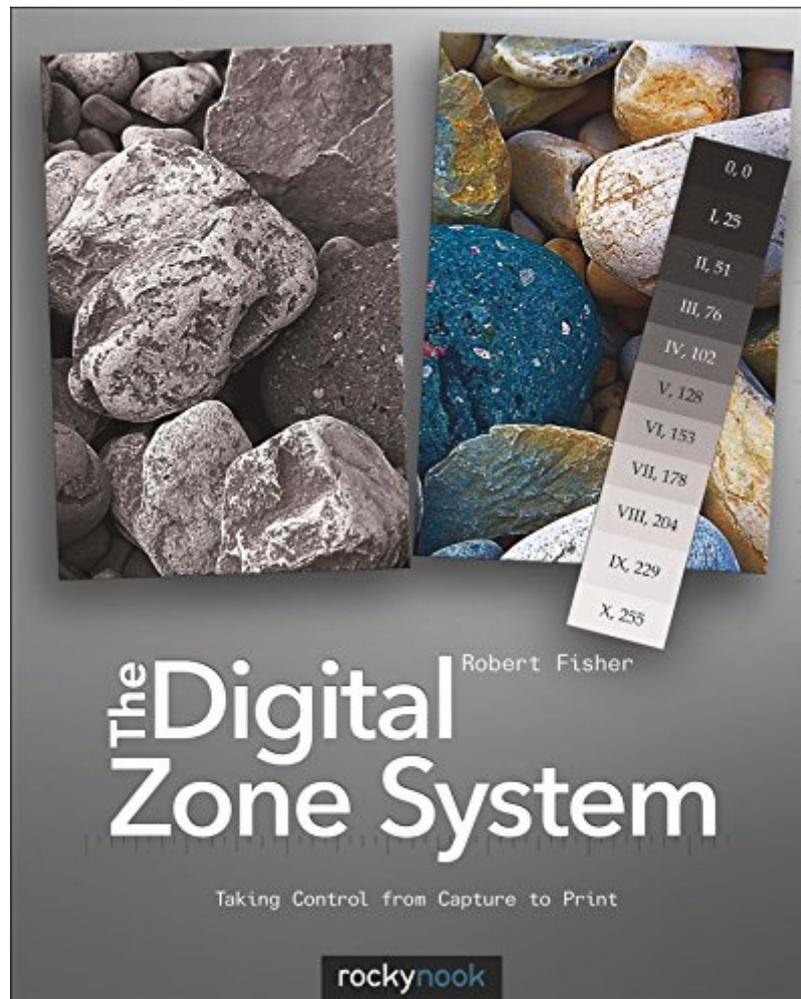


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The Digital Zone System: Taking Control From Capture To Print



Synopsis

There is an ongoing debate among photographers whether digital photography processes will ever be able to reach the pinnacle of image quality and tonality achieved by Ansel Adams decades ago. The Digital Zone System (DZS) is an innovative methodology for editing digital images that mimics the Zone System created by Adams. With this book, author Robert Fisher presents a practical guide for editing digital images with a level of control previously unattainable without significant manual work. He walks the reader through the background of Adam's original Zone System and points out similarities to current digital processes including Expose to the Right (ETTR) and high dynamic range imaging (HDR). Learn to use luminance masks to separate an image into "one-stop" zones of brightness, similar to the zones in Adams's Zone System, that can be worked on individually or in groups. This makes the DZS a powerful tool for converting color images to black and white. You will also gain tremendous control over how color is adjusted in your images by learning to isolate and adjust color in specific targeted areas. These DZS processes are quicker and simpler than the tedious work of using global adjustments and painting in layer masks to isolate the effects of an adjustment layer. In this book, you will learn how to use the Digital Zone System for editing color images, converting images to black and white, and tone mapping HDR images. Also included are brief discussions of color management, setting up Photoshop, printing, and exposure for digital images. The book is richly illustrated with step-by-step screenshots and stunning example images that show the benefits of the Digital Zone System over commonly used digital editing methods. Once mastered, the DZS will allow you to produce a higher level of quality in your images, at a faster pace and with greater ease than ever before.

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Customer Reviews

In spite of what the title says, this book is about luminance masks not the zone system. The author provides a set of Photoshop actions to generate a set of masks that cover the various zones of the zone system. In keeping with the ideas of the zone system the masks are separated by a factor of 2 in exposure. The masks are combined with adjustment layers in Photoshop to fine tune an image by confining the effect of the adjustment to a limited area. The author provides a nice color image showing the advantages of using the masks. The demonstration would have had more instructional value if the author had provided the same kind of detailed descriptions that are used in Oz to Kansas. The color chapter is followed by a chapter on black and white conversions. The best part about this chapter is the discussion of the importance of color in the black and white conversion. This is a valuable discussion. The color image used in the color chapter is used to demonstrate the author's black and white conversion method. This is followed by a second demonstration using red peppers. Then a comparison between the zone system conversion and a Lightroom conversion. One drawback to the demonstrations is that the author doesn't provide sample images that you can use to follow along. The black and white discussion is followed by a discussion about using the digital zone system in high dynamic range (HDR) applications. I don't know enough about HDR to comment on this chapter. The book concludes with a discussion of printing and the importance of soft proofing and color management. This is a clear and useful discussion. This is one of the few books where the screen shots showing layers/etc. are printed large enough to read. The reproduction of the photos is good.

For those of you who grew up in the black and white film photography days, the phrase 'Zone System' should ring a bell for you. For those of you that have never heard of it until now, this book should be on your reading list, especially if you want to improve your photography skills. The Zone

System was developed by Ansel Adams in an effort to allow the capture of the widest possible tonal range in images possible. It is a ten step (eleven, actually, counting zero) exposure system, where exposures are separated into zones, with zero being pure black and zone 10 being pure white. The concept and use of the Zone System is to give photographers a guide to allowing their photos to be properly exposed across the entire tonal range. In the simplest terms, to make use of the Zone System, you expose for the shadows, and develop for the highlights. In other words, you want to make your exposure such that there is sufficient detail in the shadows, but you also will need to develop the image so that the highlights also retain detail, and do not burn out. This was oftentimes a long involved process in the old wet darkroom days. Adams would make countless prints to arrive at the desired look and feel he wanted, and he set out to make it easier on not only himself, but countless other photographers. The result was the Zone System. The digital darkroom is a much different place than the old wet one. Computers, software and digital imaging have made the production of outstanding prints even easier than before. One would think that the Zone System would therefore be outdated and not much use any longer. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Ansel Adams and Fred Archer designed the original Zone System to extend the range of light of film and to better control tonalities within the print. The Adobe Corporation, over time, designed Photoshop and related raw converters, like Adobe Camera Raw (ACR) and Lightroom, to extend the range of light of digital images and better control tonalities in a variety of output media. Now Robert Fisher offers what he calls the Digital Zone System (DZS) which applies the tools in Photoshop and related raw converters in ways never contemplated by the designers to fit into the schema of the original zone system. In reviewing books concerned with image post processing, I usually consider the effectiveness in the explanation of the use of the software, but in the case of Fisher's work I wonder if the underlying concept is worth the work. Essentially, Fisher constructs a number of masks, each of a zone of tonality and then adjusts them, claiming this method creates better images. It appears to me that the DZS adds unnecessary complexity to the use of post processing software with no advantage. Even with DZS it appears that one must still recover the data at the extremes of a digital image's tonal range by manipulating the image with ACR or Lightroom's basic sliders, and manipulation of tonality within a zone must still be accomplished by using a curve function. Although he alleges that DZS can be more precise, nothing convinces me that careful use of, say, the curves panel can't achieve the same thing. Moreover, one will not be fighting against the design of the software, which I conclude one is doing when Photoshop repeatedly warns that no pixels are more than 50% selected, a warning which Fisher tells us to just ignore.

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