

# The Art of Texture Blending: Photography Beyond Realism



*Oak Tree*

Bettina & Uwe Steinmueller

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Adding textures to paintings and photographs is as old as these art forms. This article focuses on artistic aspects of Texture Blending, starting with a brief overview.

## **Texture Blending Overview**

With film, photographers created texture blended images by exposing multiple times with different textures and the main images. It could also be done by creating sandwiches of different negatives or blending in camera. Today the process is much easier to control by using Photoshop.

The idea is to blend a picture with one or more textures and let the result become more than the sum of the photos used. For us, Texture Blending is always an exploration process. This is done primarily by utilizing Photoshop's Blending Modes to blend the images. Texture Blending is not a me-

chanical process. Experimentation is key, and we always try to get surprised. You will learn that good textures are as important as your so-called main images. We create new textures all the time by photographing, collecting from the web (always respecting copyrights) and Texture Blending of textures. It is not easy to get textures of a good resolution. Sometimes texture resolution does not matter, but then in other cases it does. Making textures smaller is easy, but you cannot create artificial resolution.

## **Photos and Paintings**

Do we want to create images that look like paintings? We don't really think that way. But in some ways, our images have a certain painterly look. When we work on our images, we think about enhancing their visual impact and not what painters would do. We always think about the mood of the photos.

In most cases, the base image is a very realistic image. It then gets enhanced using abstract patterns (sometime we use simple collages). In the end we may use techniques like painters, but we don't think in terms of painting.

### Some Photography Myths

Photographers are often fixated on sharpness and resolution. Texture Blending will actually often reduce the sharpness and detail. It is all about the mood we want to create. We also do not care much about "correct" colors. First of all, we would need to define what this is (except in the world of pure product photography). Again, the color is a major element to create the mood we like. Dark colors play an important role for us.

We often shoot in light many photographers would avoid and not much at the so-called golden light of the morning or evening. We love early morning light and also some soft overcast. In the end, we create some of the light with our Texture Blending.

### The Art Of Texture Blending

All these images were created using our own Texture Blending technique and they demonstrate a variety of reasons to apply Texture Blending.

### Dreamy



When we captured this girl at the beach, we liked the posture and the hippie-like skirt. But we were not too keen about the shoes and the boring ocean surf.



These wildflowers shot at Big Sur using a long focal length were not intentionally photographed to be a texture.



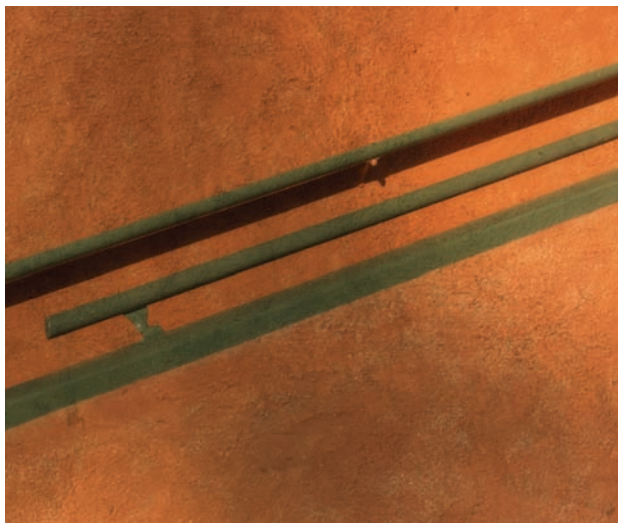
Now the photo looks more like how we felt while capturing the scene. The posture is the key element, the boring background gone and the shoes well-hidden.

### Abstraction



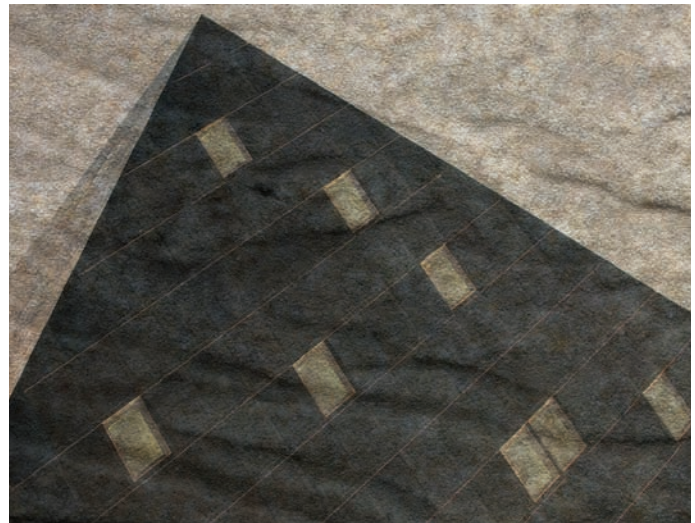
We like the image because it is quite abstract. What we see is actually compressed cardboard at a local recycling yard. In this case, the B&W conversion was created using our special B&W texture with frame. Both the main image and the texture image were taken with an iPhone.

### Too Clean



These are the handrails of some stairs in Monterey, CA. We found the original photo "too clean." In contrast, the blended photo invokes a more interesting "mood." We used a photo of a dirty wall for the texture.

### Surreal

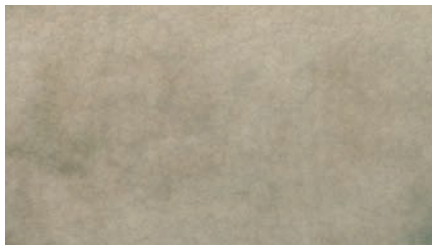


We also like to create some more surreal looking images, like this one based on a realistic photograph of the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco. Again the boring sky and the too clean look made the photo uninteresting, though we liked the framing. The texture this time is a blurred version of a different beach photo.

## Skies Can Be So Boring



Near our home we have beautiful oak trees. It is hard to do them justice because the skies are most of the time just plain boring.



When the image is blended, the trees can show why they are special.



On one hand, you have to photograph these trees against the sky to show their beautiful shape and on the other hand, it is hard even to imagine the ideal sky.

## Painterly Look (Etching)



This photo looks like an old etching. We had no intention of simulating an etching look, but this was the result of our exploration process. The original photo was a digital infrared photo taken with an IR modified camera. The texture used is a photograph of the metal fish container surface in Monterey.

### References

Digital Outback Photo  
[www.outbackphoto.com](http://www.outbackphoto.com)

*German photographer Uwe Steinmueller and his wife and partner Bettina came to live and work in the United States over a decade ago. They concentrate on taking photos for fine art prints, mainly nature and urban landscapes. Owner and editor of Digital Outback Photo ([www.outbackphoto.com](http://www.outbackphoto.com)), Steinmueller has authored numerous books and articles about digital workflow.*

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