

Camera Raw 3: the jpeg filter

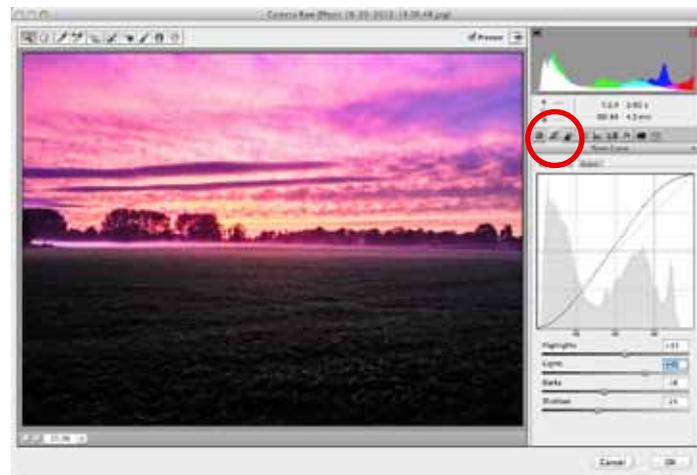
CAMERA RAW may have been designed for working on RAW images, but Photoshop has long had the ability to open all files – including JPEGs – in the RAW dialog.

Now, with Photoshop CC, Camera Raw appears as a filter in its own right, so you can apply it to any open file. Although JPEG images have just a fraction of the bit depth of RAW images, we can still do a lot with them. I photographed this sunset with my iPhone: let's see if we can bring a little magic to the scene.



2 Click on the Tone Curve icon above the sliders to switch to this section. Here, you can drag the Highlights, Lights, Darks and Shadows sliders left and right to change the shape of the curve, giving more emphasis where needed.

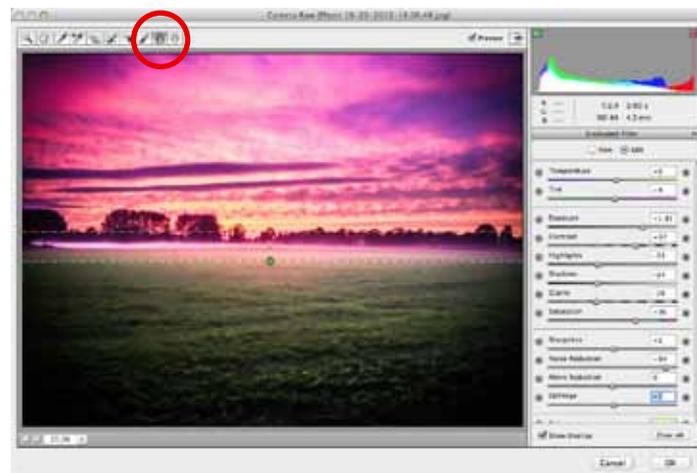
The Tone Curve section of the Camera Raw dialog behaves very much like the Curves adjustment. Its effect is a lot smoother and more subtle, though, due to the built-in constraints. Here, I've boosted the Highlights and Lights, and reduced the Darks and Shadows to darken them. The result is a better image contrast.



4 On the previous pages we looked at using the Adjustment Brush to treat one area differently from the rest of the image. Next to it is the button for the Graduated Filter, blending effect.

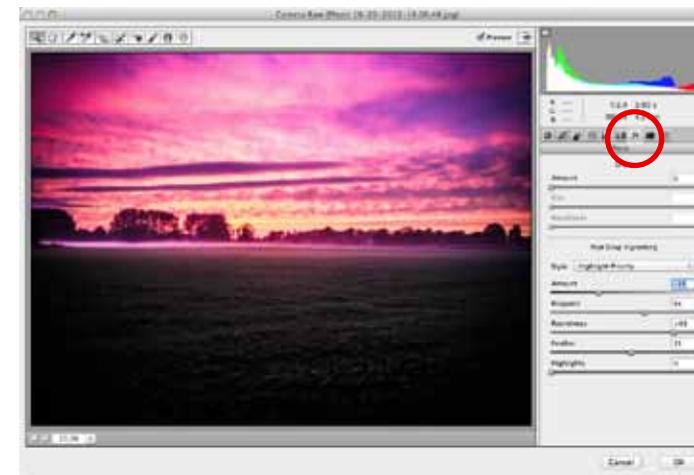
The graduation is indicated by a green dotted line, below which the effects are 100% applied, and a red line, above which they're invisible; the effect strength blends smoothly between the two, and the gradation can be adjusted by dragging the red and green dots.

Here, I've brightened the grass area in the foreground, and have use the Color tint (just off the bottom of the screen here) to add a little green, giving the grass a more verdant appearance.



1 Start by choosing Filter > Camera Raw (you'll find the new filter right at the top of the Filter menu). It's almost always a good idea to boost the Clarity setting, which brings a lot more definition into the image. You can see already how much sharper this looks, compared to the original.

Clarity is a terrific filter that gives images a real boost without damaging them. Even at 100%, there's rarely a downside to the Clarity filter.



3 The Effects tab lets you add grain and, more importantly, some vignetting to the scene. By dragging the Amount slider to the right we can add a white vignette; dragging it to the left, as I've done here, adds a dark vignette.

The result is a darkening of the edges, which gives the image a more spectral appearance, focussing the viewer's eye on the center and away from the edges.



5 And this is the result of the Camera Raw operation. It's clearly a very much stronger image than the one we started with, and has very much more interest and power to it.

The ability to use the Camera Raw dialog on all our images, not just RAW files, is a huge bonus, as it allows us to use a wide range of tools to bring out the detail that's lurking in there.

Even if you only use it for the Clarity adjustment, it's well worth taking the time to get to know Camera Raw, and to see what it can do for you.



HOT TIP

When we use Camera Raw on true RAW images, we're able to expand areas such as deep shadows to reveal the hidden detail within. But when we use it on JPEG files, that detail usually isn't there to be brought out; we may brighten the appearance, but we do so at the risk of extra "banding" – producing ungainly and unwanted bands of tone that become visible to the naked eye.

Always look again at your Raw-altered images to make sure you haven't pushed it too far.

