Scrapbook-style photos

PixTrix**3**

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Here are six easy ways to add depth and realism to flat digital photos.

Dexter and Leilani are making a Web site for their upcoming wedding and have 10 years' worth of photos to share with family and friends. They want their images to convey the warm, lived-with quality that you'd find in a scrapbook or photo album. Yet digital photos are by nature cold, flat and hard-edged, so they'll need a little help. Here are six techniques to add borders, shadows, fasteners, the illusion of a curl and so on to turn those computerized pix into ones that you can almost touch.

Add a border

The easiest thing to do is simply add a white border, which will make your photo look like a traditional print. Widths vary; older photos generally had wider borders. In Photoshop . . .

Open your photo and increase the Canvas Size enough to accommodate a border and a shadow.

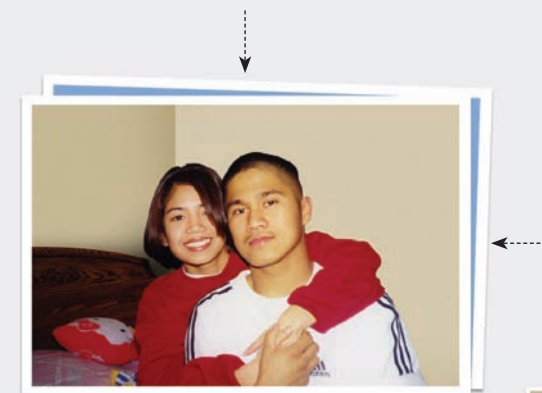**Apply a white stroke** to the outside of the photo. Its pixel width will depend on your resolution.

Add a shadow. Click the layer, and add a *very thin* drop shadow to make the photo appear to be on the page, not floating above it.
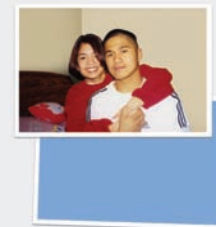
Stack 'em up

A stack of photos slightly askew looks naturally casual; two or three in a stack is usually plenty. Technically, upper photos would have softer shadows, but in practice this usually isn't necessary.

Look for points of interest. Your upper photos will crop the lower ones by covering some parts. *Look for artistic parts.* It's obvious with portraits that you want the people to be visible (above), but other images will have different possibilities. Also, skew your photos only slightly—between two and four degrees. Much more than that and they'll look strewn, not stacked (right).
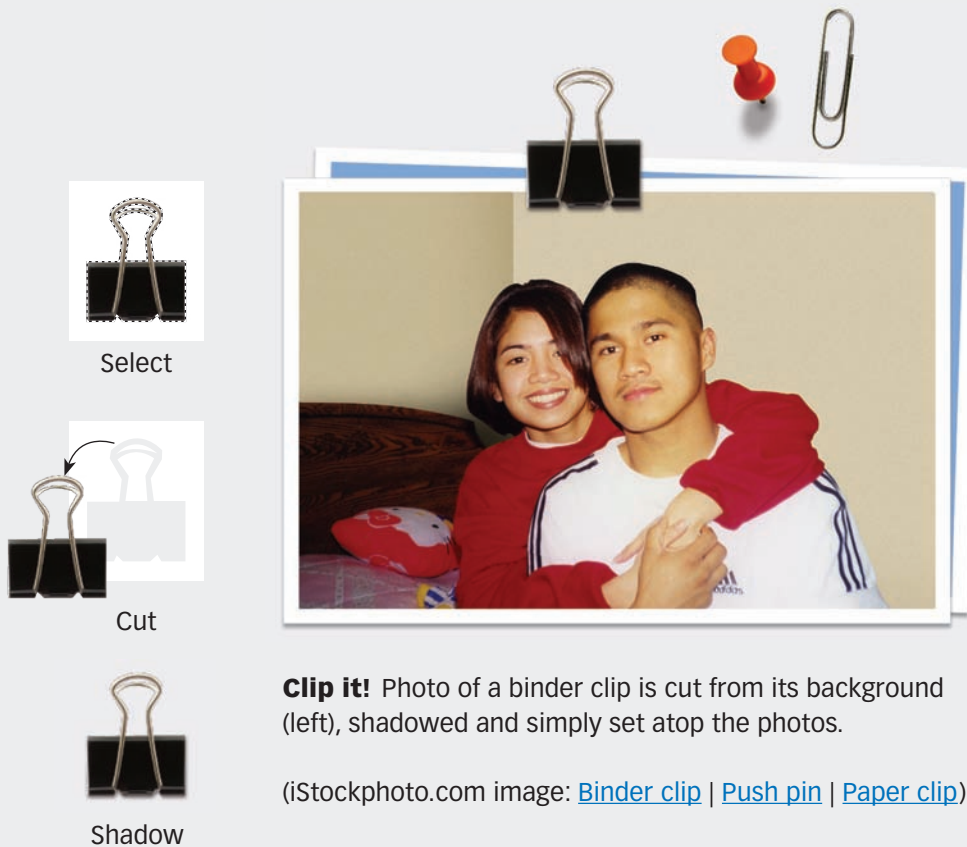
Save file size. One photo can look like a dozen! Save file size by substituting a solid color for the underlying images (right) and flattening the file.

Add an object

Clips, pushpins and other photographic objects add realism—and they're fun. When looking for an object photo, pay attention to its lighting, which must match your shadows (or vice-versa).

Select

Cut

Shadow

Clip it! Photo of a binder clip is cut from its background (left), shadowed and simply set atop the photos.

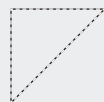(iStockphoto.com image: Binder clip | Push pin | Paper clip)

Use a decorative element An object that you'd find in the scene makes a lifelike ornament. A cast shadow (not a drop shadow) makes the pine cone appear to be sitting on a tabletop. (iStockphoto.com image: Pine cone)

Draw your own fasteners

Triangle scrapbook corners and translucent tape are easy to draw and look great.

Draw corner tabs What says *photo album* more than those little corner tabs? Just draw, fill and apply a very thin shadow. Make all the tabs in your album the same size.

Draw a triangle.   Fill   Shadow

Draw translucent tape In real life you'd rarely tape your photos like this, but hey; it looks good, and you can use a lot of variety—white tape, beige, thin, wide, long, short and so on.

Draw a shape. Note serrated ends.   Fill with white.   Reduce its opacity and apply shadow.

Add some curl

Paper photos are rarely perfectly flat. Create the illusion of a slight curl by drawing a curved shadow.

Curved shadow creates the illusion of the photo curling without distorting the image. Drawing a freehand shadow is about as effective as any mechanical technique and yields shadows that are slightly—and naturally—irregular.

Draw a shape with corners like these.
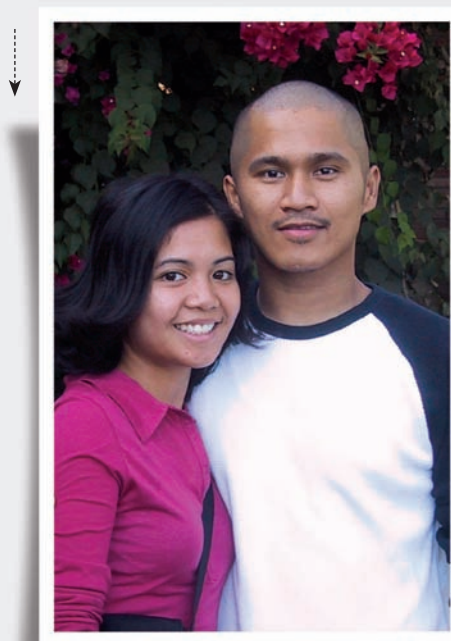
Fill, then blur the edges.

Place the image.

Lighten the shadow.

Try different curls

Modifying the shadow slightly "lifts" the photo higher off the page. Note in all cases that only the shadow is altered; the photo remains untouched.

Lift three corners by enlarging the shadow and offsetting it horizontally.
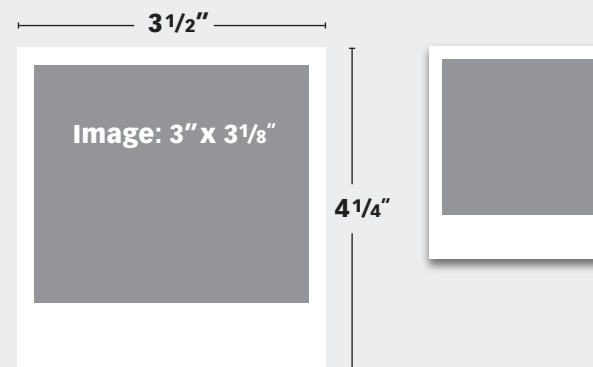

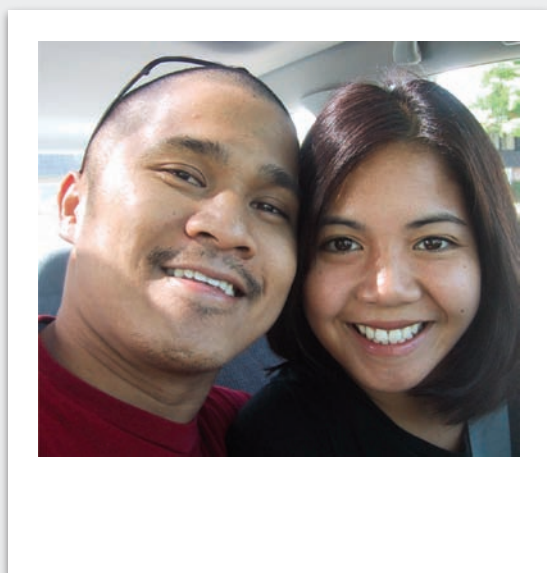**Lift the top** by shortening the shadow as shown.

Lift more. The larger and softer a shadow is, the farther above the surface it appears to be. To modify an existing shadow, enlarge it more, then in Photoshop select the eraser tool, a soft brush, and start erasing (above). A slight tilt (left) makes it more dynamic.

Make your own Polaroid

No old photo collection would be complete without a Polaroid-looking print that has that characteristically wide bottom margin. Image-to-frame proportions vary; just get close.

Great America '98

3½″

Image: 3″ x 3⅛″

4¼″

The classic snapshot No photo looks more informal than an old-fashioned, self-developing Polaroid print. Just draw a white field and lay the photo atop it; the wide margin leaves room to add a scrapbooky note. Below, apply styles from the previous pages.
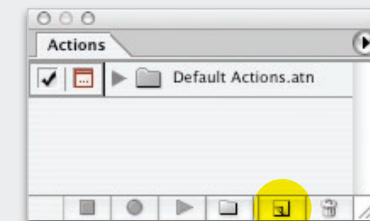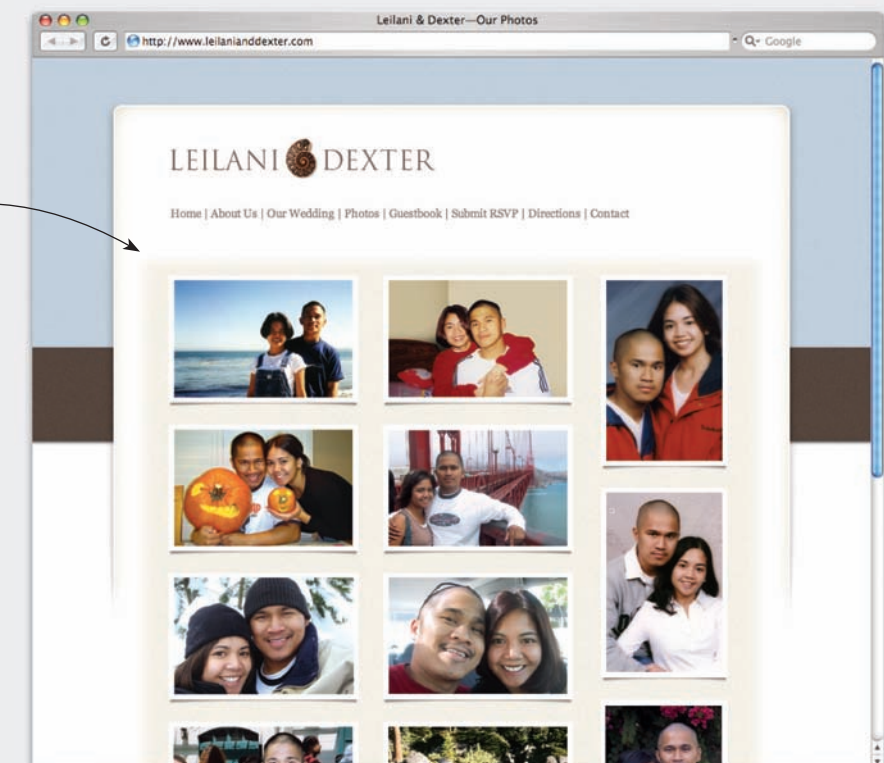
Stacked   Tacked   Taped   Curled

Fill the page

If you have many photos from different years, you can bring them together beautifully by using just one style. To minimize making repetitive steps, this is a good time to use Photoshop's Action feature.

Select one style and repeat it.

Create a Photoshop Action
Actions save time by recording repeated steps. In the Actions palette, click on the Create new action button (above). Specify a name (and, optionally, a shortcut Function Key), and click Record. Stylize your image, and click Stop when you're finished. To apply the Action to another image, simply open that image, and either click the Play button or your specified shortcut Function Key. (Note: You will need to create separate actions for your portrait and landscape images.

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For the current table of contents, click here. To save time and paper, a paper-saver format of this article, suitable for one- or two-sided printing, is provided on the following pages.

For presentation format
Print: (Specify pages 1–11)

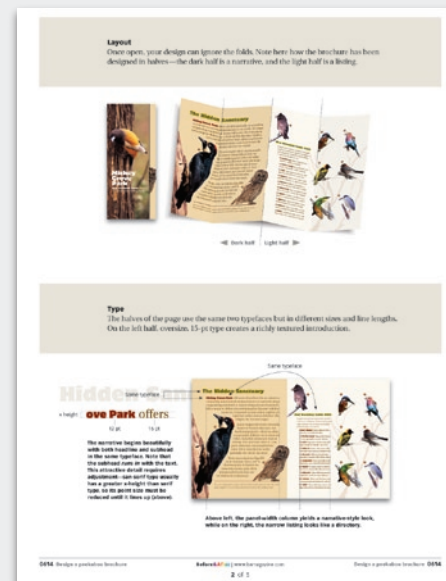**Print**
Format: Landscape
Page Size: Fit to Page

Save
Presentation format or
Paper-saver format
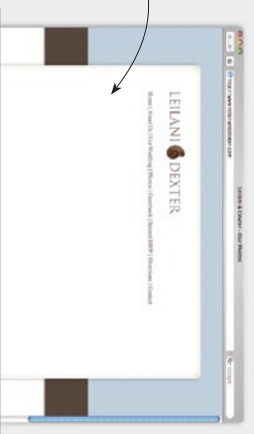
For paper-saver format
Print: (Specify pages 13–18)

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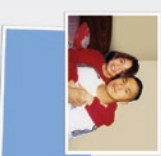
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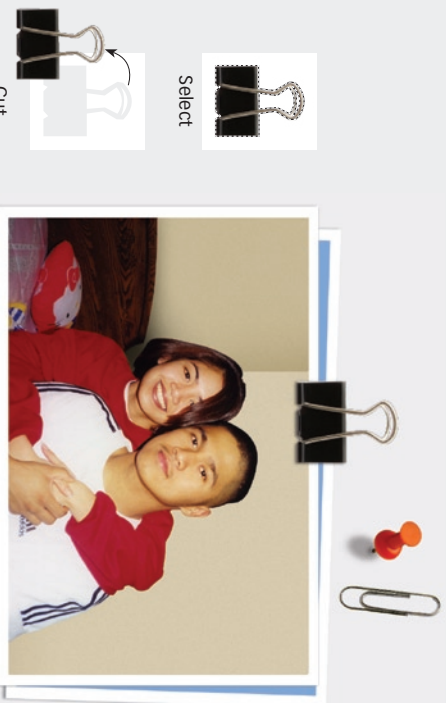
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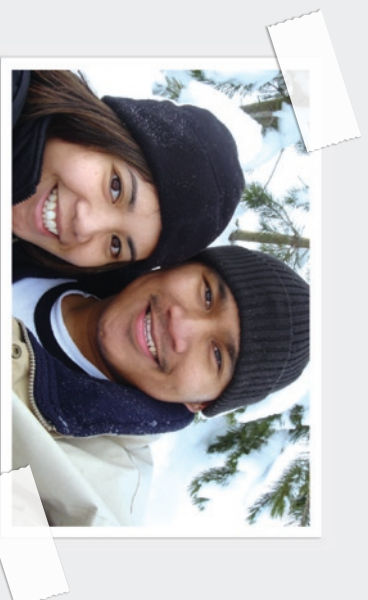Triangle scrapbook corners and translucent tape are easy to draw and look great.

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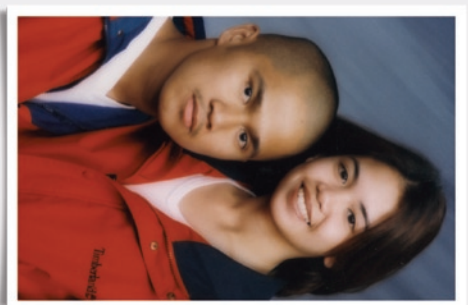
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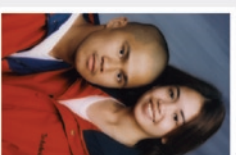
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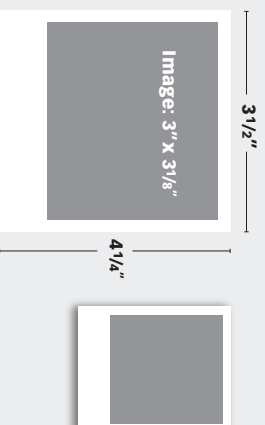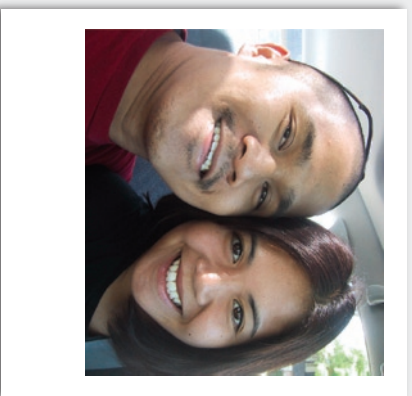**Lift three corners** by enlarging the shadow and offsetting it horizontally.

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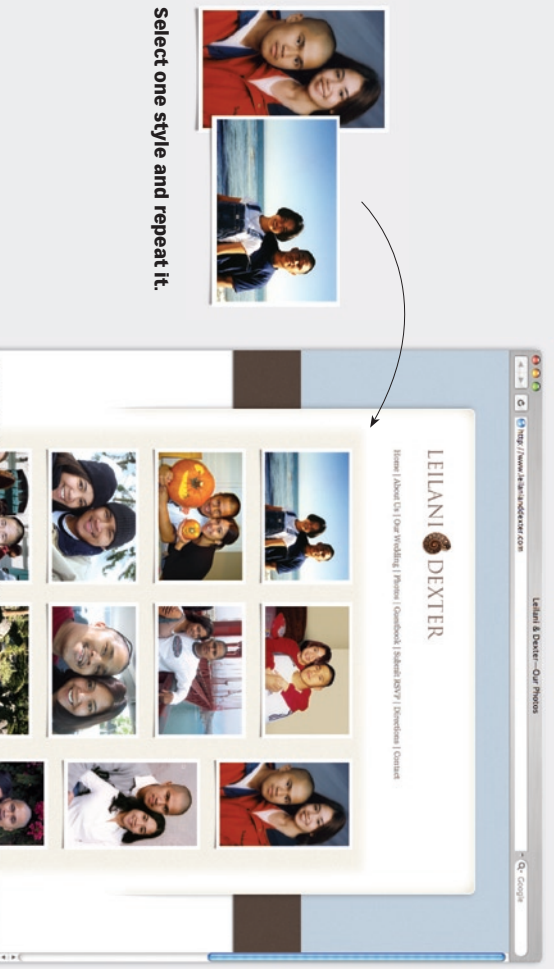
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LEILANI ♥ DEXTER

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Leilani & Dexter - Our Photos

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Default Actions.atn

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