



TECHBYTER WORLDWIDE

Speak softly and carry a large megaphone.

Tiffen's digital filters can turn an OK image into a WOW image

If you're a photographer who's been involved with cameras as a hobby or professionally for long enough, the name "Tiffen" will be one that you know. Tiffen has manufactured filters for cameras, from the ubiquitous "skylight" and UV filters to warming and cooling filters, filters to balance tungsten film to daylight or daylight film to tungsten, polarizing filters, fog filters, star filters, and that's just scratching the surface (which is something you should never do with filters.) With the advent of digital photography, some of the filters (warming, cooling, and color matching) are no longer necessary. Those settings can be controlled in the camera or in Photoshop or other applications if you start with a raw image. What's a company like Tiffen to do? They've developed a \$100 application that takes the place of several thousand dollars worth of glass filters and does things no glass filter ever could do.

The hammer syndrome

When you have a new hammer, everything tends to look like a nail. It's important to use any tool such as Tiffen Dfx with care. When you need the filter to make a particular statement with an image, use it. But don't use it indiscriminately.

Although Tiffen Dfx can open raw images from most cameras, you won't be able to see a preview unless you use some other program in conjunction with Dfx. Opening a file simply calls the Windows Explorer and that application can't show thumbnails of raw files. If you shoot jpg images, you can have Explorer show thumbnails. Another shortcoming involves how to pass the results of Tiffen Dfx on to another application. Files may be saved in only two formats: JPG and TIFF, not the raw format, PSD, or DNG. With luck, those options will be available in a future release. The only viable option, if you plan to do additional processing is TIFF. That limitation applies to the standalone product. For \$300, you can purchase a version that acts as a plug-in with Photoshop and Aperture or \$600 if you want a version that works with After Effects or Avid. Amateur photographers will probably choose the standalone version, but professionals will appreciate the time savings they'll realize by having the filters available inside Photoshop.

The actual images that I include as part of this article are large. I have converted them from TIFF (where they're 30 to 50 megabytes) to JPG, but the size and quality are sufficient for you to judge the overall quality of the filter. That means the file sizes are large. If you're on dial-up, I'm sorry about that.

Going beyond filters

Click any of the smaller images for a full-size view.



One of the Tiffen glass filters that I love to use is a polarizing filter because, depending on the angle of the sun and the direction I point the camera, a polarizing filter can turn a wimpy light-blue sky to a beautiful dark blue that more accurately represents what your eyes saw. I expected not to be very impressed with the Dfx "polarizing" filter,



applied after the fact. I was wrong.

At left above is the original image. At right above, I've applied the polarizing filter and the sky is much improved.



See the full-size polarized image at the left. But these digital filters do things that glass filters could never do. At the right is a modified polarizing image that might create the view you'd see on another planet.



Creating the kind of image at the right would be extremely difficult in a film-and-darkroom setting. In a digital age, this kind of trick is quick and easy.



At the left is an image that I took at last year's Via Colori. It's an OK image of an artist, but I thought that a somewhat desaturated, airy view might be better. And the image should also be cropped a bit to eliminate the extraneous feet.



The result is the image at the right.

The desaturation and fog effects are subtle, but I like the result of using them.



I am owned by an orange cat. That's him at the left. This view also shows the input screen that Dfx provides for raw images. At this point, I can modify the color balance, the tint, the exposure, and the black level.



The orange cat, Tangerine, is actually more orange than he looks in the image at the left, so I selected Special Effects, Enhancing, and the Enhancing Red 5 preset.



In addition to the presets, Tiffen Dfx allows the user to specify settings.



So I can create an image that represents my very orange cat as a very orange cat. The image is more accurate than the one the camera recorded.



Hollywood producers sometimes need night scenes, but trying to photograph any scene at night is between difficult and impossible. Instead, cinematographers have developed techniques that allow them to shoot during the day, modify the exposure and the color balance, and make the image appear to have been shot at night.

That's what I wanted to do with the image of a flamingo that I took at the Columbus Zoo. The image was created inside a building, during the day, and with supplemental flash to fill in the shadowed areas. The Tiffen "Day for Night" filter produced the kind of image that would easily pass for a night view of the flamingo.



Bottom Line: Tiffen understands photography, so Dfx is a tool that every professional will need and every amateur will want.

If Dfx could preview raw images and save intermediate images as DNG or PSD files instead of TIFF images, it would earn 5 cats. Even so, Dfx packs a lot of power into a package that can cost as little as \$100.

For more information, visit the [Tiffen Dfx website @ tiffen.com](http://www.tiffen.com)

