



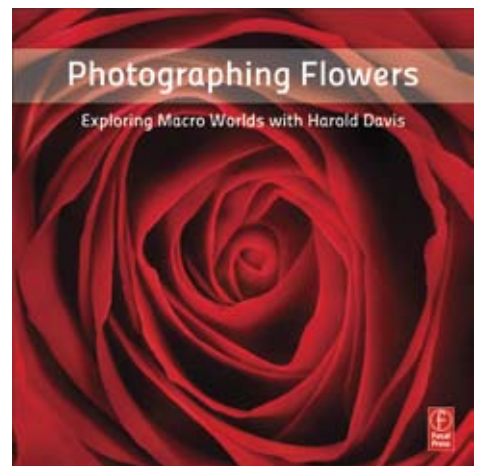
Of Petals, Plops and Portraits

Anyone who's spent time with Harold Davis at one of his frequently sold-out workshops, visited his popular Photoblog 2.0 (www.photoblog2.com), or read any of his

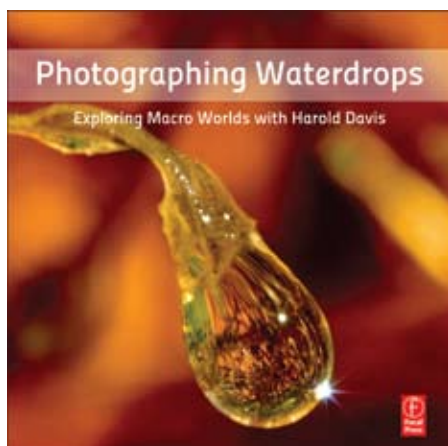
30 books gets the idea that Davis is a force of nature—a man of astonishing eclectic skills and accomplishments. Not surprisingly, he tends to get pigeon-holed by his expansive grasp of the digital imaging world. Among his diverse catalogue of photographic titles,

you'll find, to name a few, *Creative Composition: Digital Photography Techniques*, *Creative Night: Digital Photography Tips & Techniques*, *Creative Close-ups: Digital Photography Tips & Techniques*, *The Photoshop Darkroom: Creative Digital Post-Processing* and *Practical Artistry: Light & Exposure for Digital Photographers*. (For more on his digital-focused, *Creating HDR Photos*, see the feature story on page 48 of this issue). But flip through any of his books, and you're never left with the impression that Davis is a robotic, pixel-obsessed dweeb. The imagery he uses to illustrate even his most austere nuts-and-bolts tutorials is always passionate and remarkably personal. Davis is a creative, driven artist and digital technology is his canvas. To the good fortune of us all, he almost compulsively likes to share.

In October of last year, Davis unveiled what is probably the most comprehensive guidebook ever written on one of his private passions. *Photographing Flowers* is a detailed roadmap through all possible iterations of this specialized breed of macro photography. It covers every niche of the floral world, from basic Latin taxonomy to well-illustrated details of enhancing these endlessly diverse life forms



Photographing Flowers
Harold Davis
Focal Press
www.focalpress.com
208 pp.



Photographing Waterdrops
Harold Davis
Focal Press
www.focalpress.com
208 pp.

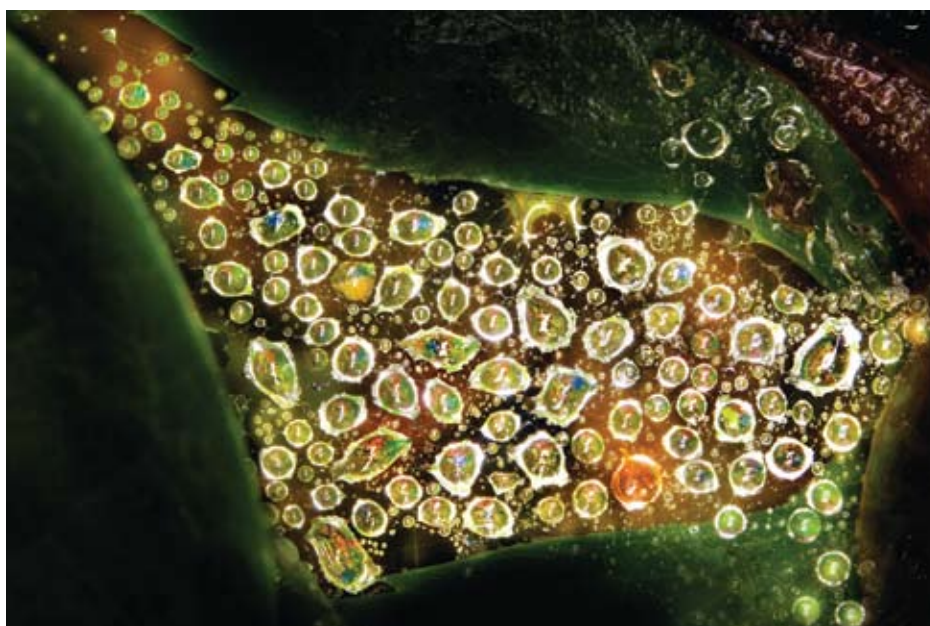


PHOTO © HAROLD DAVIS

with lighting, camera technique and after-capture manipulation. There's even a spread that teaches you to replicate the earthy brushstroked look of Vincent Van Gogh's celebrated sunflowers. Every photographer shoots a flower now and then. Their beauty and convoluted detailing have made them seductive camera magnets since photography's origins. Davis' passion seems to run a little deeper than the others': "I like to photograph flowers," he writes, "for the grace they bring to the world, the wildness that is contained in every flower no matter how showy or domesticated...the bravery with which flowers confront the mystery of their brief lives." The flower, according to Davis, deserves our attention as photographers for the sobering lesson it teaches us: "How can we not," he asks, "want to capture this ephemeral and bold stand against entropy and the chaos of the universe?"

I'll almost guarantee that you won't own this remarkable book for long before you're outdoors with your camera on a windless early morning, exploring someone's garden for a perfectly formed *Ranunculus asiaticus*.

Trompe L'eau

On the subject of macro photography, Davis has just given us a tribute to another of his Lilliputian passions: the water drop.

Photographing Waterdrops makes a good companion volume to his flower opus, as waterdrops often live on the edge of petals. Davis brings his technologist's fascination

with the physics of the natural world to the diminutive, often stunningly beautiful phenomenon of aquatic surface tension in its tiniest visible expression. Hear his own eloquent explanation: "Waterdrops are encapsulated worlds that follow their own rules. Inside...the play of light, focus, and shadow...on the outer edge, the skin of the waterdrop, transparency plays with reflection—and reflection presents a fish-eye view of our outer world...an *Alice-in-Wonderland* view that is recognizable, but also recognizably different."

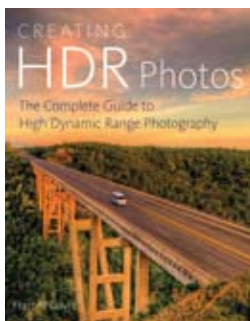
The technical credentials for photographing this poetic natural phenomenon are complex, as anyone who delves in the closeup world can confirm. Davis uses a score of his most lavish images as case studies in the techniques of extreme macro shooting—from lens and accessory selection to artificial lighting, to dealing with nerve-wracking challenges such as depth-of-field and shutter speed selection. Not unexpectedly, Davis devotes the book's final chapter to the various permutations of after-capture polishing in the digital darkroom. He reviews in detail the uses of Photoshop and workflow schemes with RAW files that enhance the vibrancy of color in his subjects, improve overall sharpness and extend an image's dynamic range. Waterdrops are potential sources of interesting abstract shapes as well, and Davis explains at length how he wheedles compelling designs and juxtapositions of color from even relatively

monochromatic originals. The waterdrop is an element of natural décor that requires the discerning eye of a photographer to preserve for every one else. And it's important to do this, Davis insists, because water is the fundamental substance in our entire worldly existence. Droplets of water, he writes, are intimate reminders, "that we are connected to the forces of nature that rush around us, control our bodies, imaginations and physical world." **RF**

MAKING SENSE OF HDR WITH HAROLD DAVIS

BY JIM CORNFIELD

Most photographers know that the current buzzword in the world of digital imaging is HDR—High Dynamic Range. It describes a process for maintaining detail throughout the entire tonal range of an image, from the darkest areas to the lightest. Today it's accomplished digitally by merging several versions of the same photograph. But, despite the technology that makes this possible, the core concept of HDR imaging is one of photography's oldest ideas. Many refugees from the wet photography era remember spending hours at the enlarger, under the glow of a safelight, coaxing detail out of the shadows and highlights of a single frame. Now, the digital universe has commandeered HDR as the queen of its after-capture applications. YouTube, blogs and websites sizzle with HDR tutorials, and the book publishing business has gone into overdrive. I recently counted 40 HDR titles on Amazon.com alone (and there were more; I just stopped counting).



A lot of HDR literature seems (admirably) skewed toward the idea of restraint when using this tool—in order to avoid that artificial “in your face” look that exposes the heavy hand of the person at the mouse and keyboard. Naturally, there are times when creativity demands taking HDR's capabilities beyond the realm of simply balancing highlight and shadow values. The instinct for knowing when it's

okay to cross the line isn't necessarily hard-wired into most of us; Harold Davis is an exception. His newly released 192-page *Creating HDR Photos* (Amphoto Books) is a meticulously detailed HDR tutorial. It's also a guide to discovering the moments when taking more creative license with HDR might be appropriate. Davis is an interesting hybrid of fastidious technologist (he's a mathematician and former software developer), and a widely respected, award-winning creative artist; parts of his book dissect the elaborate workflow he taps for his own best-known imagery. Fortunately, *Creating HDR Photos* is masterfully organized to acquaint even beginners (I confess to being one of them myself) with this fascinating subset of our craft.

Right: HDR Imaging at work in a bridal study. Automated HDR software and Photoshop technique combine to save the delicate highlight and shadow details that give this portrait its painterly charm.



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