Elements, a digital camera and YOU!

Your potential for really good photographs is better than you think it is. Trust me here; I know what I'm talking about.

I know this to be true, because we have three ingredients in place;

- a digital camera
- Adobe Photoshop Elements
- Your desire to learn how to take good photos

We can't focus on one of these ingredients alone; the three work ***together*** to create good photography.

It is a waste of your time to learn Photoshop Elements without understanding your camera. And no matter how good a photo you can take with your camera, with Photoshop Elements you can make it better.

To learn one to the neglect of the other is like learning to play the piano with one hand. No matter how good you get with that one hand... the really beautiful music comes from playing both hands in harmony with each other.

What I want you to do right now is to ***stop*** thinking of Photoshop Elements, your digital camera and your desire for good photos as separate entities. These three are all part of the ***same whole,*** They are all three interrelated and integrated to produce the same end.

This book will help you learn Adobe Photoshop Elements, your digital camera and most important of all....how to get the photography you want of the things that are important to you.

Not trying to play to narcissistic self-absorbed types, but this YOU factor is important in photography. Most photography books and classes don't mention this, but I think they should.

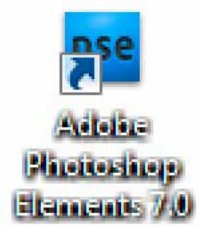
The equation for photography is:

CAMERA + ELEMENTS + YOU = GOOD PICTURES

Oddly enough, You are the most important factor. If you know what you want and what you are doing, you can make a good, meaningful photo with a crude, simple camera and not even use Elements. And if the You in this equation is off, don't know what you're doing or wanting for the picture, then a $20,000 camera and all the computer programs in the world can't save your pictures.

So this book will have three types of chapters; those about Photoshop Elements, those about digital cameras and even some about you.

Elements NOW



Start Elements by clicking on the Elements icon on your computer's desktop; it will look like this;

Or, you can click on the Start Button, then All Programs, then on Adobe Photoshop Elements.

Now, Adobe Software Systems would like us to always refer to this program as Adobe Photoshop Elements, but that sure is a mouthful... from here on out let's just call it ***Elements.***

Anyway, when Elements starts, you see a welcome screen that looks like this:

The only thing of interest here is those four buttons at the top: Organize, Edit, Create, Share.

It will help you to think of Elements as two separate programs;

- the ***Organizer*** helps you organize, sort and download your photos
- the ***Editor*** helps you:
  - ***edit*** or fix your photos
  - ***create*** things like books, slide shows, calendars from those photos.
  - ***share*** the photos via e-mail or online or CDs or DVDs.

So.....click on the Organize button and get this show on the road.

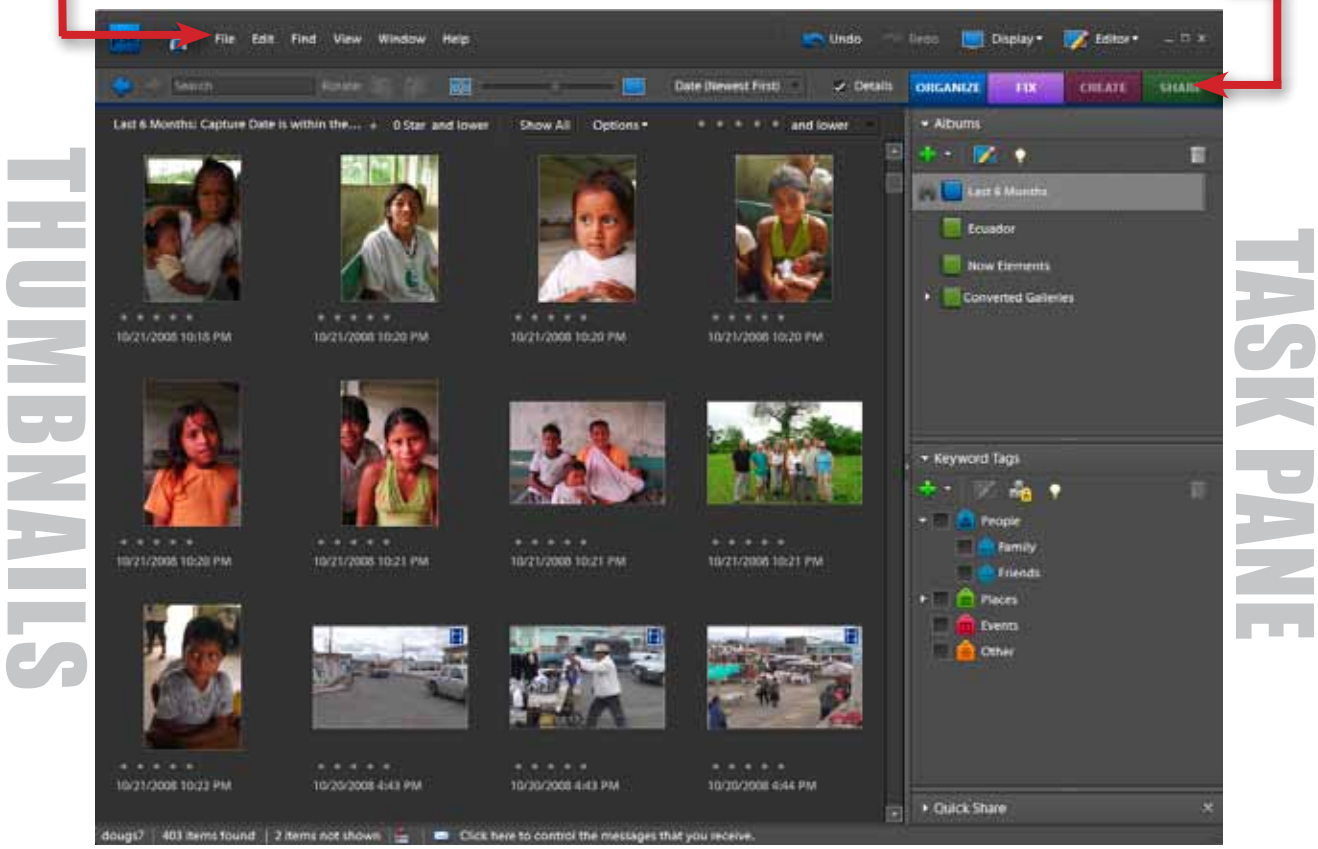
The Organizer

When Elements' Organizer window opens it looks about like the window below. Your's may not have any pictures in it yet, or might look a little different, but don't worry about that right now.

We'll talk about details in a minute, but here I just want to give you an overview of the Organizer.

Along the top is the standard Drop-down Menus common to many programs; *File Edit....Help*.

Just like on the Welcome Screen, we have the four buttons of Organize, Fix, Create and Share.



Most of the Organizer the large area filled with thumbnail-sized versions of your photos.

The right third of the Organizer is the "Task Pane".

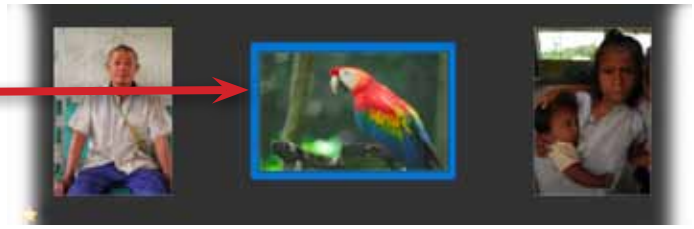
Below the File Edit Find drop-down menu list find the bar you see below. When you have a photo selected you can rotate using these icons.

Use this slider to adjust the size of the thumbnails in the Organizer. At least at this point, leave the Date(Newest First) choice where it is, and leave a check in the Details check box.

You have the scroll bar at the right side of the thumbnails window that let's you scroll down through your photos.

Right now we are just ***looking*** at ***ALL*** the photos. But soon, we will want to do something, like rotate or delete, not to ALL the photos, but to just ONE of them. The computer needs us to tell it which photo we want to do something to by ***selecting*** that photo.

To select an individual photo, just click on the thumbnail. A blue frame appears around that picture indicating that it is selected.



But selecting pictures individually, one at a time, can get old if you have many photos you need to do something to.

You don't have to select photos individually, you can have more than one photo selected at a time.

To see this happen, select one photo by clicking on it. Then hold down the Control Key (CTRL) on your keyboard and click on another photo. You see that both photos have the blue frame around them; both are now selected. Hold down the CTRL key and click on other photos to add them to your selected photos.

If you want to select several photos that are all in an unbroken sequence, click on the first photo to select it. Then hold down the Shift key, and click on the last photo in the sequence. All photos between that first and last click will be selected.

To select all of the photos in the Organizer thumbnail window, click the CTRL key and the A key (ALL).

To select none, or de-select the photos you have selected in the Organizer, click CTRL plus the Shift Key, plus the A key.

The Organizer was created to solve (or at least, help) a problem digital cameras have created. With digital cameras we tend to shoot many, many pictures. And this is good, because more pictures is better, and we aren't paying for film or processing anymore. But keeping track of all these digital pictures, remembering where we put them, finding the one picture we are looking for... that has become our challenge. We gotta get ***organized.***....

Getting Organized: Catalogs, Tags and Albums.

Getting your photos organized and keeping them organized is just darned awfully important to your enjoyment of this digital photography stuff.

As an example, let's say you want to show me pictures of your dog.

But your dog pictures are scattered all over your computer. The pictures are in many different folders on hard drives on your computer. You open this folder, look for dog pictures; Nope, no dog pics in that folder. You open another folder; Nope no dog pics there either. Open another folder and AHA! Here's one. I'm getting bored.

What we need would be a way to "see" all of your photos in one place, at one time, without having to go to all these different folders on these different drives.

And that's one of the prime things the Organizer provides is a place where we can see all of our pictures at one time, in one place. This place is called a ***catalog.*** A catalog does not contain a duplicate copy of your files; it just shows you what they look like. The actual files themselves are still in their original folders. If you delete a photo out of the Catalog, it only deletes the thumbnail from the catalog. The actual photo is still in it's original folder.

So we could use the Organizer in Elements to scroll through the catalog of all your pictures and look at all the dog pictures.

If you only have say, 200 photos this catalog showing us all your pictures is great. But at some point, as you keep shooting and adding pictures, you catalog will become ***so*** big that it's unmanageable. At this point, we no longer want to see ***all*** of the photos at one time. Now we need a way to display ***some*** of the photos, while ***hiding*** others.

We need to display the dog photos and hide all the non-dog photos in your catalog. This is where ***tags*** come in.

With tags we could create a new tag labelled "DOG" (a dog tag! ha ha!). We could then tag all the photos with dogs in them with the Dog tag, then tell the Organizer to only display photos bearing the Dog tag. With only the Dog-tagged photos displayed, it should be much easier to find this elusive dog photo.

But let's go further. Let's say you have more than one dog; maybe you have a poodle, a chow and a lab.

So under the DOG tag, you could make three "sub-tags" one for poodles, one for labs and one for chows.

You would apply the Dog tag to all the dog photos and the sub tags to the individual breeds. Thus, by selecting which tags to display you could display all the dogs or just one particular breed.

Let's take this a little further. Let's say you want to group several of these different dog photos together. You could put these photos together in an ***Album.***

An album does not duplicate the image files, it just virtually groups them together where they can be seen at the same time. Thus, one photo could be in several albums, but that photo is still just one file on your computer. For instance (I'm struggling with this example so bear with me) you could organize your dog photos so a single photo of the Chow dog as a puppy could appear in the Chow album. the Cute Puppies album and the Dog Show album.

When you downloaded your pictures into Elements, the program put them into folders on your computer's hard drive. That's really where the data that makes up the photo resides. But Elements also "sees" your photos as being in your "catalog". By looking at your catalog, you can see all your photos, without having to actually go and access the particular folder in a particular hard drive.

HOW TO COMPOSE A PHOTO

What I am about to tell you is obvious. Yet most people ignore the obvious and that is why there are so many BORING pictures. Read and apply the following obvious advice and watch your photos improve dramatically.

Match your photo's composition to the subject's composition. What I mean is shoot ***vertical subjects vertically*** and ***horizontal subjects horizontally.***

Pictured here is the most common mistake in photography. This is a **horizontal** image of a **vertical** subject.

Put your finger over the area to the left of the person. Did you lose anything; no, just a blank empty area.

Put your finger over the area to the right of the person; lose anything?
Nope again; just blank empty space.

If an image is a visual communication,

- what does the left side of the image communicate? NOTHING.
- what does the right side of the image communicate? NOTHING.

Two thirds of this image is ***wasted space*** telling us nothing of the subject.

It's true that in Elements you can always crop down to what you want, then enlarge what's left of the image to fill the size or space you need. But to do that, in this case, you will ***throw out*** 2/3 of the image's resolution. If you shot this on a 6 meg digital camera, you now have the image resolution of a cheap-O 2 meg camera.

By simply turning a camera on it's side, you have created a vertical image of a vertical subject. Think about it a minute, an individual person is a vertical subject. A person's face is a vertical subject. These will almost always shoot better, compose better as verticals.

Having said that, this next photo is an example of the second most common mistake in photography.

By simply turning the camera on it's side, we now have a vertical shot of a vertical subject, which is certainly a better use of our image space than before, But this still isn't very good.

Notice that the top half of the image has nothing in it of interest. The photographer has put the main point of interest (a person's face) exactly in the center of the frame. As a result almost the top half of the image is empty.
And even worse, the person's feet are cut off.

What has happened is the person, trying to be a good photographer has put the auto focus sensors (which are in the center of the viewfinder) exactly on what they want most of all to be in focus, the person's face.

That was a good first step, but they needed to go ahead and take the second step of recomposing after focusing to exactly what they want in the photo.

It's simple to crop out all that wasted space, but how do we replace the feet?

Now look at this photo. Again, we have a vertical shot of a vertical subject. Okay, so it's not going to win the Pulitzer Prize, but notice how much better it is than the first two photos we looked at.

We have all of the person, nothing is cut off. No image space is wasted. We have just the right amount of space around the person; not too much, not too little.

Many photographers don't know what they want to say. So they end up including more in the image than they want.

Crop to eliminate everything…except exactly what you need. Where an image is cropped is an artistic choice, and the difference can make or break an image. Rather than just cropping undesirable stuff "out," refocus your thinking to cropping desirable "in."

A photographer may crop out all the sky, most of the ground, and everything else he can see to only end up with ***exactly*** what he wants in his picture. Not one thing more, not one thing less.

A good photographer doesn't look at his image and say, "Whoa! Where did that tree come from? I never saw that when I was looking through the viewfinder. I guess I just didn't notice it".

A good photographer will notice ***every little thing*** in the viewfinder and will move in closer or move to a different angle until he doesn't have ***anything in the image he doesn't want*** in the image.

It's true you can "re-compose" an image after you have shot it using Elements, but there is only so much you can do with that. Elements is not an excuse for a poorly composed photograph. It is always better to compose your image well in the camera.

Make the most of your image space. Turn that camera on it's side so the image in your viewfinder is vertical instead of horizontal, then zoom in or better yet, just get closer to your subject. ***Fill*** that viewfinder with your subject. ***Eliminate everything*** that doesn't add to your composition.

Full Editing

When Elements opens the Editor workspace things look like this. This is the “full” version of what we started in the Quick Fix workspaces. Most of this you are already familiar with, but as a refresher, or, if you are skipping ahead to this point and don’t know this is what we’ve got.

Along the top....
to the left we see Drop Down menus like we are used to from the Organizer. They aren’t exactly the same, and we have several new ones, but more on that later.
to the right we see the important REDO, UNDO and a button to take us back to the Organizer..

On the right side of the screen is the big Task Pane.

Along the bottom we have the Project Bin, which shows thumbnails of all the open images or projects.

I personally would rather have more screen space available for the photo I’m working on than a constant reminder of all the photos I have open. So I click on the gray down ▼ in the middle of the Project Bin to hide it. Anytime you want the Project Bin open, just click the gray up ▲ .

In the upper left side the **Tool Box.**
Across the top, the **Options Bar,** just below the Drop Down menus.

Don’t’ forget that the Tool Box and Options Bar work together. From the Tool Box we ***choose*** the tool then From the Options bar we ***adjust*** the tool.

We might choose the Paint Brush from the Tool Box then from the Options Bar we could adjust the size and shape of the Paint Brush, the opacity with which it paints, and several other options.

To select a tool, just click on it’s icon in the Tool Box. The tool you selected, stays selected until you select another tool. The selected tool appears indented or shaded in the tool box.

The Toolbox

We will discuss individual tools soon, right now I want to give you an overview of the toolbox.
I know at first this looks like a random assembly of little cartoon objects, but If you look closely you will see a darker gray line separating the tools into groups. Loosely speaking the groups are;

Navigating tools
For navigating and zooming in or out on your work.

Selecting tools
We talked about selecting back on page 58.

Type Tool;

Cropping tools
You've already worked with the Crop tool back on page 56.

Retouching Tools
For Red eye, blemishes, etc.

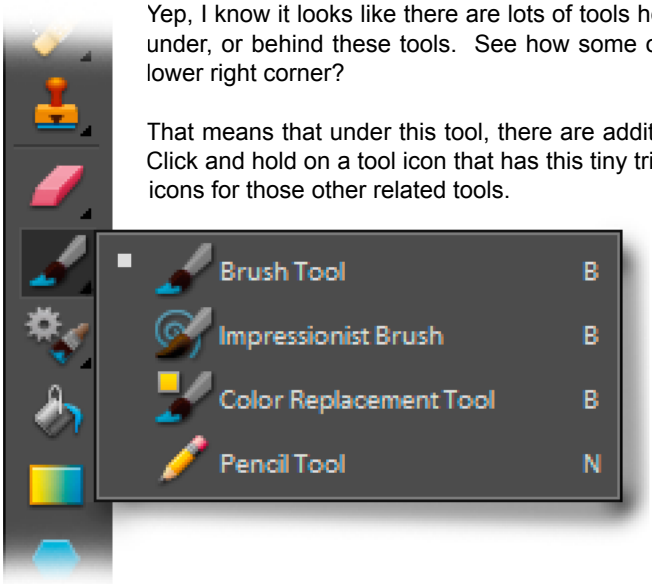
Drawing/Painting Tools

Two More Retouching tools.

Color Boxes; choosing colors.

Yep, I know it looks like there are lots of tools here, but it gets worse; there are even ***more*** tools under, or behind these tools. See how some of the tool icons have a tiny black triangle in the lower right corner?

That means that under this tool, there are additional tools that are related or similar to this one. Click and hold on a tool icon that has this tiny triangle and a pop-out menu will appear displaying icons for those other related tools.



Tools, Brushes and the Options Bar

We're still in an "over-view" phase of looking over this program. Don't worry about a thing; we'll get to specifics and how to use this stuff soon.

You understand about choosing tools from the Tool Bar, and in previous chapters we talked about the Options Bar, that long, horizontal box just below all those drop down menus of FILE, EDIT, etc.

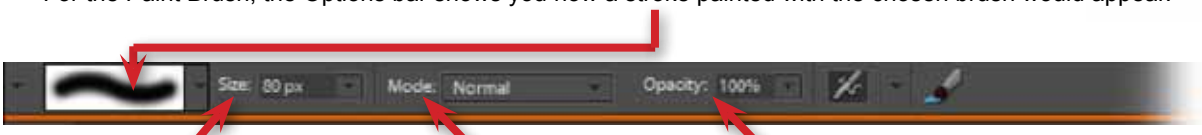
The Tools and the Options Bar work hand-in-glove to do your biding in Elements.

You ***chose your tool*** from the ***Tool box***. You ***adjust your chosen tool*** in the ***Options Bar.***

To see this happen, choose the Paint Brush tool from the Tool Box. The Paint Brush is the one that looks like a paint brush, and is just below the bright pink Eraser tool.

After you have chosen the Paint Brush, look in the Options Bar. The Options bar displays different options depending on which tool you have chosen.

For the Paint Brush, the Options bar shows you how a stroke painted with the chosen brush would appear.



Also the ***size*** of the brush in pixels, the Mode(more on that later) Opacity of the stroke the brush is about to paint, and some other options.

Clicking this little down ▼ here opens the Brushes palette from which other brushes can be chosen.

If you don't find a brush exactly the size you want in the Brushes Palette, from this ▼ you can access this slider to adjust the size of your brush exactly.

Drop Down Menus in the Editor

Of course at the top of the screen, in most programs we've seen this horizontal list of FILE EDIT IMAGE.....WINDOW HELP. And we've seen almost this exact list in the Organizer/ Quick Fix parts of Elements. So you probably already have an idea of what these will hold, but in our overview....

FILE The usual Open/Close/Save/Save as....stuff. Also the commands for Printing and to Exit (close) the program.

EDIT Here are menu choices for Undo and Redo, just like the blue arrow icons, also a section for Cut/ Copy/Paste like you have seen in word processing programs. More stuff.

IMAGE Most of what is in this menu concerns changes made to the whole image, such as rotating it, re sizing it, color modes, etc.

ENHANCE This menu has to do with adjustments to tone and color. It's got many Auto Fix, Auto Color, etc. I didn't like the Auto stuff earlier and I don't like it now. But below this big Auto section we have important sections for adjusting lighting, color, tone, saturation, converting to black and white. Lots of good stuff in this menu.

LAYERS Layers are a real important concept to image editing, so important that it needs it's own drop down menu to deal with it. More on Layer's later.

SELECT We've already discussed the idea of Selecting/Masking (page ____ if you missed that). Here is a menu that lets us Select All/None/or Re-Select. Also commands to adjust the edges of selections we have already selected.
FILTER for lack of a better word, a filter applies a specific change to your image or part of your image, such as blurring or sharpening or rendering or lots of other things. And this menu, is where you get to those changes.

VIEW This menu controls how you "view" the image and your program. From here you can zoom in or out on your image, or display or hide rulers, a grid, and several other helpful features that are helpful but that you don't want out all of the time.