How Do We Make Big Prints?

By Reed Hoffmann/Blue Pixel

All of the large mounted prints were done on an Epson 7600 Stylus Photo Pro using Ultrachrome Inks. Most prints are on Premium Semimatte, although a couple are on Luster (semi-gloss but with more of a textured surface) and Enhanced Matte.

1 – The image must be tack sharp with no camera movement, and low ISO images work much better than high ISO. Exposure needs to be right on, or a bit under. It's important to remember that when you grow a picture to large sizes, the bad grows along with the good. If there are any areas of overexposure, where there's no detail, that will become even more apparent. Same with any blur or missed focus.

2 – Open original image (not a file compressed for delivery), check ISO. If the ISO is above the camera's base setting (lowest available), noise reduction was applied either through Nikon Capture on a NEF file or with Noise Ninja (www.picturecode.com).

3 – In Photoshop, go to View – Proof Setup – Custom, and choose the paper profile you'll be printing to. Choose Relative Colorimetric, Black Point Compensation and Simulate Paper Color ("Paper White" in CS) so you can see the image as it will print. Make tonal and color adjustments in 16-bit if possible, using Adjustment Layers in Photoshop CS.

4 – Resize to your chosen output size. In this case, the images were resampled up to 32-inches on their longest dimension. Most of these were done with Photoshop CS2's built-in Bicubic Smoother interpolation, though I sometimes use pxl SmartScale or Genuine Fractals. For extremely large prints like these, I resample at a high number, 360 PPI.

5 – Sharpen – The last step is always to sharpen the image for printing. I tend to sharpen a big print more, as I'm creating a lot of fake pixels when resampling large, which tends to soften an image. I prefer using nik Sharpener for this, as it automates the process of figuring out how much sharpening to apply based on resolution and detail, and let me selectively sharpen. That means I can choose to sharpen only that which is important to me, and avoid sharpening areas such as shadows and sky.

6 – I always choose Print With Preview when sending to the printer, then first check Page Setup to make sure I have the right printer and paper size chosen. Then in the Print dialog, under Color Management, I choose:

Print
- Document

Options
- Color Handling – Let Photoshop Determine Colors
- Printer Profile – Printer Profile for paper and printer I'm using
  - Rendering Intent – normally I choose Relative Colorimetric, with Black Point Compensation.

6 – Lastly, I make sure the correct Printer is chosen in the Print dialog, the go to:

Print Settings
- Media Type – the paper I'm using
- Ink – Color/B&W Photo
- Mode – Advanced – 729 DPI
- High Speed ON

Color Management
- No Color Adjustment – since I'm running color management in Photoshop, I don't want the printer to also try to color manage the image.

That’s it! One reason we use Epson printers is that they make beautiful prints for us without a lot of extra work.