Introduction

Are you a professional photographer or at least substantially experienced in digital photography and image processing? Good.

Are you looking for ways to take your work to a more creative, more artistic level than what you're currently doing or what you've seen from others? Very good.

Would you like concise information on how to achieve your goal without being treated like a beginner, tediously explaining the basics of image capture or Photoshop and instead getting right to the point?

Excellent, you've found it!

I began work as a photographer right after leaving school in 1982 and have been at it ever since.

I spent many enjoyable years working with film and had a pretty impressive darkroom at home for a few years, mixing my own chemistry from component ingredients and experimenting with various developers, toners and such.

So much time was spent shooting and processing for both work and artistic enjoyment, that I became well practised in the methods of both.

When digital photography started to become mainstream, I have to admit that at first, I was sceptical and reluctant to try it.

I couldn't imagine how all the skills that I had developed over the years could somehow be reproduced satisfactorily in a digital environment.

Nevertheless, working necessities thrust it upon me and when I began to actually learn the possibilities of digital processing, my mind was quickly changed and I became a devotee.

The tools have increased substantially since then, making many opportunities for creative and eye-catching photography that were previously either outright impossible, or extremely difficult, time-consuming and costly.

This explosion of possibilities however, has made it difficult for everyone to keep up.
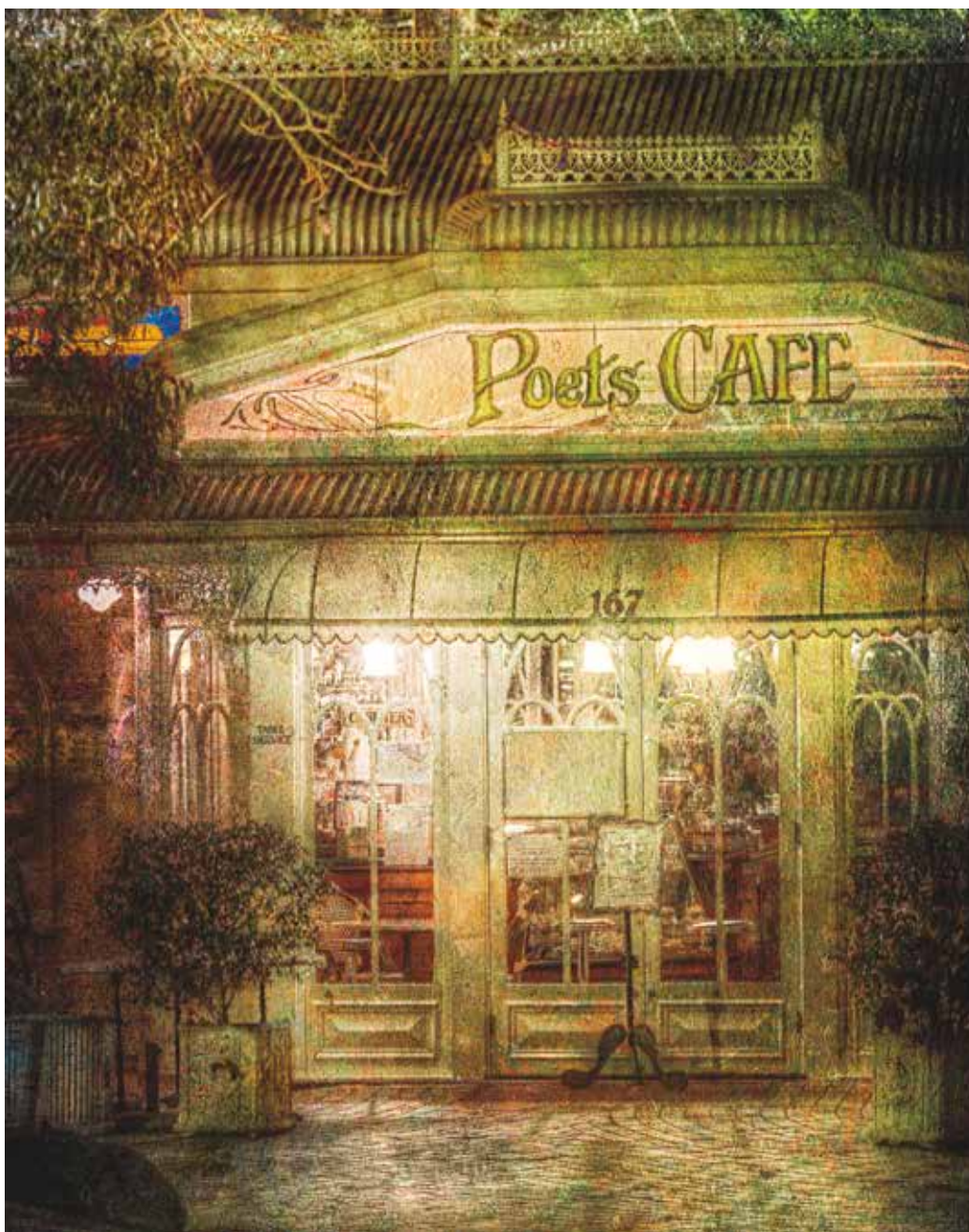
You may have seen impressive images on the web or elsewhere and wanted to know how to achieve the same effects, in a concise and understandable manner.

That's where this book comes in.

THE RIGHT STUFF

You may for instance, be aware of significant new advances like HDR processing and Focus Stacking, but don't know how to use them effectively.

I will discuss both, amongst others, in detail.

And before you put the book down in disgust after seeing the term HDR, I can reassure you that I won't be going down the well-worn route of garish, simplistic presets and the commonly seen and easily identifiable methods of its use.

Rather, I want to highlight some seldom seen and more creative possibilities.

Most of the methods I discuss in this book use many variables in their application, so

Infrared

HDR

using them on different images will generally produce surprisingly different results.

Experimentation by you is called for after I introduce the techniques themselves, which is actually the most positive aspect, and part of the fun of the various procedures I outline.

Your results will not be cookie-cutter clones of something that a bazillion others are doing.

They will depend on your creativity, the time you spend, the original photo, the settings and additional components you use and even the combination of different methods.

There is no rule that says you can't cherry-pick multiple procedures and use them all on a single or composite image.

You can easily process the same image using various combinations of the methods I discuss and the different ways of applying them, resulting in many strikingly different versions.

There are virtually endless possibilities.

Dilemmas

I should note at this point that I am treading a rather difficult line with this book.

I am explaining advanced techniques, so the book is not aimed at beginners, but at the same time, I can't assume that everyone knows how to effectively use all the Photoshop commands that I will be demonstrating.

Therefore I will be explaining the use of quite a few commands, adjustments and filters in chapter one, that are essential for these techniques and that when used in a skilful way can have a more pronounced impact than you might have previously realised.

I *will* assume that you have a good, working knowledge of Photoshop though, so that you are at least aware of the commands I discuss and how to find them in the program, and that if you require even more detailed information about them than what is in this book, you'll know where to find it.

Also in choosing the book title, I needed to refer to producing images with Photoshop, as it is a major component, but the "Paths" part is important too, as it highlights the crux of the book's strategy.

I will discuss various methods of image capture, as well as the use of other software prior to the image arriving in Photoshop for final processing.

For instance, there are chapters on acquiring infrared images, shooting for Focus Stacking in Helicon Focus software and also HDR

captures for processing in Photomatix, all before finishing off in Photoshop.

It's an "All Paths Lead to Photoshop" approach!

The aim is to show you how to capture a good photo as a starting point and then use all the available tools to make it into something extraordinary.

And Further On

In chapter two, I discuss the most modern and effective methods of colour correction, so that you can be sure to begin with an image that will respond well to later processing for creative ends.

Next, I will give an explanation of the use of the LAB colour space and its benefits in changing and further enhancing colour with almost limitless possibilities.
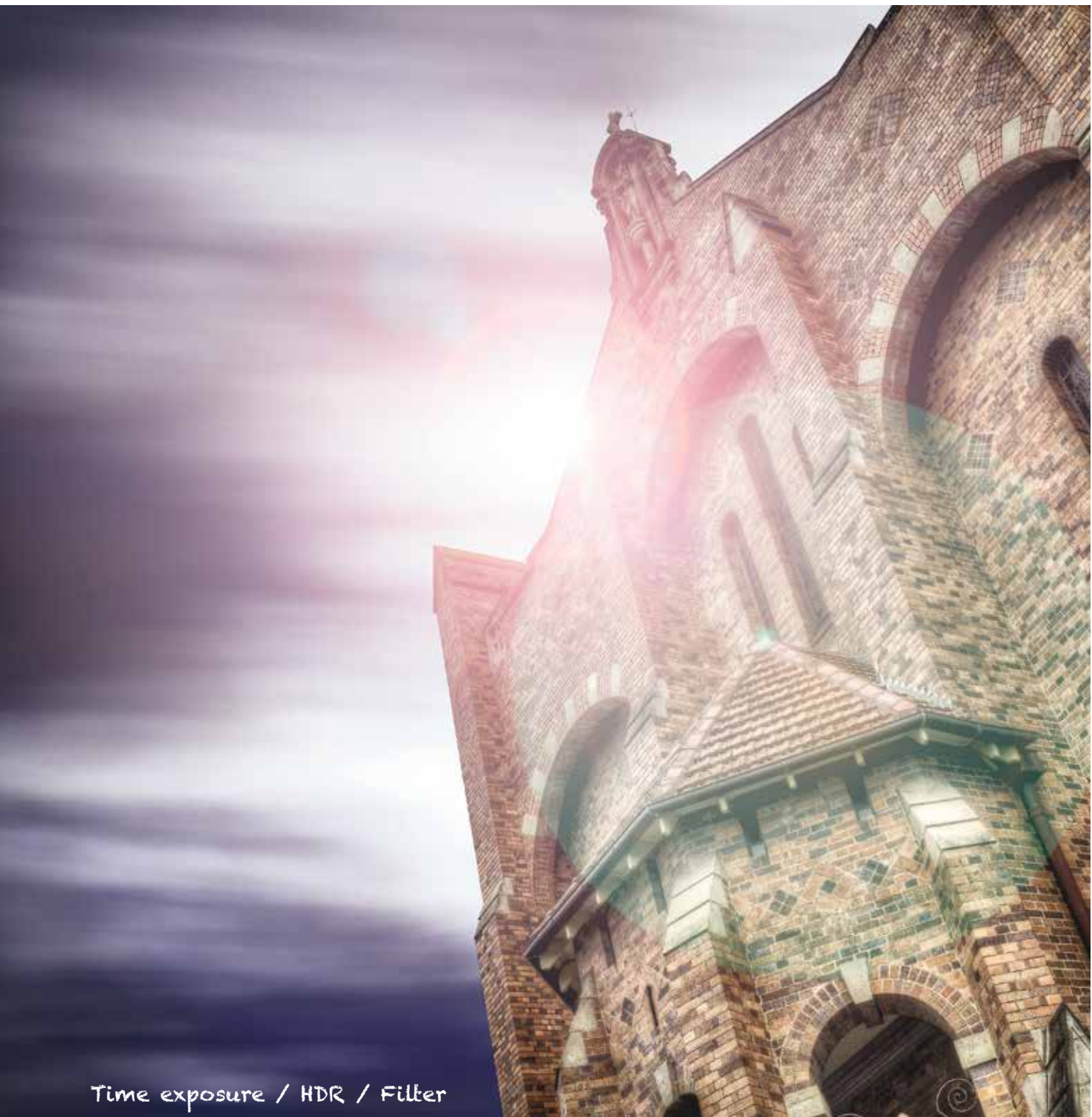
Time exposure / HDR / Filter

93-105

HDR

Use of this colour space is the best way to significantly change colours in a believable way.

It opens doors to image manipulation that simply cannot be achieved in RGB or CMYK.

I then go on to cover the aforementioned Infrared, HDR and Focus Stacking, plus effective texture overlays, time exposure, low light and night sky photography and a whole chapter of miscellaneous tips and ideas, which can help to add that final finishing touch.

And never fear, I won't be simply applying tiresome filters to mediocre pictures and calling them art - my suggestions go much deeper than that.

This is another reason that experience and a good, basic understanding of image processing in Photoshop is required.

I Won't Be Holding Your Hand...

I won't be explaining how to navigate the program or shortcuts to use for each command.

On the rare occasion that I do refer to shortcuts, they will be of the Mac variety; I'm sure PC users can figure out the equivalent by now!

Many books on Photoshop that I have read have driven me crazy with tedious explanations of every single step, each time giving shortcuts for both PC and Mac.

I often feel I could condense the useful information from the whole book into a couple of chapters.

Therefore, if you're anything like me, you'll be relieved to know that I will waste neither my time nor yours on such dross and instead explain directly and concisely how to achieve

each of the methods and then it's up to you to apply them yourself, with settings and preferences that are most appropriate for your style of work.

Don't expect one unified system here either.

This is essentially a compilation of methods, geared toward creative imaging, which can be used alone or in combination.

The key is to be experienced enough to know which method or methods to use alone or in combination on a given image, to end up with something great.

Each combination takes the result away from an identifiable technique and into the realm of the truly unique.

Extending Ourselves

I have always been passionate about my photographs and I don't want to be a One Trick Pony, simply hitting on a good method and then sticking to doing only that in every situation.

I am constantly trying new variations and tackling new ways of doing things.

I like to think that I can produce images in many varied styles, with different moods to suit different tastes and requirements.

Most of us don't have the opportunity to globetrot, to capture great images of African wildlife, the Aurora over the peaks of Iceland or the grand, historic architecture of Europe.

This doesn't mean that the pictures you do have the opportunity to take can't be just as bold and eye-catching and even more artistic and creative.

The image subject isn't the only consideration.

Lets' face it, these days every kid and his dog from every part of the world have digital cameras, access to some form of image processing and an internet connection.

Even cheap cameras can turn out a pretty reasonable snap and everyone with more than a point-and-shoot considers himself a photographer.

Check **www.500px.com** to see how many pictures are added *every minute* of the day.

Granted, most are not professional quality but the majority are pretty reasonable and most people without a professional eye would find them perfectly acceptable.

It's getting harder and harder to stand out from the crowd, so it's in your interest, if you have a creative passion like mine and want your work noticed, for you to separate your images from all the background noise.

I wrote this book because in my experience, much of the information and methods described are either difficult to find or virtually non-existent elsewhere.

Whether you find just a few ideas in this book that you want to run with, or like me, you want to explore everything and enlarge on the ideas yourself, is entirely up to you.

You may discover that some or even all of my humble offerings will take your work to a level you've always wanted to reach, far exceeding the plethora of work out there and making images you'll be truly proud of.

There are examples of my work scattered through the book to whet your appetite and give you inspiration!

In this introduction and the first two chapters, I have noted on full-page images the methods used in their production that relate to later chapters of the book.

The image opposite for example, was photographed using the focus stacking method discussed in chapter six and later had Photoshop's Lens Flare filter, which is covered in chapter nine, added to give a final finishing touch.

In subsequent chapters, the examples are those of the current topic and therefore need no label.

I have also included at the end of each chapter, a detailed explanation of the process of creating one particular image.

The first is over the page.

I hope they will be informative, to assist you in properly understanding the methods discussed.

Dive in and enjoy!

Focus Stack / Filter

The Making of....
Taking Flight

I thought it appropriate to make the first of these little procedural examples, the picture that I used for the cover of this book.

It began simply as an image of a floodlit tree at night, not far from where I live.

The stark branches and leaves looked striking against the black sky, giving an impression that was very different from what a daytime capture would.

The first issue was the artificial lighting, which was strongly yellow and so the raw image needed some serious neutralising! (Original below and corrected above.)

It was one of those images that I knew had potential but needed something special to give it the impact it deserved.
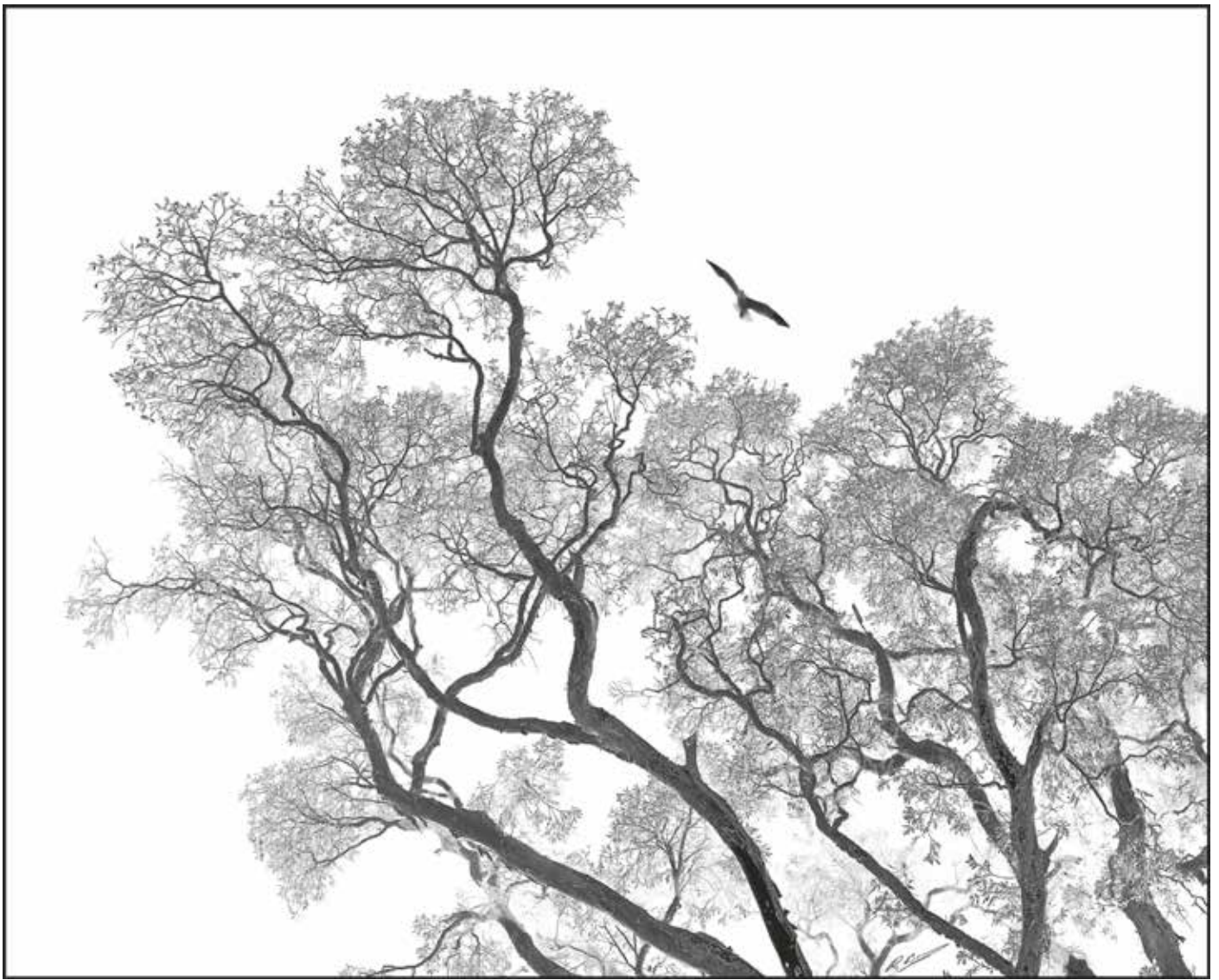
I fiddled around with the colour and contrast for a long time but couldn't find the secret ingredient.

Texture didn't help and nor did anything else I could come up with.

I tried it in mono and then somehow I hit on the idea of inverting it, which was when the magic happened.

Having taken it as a night photo, I liked the dark sky and so initially had no thought of changing it, but when I did, I knew it was finally right.

Then, it just needed something for a focal point, so I took a separate image I had of a bird in flight and added it to the scene.

It's a good example of not always needing to do too much to arrive at a great result.

In the end, it didn't need a lot of monkeying around with colours or effects, just a simple invert and a little added point of interest.

From such unremarkable beginnings and relatively simple processing, it became my current "signature" image and my choice for the cover of this book.