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Taking and Editing Photos for the Internet

by Vicki Welsh

How I photograph small wall quilts

I do not profess to know the BEST methods for photographing quilts. This is just the method that I have developed that works for me.

In this tutorial I will show you how I photograph and edit photographs of my small quilts. These instructions also apply for large quilts, except that I have a hanging system in my basement that I use for those. But the tools and methods are otherwise identical.



For this example I am using a piece of artwork made by Terri Stegmiller. It is approximately 16" x 20".

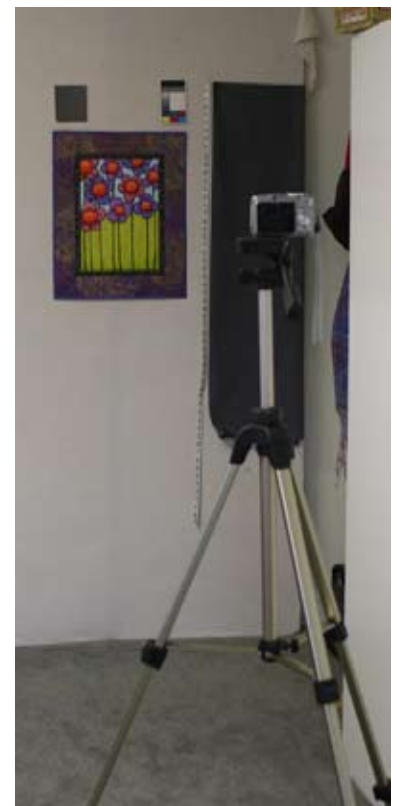
I pin the quilt to my design wall through the hanging sleeve so that the pins are not visible.

The most critical part of my set up, in my opinion, is the use of gray value in the photo. I use one of three things:

- Left, above the art—a Color-Aid card in Gray #4 (medium gray)
- Right, above the art—Photographer's color card, or
- A piece of medium gray fabric. This is Kona solid medium gray and it's the perfect value of gray.

Sometimes I use the gray fabric as my background. The point of the gray is that your camera is looking for gray in your photo. That's why some of your more monochromatic photos never seem to come out quite right. The gray card or gray fabric gives your camera something to adjust color to and you don't need to deal with the white balance setting.

I always use a tripod to take my photos. It makes a big difference in the sharpness of the photo. If you don't have a tripod, try to position your art so that you can set the camera on a shelf, stack of books or other stable surface.



Set your camera to NO FLASH. Flash washes out the photo. By using the gray card you will be able to adjust the light in the photo editing software.

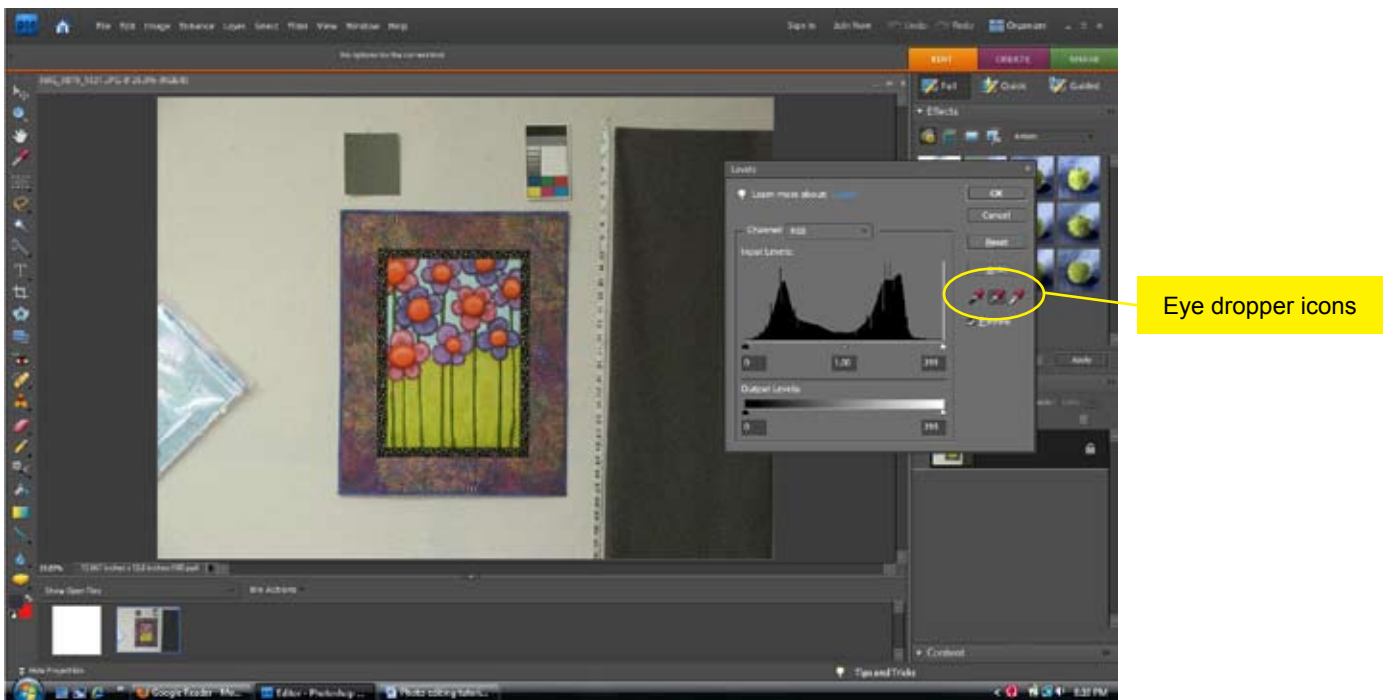
Take the photo making sure that the gray card is also within the photo frame. Here's what my raw photo looks like.

Now it's time to edit. Download the photo to your computer and open the file in your editor. For this tutorial I am using Photoshop Elements 7. You will have similar functions in your software but it may require different controls.

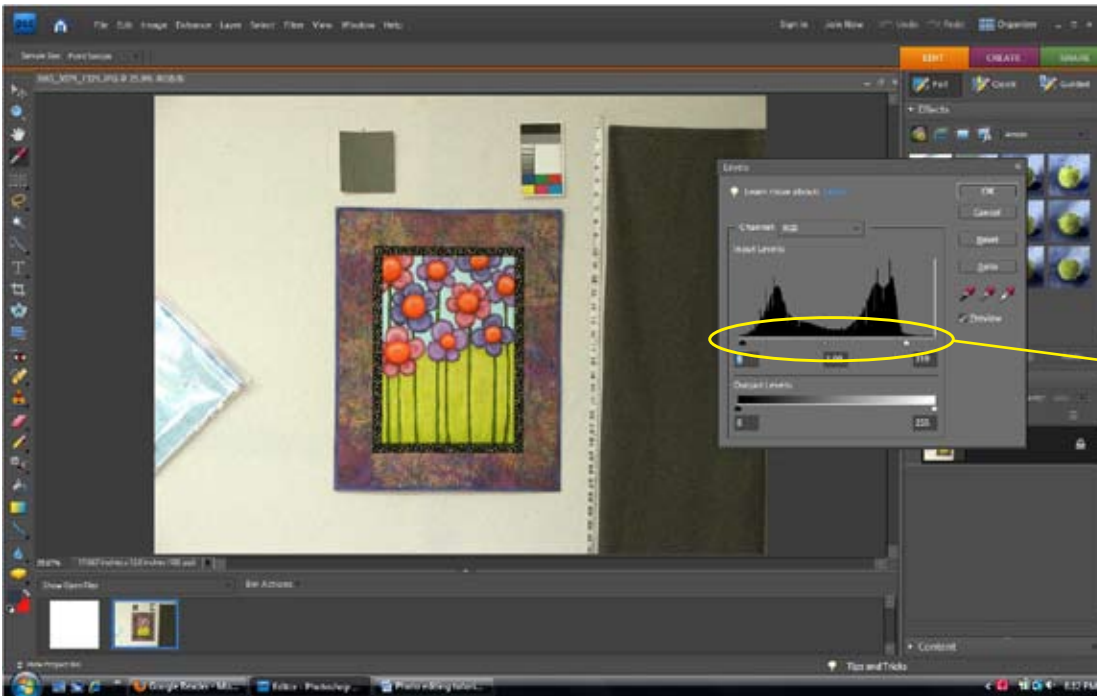
NOTE: It is good practice to save the original photo that you have downloaded from your camera and label it as the original. Don't make changes to this file. Once you edit a photo file and change it to a smaller size for the Internet, it will not be a good photo file for other uses such as printing in a book or art show entry submissions. Always make changes to a copy of the original file.



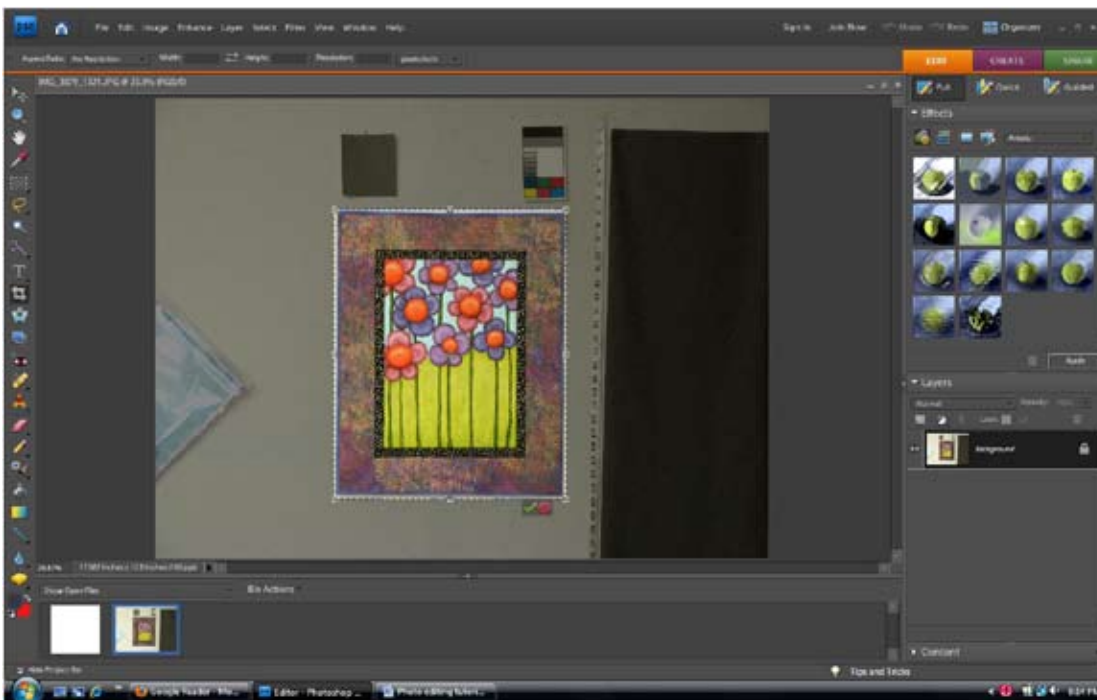
The first thing I do is correct color. From the menu bar select: Enhance>Adjust Lighting>Levels



The Levels dialogue box opens and there will be three eye dropper icons. The left dropper is colored black, the middle one is gray and the right one is white. Select the gray dropper and then click somewhere on your gray card. You can see the adjustments in the histogram in the Levels box. This adjusts the color in your photo.

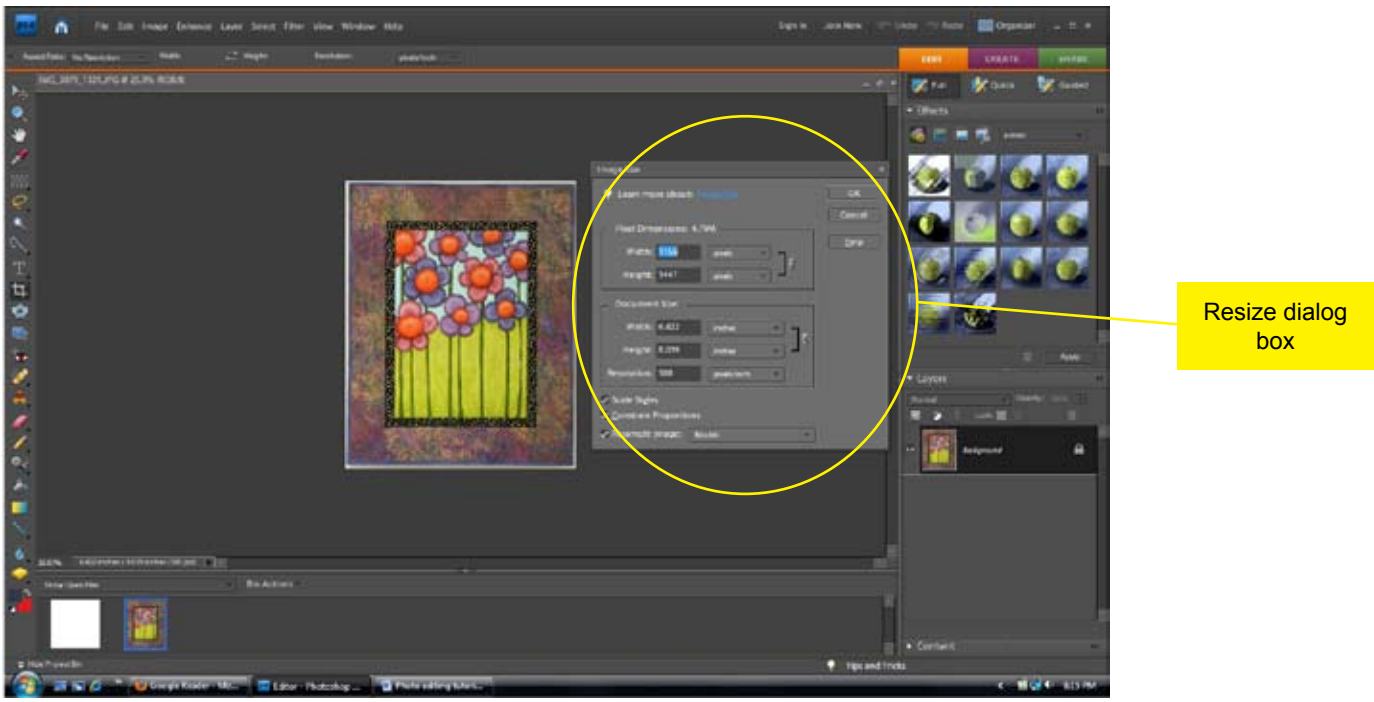


Notice that under the histogram there is a black arrow on the left and a white arrow on the right. Slide these arrows so that they are within the shaded part of the histogram. This will adjust the light in the photo. Press OK to close the Levels dialogue box.

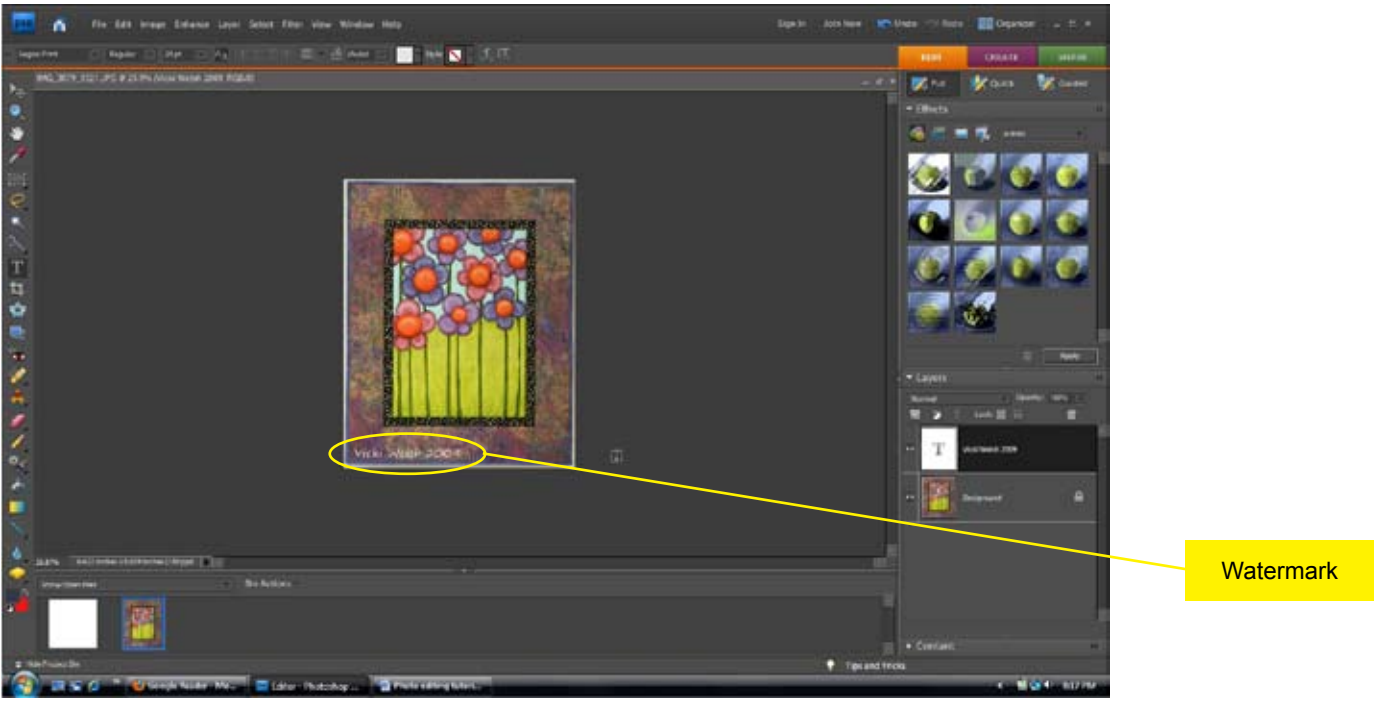


Now that you are finished adjusting the color and light you can crop the photo. I crop mine with a small background margin. The crop tool can be moved on an angle at the corners so that you can straighten your image.

At this point I resize my photos. From the menu bar select: Image>Resize>Image Size



The Resize dialog box will open. If I am saving the photo for my own use, I leave the photo as large as possible. For web publication I adjust the size so that the maximum width is 500 pixels for my blog publication and 1200 pixels for photos for my Etsy shop. If you are concerned about people copying your photos, you may want to use a maximum of 300 pixels.



If I am publishing the photo to the web, I add a watermark of sorts with a text block in the lower left corner. Some software has a watermark feature.

Save the file and you are ready to publish your artwork.