on select>inverse).

4.   Now create a curves layer for this selection (CS2: layer>new adjustment layer>curves).

5. For the curves dialog box, pull down the midtones of the line. Fiddle with the whole line to create a gentle curve that will darken the midtones predominately by pulling down the central part of the line. It is better to make it darker than you prefer.

6. Now, once you have it a bit too dark then just reduce the opacity of the layer until it looks just right.

7. You can save the file with another name so that you can readjust the vignette later if your tastes changes.

8. Flatten and resave with a unique name for the flattened file. I keep the original, the edited layered file, and a flattened file to print.

Hope this helps some.   A blur vignette is added in a similar way on a duplicate of the background layer, but a blur vignette is even more controversial for many.   For the advanced members, they will probably know a better way than me. For those just starting out, this may look like gibberish but Mike can show you in the class and you'll just have to accept for now that it is much simpler to do than to write.

Again, I know from experience that some will really hate this. That's what makes photography and other art so much fun to talk about.

Mark