



The Digital Darkroom

This is a fun discussion topic, probably because so many people get bent out of shape over this one. Before we dive into it, lets take a look back into history and look at a traditional photographers 'Non-Digital' workflow. Lets use Ansel Adams because I think most people know who he is, and respect his work.

Ansel Adams, the pioneer of landscape photography as we know it today goes out on a typical photography shoot. We will skip most of the steps and just go to 'he clicks the shutter' and captures his image on glass (film of the time). Once everything is processed chemically, he sets up to make his print by stepping into a darkroom. Making a print is accomplished by shining light through the glass plate containing the image onto photographic paper, which is designed to react with light. Now comes the fun part, the part that separated Ansel Adams from the rest. He was an artist! If you were to watch him make his print you may or may not be amazed. He would wave large pieces of cardboard around in front of the print to manipulate the amount of light falling onto the paper. He would do something called burn and dodge. In looking at his prints you ask yourself, how did he capture that tonal range! To get the details on the mountains without losing the details in the moon, yet bring out every detail in every leaf. He did it through manipulating the light. The print you see is not an exact representation of what was on the glass. He used his artistic talent to manipulate that plate into a magnificent piece of work. I do not think that anyone will argue that Ansel Adams is the most revered photographer of his time.

Let us jump ahead to present day. I go out on a typical photography shoot. We will skip most of the steps and just go to 'I click the shutter' and capture my image onto a digital sensor (film of the time). Once everything is transferred into 1's and 0's onto my computer, I set up to make my print. Now I have no special darkroom in my studio, but I do have a modern day equivalent, it is called a computer. With my computer I can change tonality, and do something called burn and dodge, which brings out details in the shadows without losing details in the highlights. But only if I want to! I then print my photographic print on a light jet ink printer and it becomes the final print, just like Ansel Adams. There is no, repeat NO difference between what we do today in the digital darkroom, than what the pioneers did yesterday in a traditional darkroom.

As a digital photographer, all I capture are 1's and 0's, there is no tangible piece of glass. Therefore this darkroom called a computer is a necessary tool in transferring your photographic art into a medium that others may enjoy, and be inspired by. After all, we are artists, not copy machines!