

By Jo Becker, BA

Last year I attended a really good series of camera Ritz University classes taught by Wolf and Kitz Camera store staff. Topics included camera basics and picture-taking techniques. Other classes walked students through the particulars of digital camera and software used to manage and manipulate the images once they've gotten from your camera to your computer.

There are so many digital cameras out there today and, still, the standard camera with scanner option to digitize print film technology. I'll never forget one of the Ritz University instructor's analogy that using cameras and working with digital images is like learning to drive a car. You didn't learn to drive a Chevy or a Toyota; you learned to drive a car! Get the basics down and you'll be able to figure out the particulars.

Most cameras on the market today have far more features than I personally ever want to learn to use. I'm a huge fan of the point and shoot technology! Don't get caught up, overwhelmed, or intimidated by all the settings and options. Find the basic picture-taking setting, know where your zoom and shoot buttons are and you're good to go. Better still, learn how to view the pictures you just took and you'll know if you want to take more or call it good.

Next step: get the pictures from your camera to you computer. This will depend on whether you are using a standard camera and scanner or digital camera, and what software you have available on your computer to manage and manipulate them.

It isn't reasonable to go into specifics here, but remember, you're not learning to drive a Ford or a Chrysler. I'm going to assume you have a digital camera, or that you already have your print pictures scanned into your computer. The next thing you'll want to do after taking your pictures and sitting down at your computer is open the software of your choice. Please notice that I didn't say the software that came with your camera or the program your computer tries to launch for you automatically. You'll want to determine what program you have or might want to purchase that gives you the functionality you want. Most often the program that your computer defaults to will be a picture viewer; that being, it allows you to view the picture and little else.

Most image manipulation programs offer a menu of commands in the top left corner of the screen; choose File/Open and browse for your image files. This will open the pictures up into the program of your chose one at a time. (Note that this is a slow means of transferring files from a camera to the computer and can eat up the camera's battery life. You can drag and drop or you other means of getting your pictures to your hard drive if you're comfortable with it, but be sure to open files from within the program you want to use in order to make changes. Again, particular steps involved will depend on whether you're driving a Beamer or a Bug.)

The next step is most important. Save a copy of your picture on your hard drive by going to File/Save As. Save the file in a folder and with a name you'll remember; for a real estate picture it might be "ML#-Exterior." Further, anytime you want to make changes to that file, start by saving a new copy of it. Go to File/Save As and name it something new, such as "ML#-Exterior-1," or "ML#-Exterior-revised date," or "ML#-Exterior-copy." If you find later that you don't like the changes you made, you will still have your original image file.

With a copy of the image you want to work with in hand, resize, crop, inverse, and add text to your heart's content.

If all of this seems too overwhelming, ask for help, but keep trying! Before long you will get the hang of it. In the meantime, *hang it there!*

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Jo Becker has eight years of licensed real estate experience. As a former broker, she knows how important, and sometimes scary, technology and self-promotion can be. Jo has provided

personalized one-on-one marketing consultation and computer software training to the industry since 2002.

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