

## Tiffen Dfx Hand-On Report

"It's the instantly accessible digital equivalent of a case of glass filters—and a lot more besides!"

By Mark Kalan

Like the fresh air and daylight that wafts around the darkroom door when you push it open, the Tiffen Dfx program awakens the senses and enhances creativity.

As with most programs, when I first began using Dfx I expected to spend hours playing "Dungeons and Dragons" with the menus trying to find the route to the necessary command (while somewhere in cyberspace a software engineer was laughing at me). I was relieved to find that this was not the case.

Starting with the drop down menus and on to the most sophisticated parameter adjustments the Tiffen Dfx program follows an intuitive pattern and the documentation offers simple explanations of each effect.

The drop-down menus offer File, Edit, Image, View and Help which all do exactly as the names imply. The View quickly became my favorite because it changed window arrangement to suit the task I was involved in. Even better, one click and I was back at the default arrangement!

Speaking of the windows, there are four in the program: Effects, Presets/Parameters, Filters and the main image window. The Filters window runs along the bottom and offers the type and style of filtration. Click on the header and the options appear below, click on a style and the presets appear on the right. On the left is the effects window, which gives you a constant before and after comparison.

Most of the filtration offered in the Dfx system is will seem pretty standard to most still photographers, like graduated neutral density for darkening skies or foregrounds and color correction but it doesn't end there. Tiffen has included a gamut of gels that would make a theatrical or motion picture lighting director swoon and grips grab their union cards. These virtual effects carry the same trademarked brand names as their actual cousins. While similar color correction can be applied with Photoshop, Tiffen offers presets that you can experiment with a mouse click or two, all the time viewing both versions in the effects window.

Also there are some real gems hidden among these effects. One is in the Light set. Silver and Gold reflectors are a mouse click away and those deep shadows are rescued.

Glimmerglass and Halo makes wrinkles on your Aunt Esmeralda disappear faster than a Botox injection and longer lasting. The Film Lab menu offers choice of film looks that add the mood and texture of analog photography plus some experimental processing looks like bleach bypass, cross processing and flashing—effects some former wet process photographers may remember and love, now in a predictable and repeatable process. Best of all, I can finally make a true sepia tone image, something I've never been able to do in Photoshop.

I found the Faux Film selection to be the Holy Grail that rescues the flat tone line of digital sensors to more of a curve like real film.



**Before Image**



**After Image Using Tiffen Dfx Software  
with Antique Plus Fog**

If you're a wedding photographer the Tiffen Dfx is nothing short of magic. With the click of a mouse you can add special lighting effects. Let's say you've got that killer shot of the couple coming down the aisle. Your lighting is good, perhaps even excellent, but run it through the Dfx program and you can add a gobo that looks like the light is falling from a large bay window (or other sources). Another click of the mouse and you've got your choice of ethereal glows.

Dfx also offers the ability to make masks and paths to selectively apply effects. The path and masking tools are accessed with one click and the automatic selection is extraordinary. After creating the mask to can pick the foreground and background with a small slash line-then with a click you can create a new depth-of-field effect.

I found the graduated ND filters my hands-down favorites and had to stop myself from applying them to every scenic image I own. The added beauty of Dfx is the ability to drag the effect to the section of the image that needs it. This goes for graduated tone filtration as well.

Color and exposure correction aside, another great feature is rotate command. At the click of a mouse you can rotate the image a single degree in either direction. Perfect for aligning horizon lines like horizons or buildings. Add that

to the crop tool and I start to wonder why I need Photoshop at all. Should you need to apply the same effect to large numbers of files there's batch processing.

Every time I pick up a camera I'm faced with decisions about lighting, composition, filtration and exposure to name a few. Each of these factors proves to be a catalyst for yet another decision to include in the creative process. Sometimes (though it's hard to admit) I make mistakes or miss some creative option. The accepted wisdom, after a century of cumulative photographic experience, is to shoot the image correctly and the photograph will be fine. These days with the relative ease of computer image processing I'm occasionally tempted to leave problems for "post-production" as the movie people have called it for years. Consciously planning to fix problems in "post" is never a good idea. Which is why I still carry an assortment of lenses, optical filters, lighting gear, gels and the like. Yet sometimes I can't carry the entire DSLR kit, sometimes I'm just wandering off with a high end point-and-shoot in my pocket. While adapters and filters are available for use with point-and-shoot digital cameras, carrying them would negate the advantages of these photo-techno micro marvels. This is where the Tiffen Dfx software becomes a perfect solution.

Simply put Tiffen's Digital Dfx Filter Suite is ***the digital equivalent of a case of glass filters, gels, adaptors, cases of custom lighting and grip equipment, and an experienced photo assistant/lighting director to lug them around for you.***

To paraphrase some early advice offered to me about image processing, when you get the Tiffen Dfx program installed and open an image, "play with it until you've got what you like." I've only touched on a portion of the marvelous effects that Tiffen's software engineers have culled together and I look forward to further exploration and I encourage all digital photographers to join me. I guarantee it will be fun.

A note on the author:

Mark Kalan, based in Valley Cottage, New York has been a professional photographer/editor/writer/ for over 30 years. A graduate of the renowned Brooks Institute of Photography in Santa Barbara CA he was an assistant to such acclaimed photographers as Pete Turner, Ernst Haas, Jay Maisel, Art Kane, and Klaus Lucka. His list of word-class clients includes Woman's World Magazine, Conde-Nast, Bertlesman Group, and TAM Communications. Kalan also published and edited City Cycle, a highly regarded magazine aimed at urban motorcyclists, from 1994-2005

To see more of Mark Kalan's work including still images,  
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