



# True Blue

Create a startling close-up with a ring flash

**IN SEPTEMBER'S** Lighting, "Lovely Light," August Bradley showed how, with about \$17,000 in gear, you can make a stunning beauty portrait.

Here at the opposite end of the cost spectrum, resolutely self-reliant David Becker, 27, used a homemade macro ring flash—and not even a tripod—to make an equally awesome portrait of his own eye.

A graphic designer from Sioux Falls, SD, Becker is crazy about eyes, and his website, [www.photographybydavidbecker.com](http://www.photographybydavidbecker.com), showcases a dozen of them: blue, green, brown, human, animal—each as detailed, mysterious, and beautiful as the image here. "What first got me into eyes was the detail," he says. "Most people don't ever see how detailed they are. In daily life, eyes

**"Some pets' eyes work," says David Becker, "but animals don't hold still long enough, especially after that first shot."**

are rarely lit well enough to reveal the iris' complex interplay of color and shape. Even when the lighting is good, you usually can't get close enough to another person's eye to really examine it."

As Becker suggests, the key to photographing eyes is good lighting. It's not easy because, using a typical macro lens, your subject may be very close its front element. If you're lighting with a shoe-mount



KRIS HOLLAND/MAFIC STUDIOS

## HOW TO LIGHT YOUR OWN EYE

SIMPLE  COMPLEX

David Becker shot the window to his own soul by simply turning his homemade cake-pan ring flash back on himself and taking dozens of shots until he got a keeper. It took about 20 tests to position the circular catchlight exactly within his pupil. His camera? A Sony Alpha 200 (A) with a Tamron AF 90mm f/2.8 Di SP Macro lens (B). The A200's built-in pop-up flash (C) triggered an optical slave in the Sony HLV-F56AM shoe-mount flash (D), which illuminated Becker's ring light (E). (The Sony HLV-F56AM has been discontinued, but its successor, the HVL-F58AM, \$500, street, would work equally well.) He relied on the camera's AF system for focus and made little attempt to frame his eye perfectly. Instead, he shot to include the area around the eye, and later in Adobe Lightroom 2 cropped in and upped contrast, sharpness, and brightness.

### THE GEAR



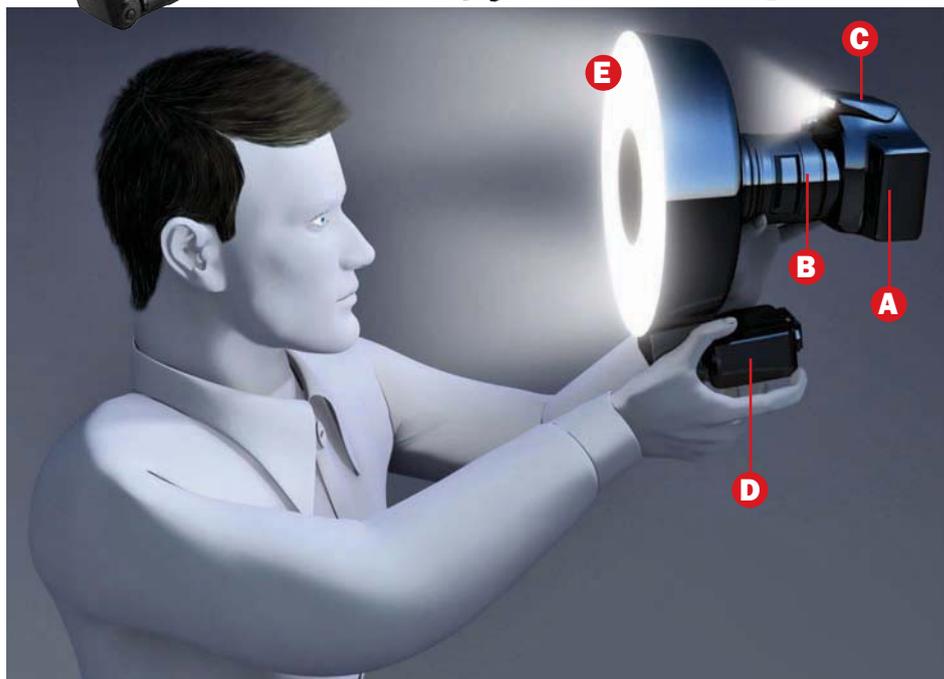
DIY Macro Ring Flash (Less than \$10)



Sony HVL-F56AM flash (discontinued)



Tamron 90mm f/2.8 Di SP AF macro lens (\$460, street)



flash, the lens barrel at such close range may cast a shadow over part or all of the eye.

To overcome this, Becker used a macro ring flash. Mounted around the lens, it produced an even illumination across the eye, with all areas equally bright and shadow-free. Notice how the eyelashes here, although lit directly, cast no visible shadows.

And you can easily make your own. "Constructing my DIY ring flash was quite simple," Becker

**Becker's exposure on the Sony Alpha 200: 1/60 sec at f/13, ISO 200.**

explains. "I found a used angel food cake pan with a hole large enough to accept my lens in the middle. Then, using tin snips, I cut a hole in its side for the flash head to poke through." He lined that hole with duct tape until it fit snugly around the flash, pressed tin foil (reflective side out) along the inside of the cake pan, and finally taped wax paper over the front for diffusion.

Want to try this yourself? Becker suggests photograph-

ing subjects who have clear, unveined eye whites and blue irises, which he says seem to show more detail. For more tips and inspiration, he turns to websites such as the Digital Photography School; DIY Photography offers similar projects.

And, if you own a tripod, let it support the camera while you experiment with your macro self-portraits. Or get a patient friend to model so you can practice.

—Peter Kolonia



**HOW** \* YOU CAN DO IT

# Leaf Show

Find a new  
angle for  
fall foliage

**THE USUAL** approach to photographing fall foliage involves gaudy color and lots of it: yellows, reds, and oranges against saturated blue skies. But Erik Lundh, 54, of Tigard, OR, has a different strategy.

Rather than capturing broad expanses of brightly hued trees, Lundh exploits—and enhances—details, shapes, and contrasts for their visual power. “I do look for color, but also for separation in individual leaves,” he says.

The shapes that a wind-tossed leaf takes on, as well as the patterns that small groups of leaves form can pack a punch. “What attracted me to this scene,” says Lundh, “were the sporadic leaves on an otherwise bare maple.” Not your normal fall foliage shot, right?

Other ideas for breathing new life into this often tired genre:

- Introduce a sense of motion by moving your camera while the shutter is open or using slow shutter speeds to blur falling leaves.
- Capture painterly, detail-free abstract images by throwing colorful shapes completely out of focus.
- In addition to color, compose to exploit depth, unusual vantage points, compelling light, and dynamic lines. Add depth, for example, by letting the background or foreground blur, as Lundh did here.
- Just as you pan with a moving car or cyclist, try panning with falling leaves to suggest gusting autumn winds.

The moral? Don’t passively fill your frame with colorful clichés. Use this striking time of year to explore new and expressive photo techniques.

—Peter Kolonia

## GEAR

Lundh shot this in Oregon’s Columbia River Gorge with an exposure of 1/45 sec at f/9.5, ISO 200. He used a 24–85mm f/3.4–4.5 Zoom-Nikkor (A) on a Nikon D100 (B), and edited in Adobe Photoshop 7 (C). While they’re now unavailable, their successors will do.

## Step 1

**Scout for great locations.** Websites like the Foliage Network ([www.foliagenetwork.com](http://www.foliagenetwork.com)) tell you where the best locations are and when.

## Step 2

**Wait for the right moment.** For a shot like Erik Lundh’s, hold off until the peak of the season has passed, when many trees are ornamented with only a handful of leaves. If sharpness and clarity are important to you, shoot on a day when little or no wind is predicted.

## Step 3

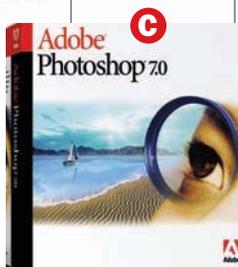
**Gather your gear.** For Lundh, two musts are a polarizing filter and tripod. The polarizer will help you squeeze every bit of color from a scene, and the tripod comes in handy when exposing (see below).

## Step 4

**Dial in the right camera settings.** Conventional wisdom dictates high shutter speeds (1/250 sec or higher) to freeze moving leaves, and a small aperture for maximum depth of field when shooting a tree from below. Lundh, however, dialed in a mid-range aperture, because it’s his lens’ sharpest, and because he wanted a lower ISO to suppress noise. A tripod helped him avoid blur introduced by camera movement.

## Final Step

**Postprocessing.** Tweak color, contrast, and sharpness in an image editor. Using Adobe Photoshop 7, Lundh selected the leaves, then inverted the selection and desaturated the background so his subject’s color didn’t have to compete with a richly saturated blue background.





# Unreal Blur

Sometimes a fake effect is the best kind

**RECENTLY**, reader Rod Sawyer wrote to us for advice: He'd seen commercials and music videos in which a subject is in sharp focus and surrounded by an area of blur, and wanted to know how it could be done. He liked

the effect for the way it makes the subject stand out and for the dramatic illusion of depth.

It's fairly simple to achieve this look, especially if you have Adobe Photoshop, and as long as you choose to work on the

**You can achieve a similar look using a Lensbaby on your camera, but Photoshop is more exact.**

right kind of picture. In order to create the illusion of depth, you need a picture that has a clear foreground, middleground, and background. Try the effect on a flat-looking picture, and the blur will look like an odd Photoshop trick, rather than an almost-realistic one.



Even though this kind of highly selective blur isn't one you could get with an ordinary lens, or even a special tilt-shift lens, sometimes it's fun to use Photoshop to make a kind of picture that would be difficult to make in a camera.

—Debbie Grossman

► **In CS5, you can now add noise to the blur to make it look realistic. If you do so, check the box for monochromatic.**



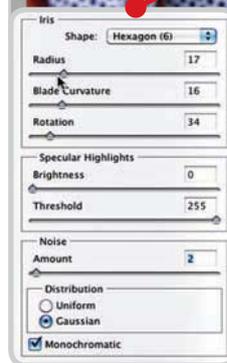
## Step 1

This method for making blur uses two layers: the original, sharp image on the bottom, and another layer on top that you'll blur completely. **To create the layer that you'll add the blur to, duplicate the Background Layer.** Go to Layer > Duplicate Layer and click OK, or just drag the Background Layer down to the New Layer button in your Layers panel.



## Step 2

Now create the blur. With your Background Copy Layer selected, go to Filter > Blur > Lens Blur. **Use the Radius slider to adjust the blur amount, and play with the other sliders until you get a look you like.** The blur should be strong, but not so much that it obscures what's going on in the blurred areas. When you like what you see, click OK.



## HOW \* SOFTWARE WORKSHOP

### Step 3

Now that there's a blurry layer on top of a sharp layer, you can use a mask to reveal a portion of the sharpness. **With the Background copy selected, click the Add Layer Mask button (circled).** The white box that appears next to your layer's thumbnail is your mask—when you click on it and see an extra box around it, it's selected.



### Step 4

Next get the Gradient tool from the toolbar. In the Options bar, you'll see a set of buttons for different types of gradients. The one on the far right (circled) creates a diamond shape perfect for this effect. **Click on it to select it, then draw a horizontal line outward from the center of the area of your picture you want sharp.**



▲ When you draw a diamond gradient, the line you draw represents the diamond's radius; the other three points will be the same distance from the center as the length of your line.



### Final Step

Unless you're lucky, the first gradient you draw probably won't be correct. But when you use the Gradient tool to create a mask, it's easy to replace. **Simply draw a new line for a new gradient.** If there are still areas of sharpness or blur that you want to show or hide, select your mask, grab the brush, and paint with black to reveal sharpness or white to reveal more blur.



## Elements Method

If you use Photoshop Elements, this tutorial won't work for you. Elements lacks layer masks, so you won't be able to make a diamond-shaped blur, plus there's no Lens Blur tool. But you can get a similar effect: Follow the first step. Then, in the second, do a Gaussian blur instead. To choose what will be sharp, get the Elliptical Marquee tool and make it very feathered—at least 50px. Circle the area you want sharp, then hit the Delete key to put a hole in your layer and reveal the sharpness below.

