

## Dave's Vignette Guide for Affinity Photo

Here's a discussion and fairly definitive list of 20 Vignette techniques to use with Affinity photo.

Enjoy -- Dave

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## What is a vignette?

A vignette is usually a gradual darkening of an image towards its edges, although this can also be lightening or even into a different colours.

## Why vignette

The origins of this go back to lenses and exposures where it happened naturally when taking pictures. Some smart photographer noticed this could be quite a nice effect and started using it deliberately, turning it into another useful tool in the photographer's kitbox.

The reason for a dark border is that the eye tends to move away from dark and towards light. Hence when the eye strays towards the edge of the image, it 'bounces' off the less attractive dark and towards the 'nicer' light area in the middle. Making this a gradual fade rather than a hard line gives a softer effect.

While traditional vignettes are lightest in the middle, you can move this focal point over the key area of interest in the image in order to guide the eye to this point.

Although traditional vignettes are dark, you can also use a light vignette. This lets the image fade out gently rather than having a hard edge. A reason to use light vignettes is that the eye is attracted to lines, which it follows in order to find interesting shapes. The border of a rectangular image does this to the eye too and hence can be a subtle distraction. A light vignette can help avoid this trap, especially in images where there are no strong elements that keep the eye's attention. It may also be a more appropriate vignette in a high-key image.

## Basic principles of vignettes

In creating a vignette, there are a number of principles that are achieved via various methods and which may be combined in various ways. These are explained later. First, the principles are discussed here.

### Selecting

The first step of many vignetting methods is to select which area to darken and which to stay light. Methods of doing this include:

- **Painting:** The simplest form of selection is with a soft paintbrush (B), painting in the darkness around the image. This is an easy method and offers a lot of control, but it can be difficult to create a consistent darkening and hence may be distracting more than enhancing.
- **Selection:** Selection can be done with Marquee shapes (M), the lasso tool (L) (which can be drawn, clicked from point to point or use the 'magnetic' outline follower), or painted with the selection brush (W). The most useful is probably the oval marquee. Selections can also be inverted (Ctrl-Shift-I), typically to select the area to be darkened rather than the area to protect.
- **Shapes:** Vector shapes (U) can be used, especially the ellipse, rectangle and rounded rectangle. The Pen tool (P) can be used to draw freehand shapes. An advantage of shapes is that, unlike selections, you can go back to them later and adjust them.
- **Masks:** Masks can be used to select the part of an image to darken, or to an already-darkened layer, selecting which parts to apply to the base image.

## Darkening

Darkening (or lightening or using other shades) can be done in a range of ways, including:

- **Vignette tools:** Tools that are designed to create a vignette.
- **Painting** in black (or another hue), often building up gently with Opacity or Flow at somewhat less than 100%.
- **Fill and remove:** Rather than painting in dark, a layer is filled with black and then the areas to be lightened are removed, for example with an erase brush or black in a mask. This is often easier than painting in the vignette around the edges.
- **Darkening adjustments:** including Exposure, Brightness, HSL Lightness, Levels and Curves.
- **Program modes** such as glow and burn that naturally darken.
- **Blend Modes** that can darken, most typically Darken, Multiply, Overlay and Soft Light.

Other hues can include greys and any accent colour you want to use. A subtle way to do this is to use a dark version of your chosen colour. A neat approach is to Average the image and use the colour picker to select this colour to use.

## Blurring

In order to create a fade rather than a distracting hard edge, the vignette has a soft blurred edge.

Ways of creating a blurred edge include:

- **Painting** with a soft brush (low Opacity, often 10-20% or Flow, often 2-5%).
- **Filters**, most typically Gaussian Blur but could be another blur.
- **Gradient** from light to dark, such as with the Gradient tool or Layer Effects.

## Layering

Painting and selection may be done using one layer, but by using separate layers a non-destructive method may be employed.

- **Empty layer:** an empty layer can be painted on, either directly with a brush or applied from such as a cut and paste.
- **Duplicate layer:** A duplicate of the layer can separately be darkened and then blended, masked or erased to expose the original layer below.
- **Paste selection:** When you cut and paste a selection, a new layer is created.
- **Shape:** When you create a new vector shape, a new layer is automatically added.

## Blending

When using layers (or just adjustments that allow blending), there are particular blend mode groups that are used:

- **Darken modes:** Used for standard dark vignettes. In particular Darken and Multiply are used.
- **Lighten modes:** Used for light vignettes. In particular Lighten and Screen are used.
- **Contrast modes:** Used for either type of vignette, varying from a 50% grey base (darker darkens, lighter lightens. In particular Overlay and Soft Light are used.

Note: in each of these modes, one colour is effectively invisible. In Darken this is white, In Lighten it is black and in Contrast it is 50% grey.

## Methods

There are more ways of vignetting than described here, though these include most variants and approaches.

### Method 1: Develop persona: Remove Lens Vignette

This has a very gentle, subtle effect and is not enough to create significant vignettes.

- In the RAW persona, Lens tab, Remove Lens Vignette.
- Drag Intensity to change (darken/lighten).

### Method 2: Develop persona: Post Crop Vignette

Stronger than the Remove Lens Vignette, it only a radial vignette is available (as it is intended for lens, which are round), and may not suit a rectangular image.

- In the RAW persona, Lens tab, Post-crop Vignette.
- Adjust with Intensity (drag left to darken, right to harden), Scale (size) and Hardness (blur).

### Method 3: Photo persona Vignette filter

This is the standard tool that Affinity give you for vignettes. Quick and to hand, but does not let you place the centre nor change the shape.

- Layer/New Live Filter Layer/Vignette Filter for non-destructive adjustment layer (or Filters/Colours/Vignette... to apply directly to current layer).
- Adjust with Exposure (darken/lighten edge), Hardness (blur), Scale (size) and Shape (circle to ellipse). You can also use Blend Mode and adjust with Opacity.

### Method 4: Nik Color Efix vignette filters

Nik Filters are free and give more shape options, though it takes a little longer than Method 3.

- Filters/Plugins/Nik Collection/Color Efix Pro.
- Vignette: Filter. Adjust Colour, Shape, Adapt Edges (blur), Transition (blur), Size and Opacity.
- Don't forget to click 'Ok'
- Note: Nik also has Vignette Blur (just blurs image without darkening) and Vignette Lens (for lens correction).

### Method 5: Basic black painting

This is a quick and dirty method, painting on the original image. Ok if you have a steady hand and are saving only as a jpeg image, but lacks the non-destructive ability to adjust later. It is useful in being able to control just where the darkening goes, though there are better methods to do this below.

- Brush tool (B). Colour black (or white or other as you wish, or even Erase brush). Soft brush (low Hardness), low Opacity (10-20%) or Flow (2-5%).
- Paint gently around edges. Need not create oval – you can paint over areas where you want to reduce attention.
- Build up layers with multiple gentle strokes rather than trying to do it all in one go.

### Method 6: Basic burn painting

This is a variant on Method 5, but the burn brush is designed to darken the image on which it is painted.

- Burn Brush tool (O). Or Dodge brush to lighten. Medium Opacity (50% or so) or Flow (50%), Soft brush (0-20% Hardness). Tonal Range to suit.
- Paint gently around edges. Need not create oval – you can paint over areas where you want to reduce attention.
- Build up layers with multiple gentle strokes rather than trying to do it all in one go.

### Method 7: New layer black painting

This is similar to the basic black painting (Method 5) except that it is done on a new layer. The benefit of this is being non-destructive, so you are able to adjust it later with Opacity and by erasing black (not just using undo). It is also easy to darken any area where you want to reduce visual focus.

- Layer/New Fill Layer (or click 'document' image at bottom of Layers panel).
- Brush tool (B). Colour black (or white or other as you wish). Soft brush (low Hardness), low Opacity (10-20%) or Flow (2-5%).
- Paint gently around edges. Need not create oval – you can paint over areas where you want to reduce attention.
- Build up layers with multiple gentle strokes rather than trying to do it all in one go.
- To remove black, use soft Erase Brush (E), doing this gently.
- Adjust overall darkness with layer Opacity.

### Method 8: New layer black removal painting

This is similar to Method 7, but instead starts with full black and removes black to expose the original image below. This is often easier as it avoids having to fiddle around the corners. Again, it allows you to flexibly choose which is light and which is dark.

- Layer/New Fill Layer (or click 'document' image at bottom of Layers panel).
- Create a new pixel layer and fill it with black. Layer/New Fill Layer (or click 'document' image at bottom of Layers panel).
- Turn down the Opacity enough to see the main layer beneath. 50% is good.
- Erase Brush tool (E). Soft brush (low Hardness), high Opacity (70-100%).
- Paint gently from centre or area of focus. Need not create oval – you can paint over areas where you want to increase attention.
- Use multiple gentle strokes rather than trying to do it all in one go. Starting with a lower Opacity may be preferred.
- You can undo by painting back the black with Paintbrush tool (B). Keep this soft with low Opacity or Flow.

### Method 9: Rectangle and mask

This is a variant on Method 8, using a rectangle shape rather than a painted layer and a mask rather than painting the dark layer (thus saving on file size).

- Rectangle tool. Draw rectangle over whole image. Set Fill Colour to black. Reduce Opacity of layer to 50% (so you can see the image). You could use a black pixel layer, but the rectangle saves file size.
- Add a white mask to the rectangle layer. Layer/New Mask Layer, or click on mask icon at the bottom of the Layer panel.
  - If new mask appears above rectangle layer, drag the mask into the rectangle layer (watch for blue rectangle).
- Brush tool (B). Soft brush (Hardness 0-20%). High Opacity (70-100%). Select Mask layer. Paint black over area in middle of image to restore normal brightness.
- Correct mis-brushes with undo or painting white onto mask.
- Adjust overall effect with layer Opacity of rectangle layer.
- Alternative method is to make the mask layer all black, then paint back in white for the outer darker area.

### Method 10: Masked darkened duplicate layer

Similar effect to Method 7, but allows for further modification of vignette area.

- Duplicate layer. Ctrl-J or Layer/Duplicate.
- Darken the whole layer. Eg. decreasing Exposure, Brightness or Luminance in HSL.
- Add a white mask to the duplicate layer. Layer/New Mask Layer, or click on mask icon at the bottom of the Layer panel.
  - If new mask appears above duplicate layer, drag the mask into the duplicate layer (watch for blue rectangle).
- Brush tool (B). Soft brush (Hardness 0-20%). High Opacity (70-100%). Select Mask layer. Paint black over area in middle of image to restore normal brightness.
- Correct mis-brushes with undo or painting white onto mask.
- Adjust overall effect with layer Opacity of duplicate layer.
- Note: you can add further effects to the vignettted area, for example various blurs, making it monochrome or other HSL shifts.

### Method 11: Layer Effects (fx) inner shadow

This is a trick that uses no extra layers, but remains non-destructive. It puts a dark area around the border of the image but the shape cannot be changed (eg. to ellipse).

- Click 'fx' at bottom of Layers panel to bring up the Layer Effects panel.
- Click on 'Inner Shadow'. Ensure the box is checked and the Inner Shadow name is highlighted.
- Opacity right up. Colour Black. Blend Mode: Normal.
- Type a big number into Radius box (like 1000) to force it past the default 100px.
- Play with Intensity (or leave it at zero) to change hardness of border dark area.
- Note: You can create similar effects with Inner Glow and Bevel.

### Method 12: Masked adjustment layer

Using a live adjustment layer reduces file size and gives a choice of various ways of darkening.

- Add an adjustment layer to the image that can make it darker. (Layer/New Adjustment Layer/.. or half-filled circle at bottom of Layers panel).
  - A good choice is Curves, pulling down the centre of the curve for a non-linear darkening effect (push up to make the image lighter).
  - You can also use HSL Luminance, Brightness, Exposure, Levels.
  - For Levels, slide Gamma right up, then steadily slide up Black Level.
- Brush tool (B). Soft brush (Hardness 0-20%). High Opacity (70-100%). Select black colour. Select Adjustment layer. Paint black over area in middle of image to restore normal brightness. (note: there is a built-in mask in all adjustment layers that is normally white).
- Correct mis-brushes with undo or painting white onto mask.
- Adjust overall effect with layer Opacity of adjustment layer.

### Method 13: Radial gradient pixel layer

This gives an even ellipse with a smooth gradient that can quickly be repositioned.

- Layer/New Fill Layer (or click 'document' image at bottom of Layers panel).
- Blend Mode: Multiply.
- Adjust Opacity to 50% to make layer below visible.
- Click on Gradient tool on left toolbar.
- On top context toolbar, Type: Elliptical. Click on colour box to drop down controls.
- In Gradient tab: Type: Elliptical. Click on left end of colour line. Click on colour box to set white. Click on right end of colour line. Click colour box to set black.
  - Tip: Click on 'None' tab then 'Gradient' tab to get white-to-black gradient.
- Draw ellipse to centre at desired place. Drag nodes to appropriate places.
- Note: For a white vignette: Make the layer Blend Mode Screen. Reverse the Gradient (left end black, right end white). Turn up layer Opacity so vignette fades out fully.

### Method 14: Radial gradient in shape

This is similar to Method 13 but uses a shape rather than a layer. This saves file size and can be smoothly scaled (eg. if the layer is copied to another, different-sized image).

- Rectangle tool (U). Draw rectangle over whole image. Blend Mode of Rectangle layer: Multiply.
- Set layer Opacity to 50%.
- Click on the Gradient tool (on left toolbar). In top context toolbar, Type: Elliptical.
- Click on colour fill image on to context toolbar. Click on right node on gradient scale and set to black.
- Drag centre of gradient to point of focus. Drag bar end nodes to shape the gradient (drag outside image to shade just corners; keep inside to have full ellipse visible. Also drag small vertical line on horizontal axis.
- Readjust overall layer Opacity as needed.
- Note: You can delete the bottom layer and save just the rectangle layer as a separate file. You can then later load it as a separate image and cut-and-paste the layer into any image, adjusting the rectangle and ellipse to suit.

### Method 15: Rectangle and ellipse shapes

This is like Method 14 but with a shape-based ellipse rather than

- Rectangle tool (U). Draw rectangle over whole image. Set fill to black (on top context menu).
- Ellipse (right click Rectangle tool on left hand toolbar). Draw ellipse within rectangle. Set fill to white.
- Add large Gaussian Blur to Ellipse. Click on Radius number box and enter a large number, such as 500 (change this for later adjustment).
- Group Rectangle and Ellipse. Select both of them (click on one and shift-click the other). Arrange/Group (Ctrl-G). Blend Mode of group: Multiply. Opacity of group: 50% (or to suit).
- You can adjust the vignette with the items above, for example changing the size and location of the ellipse or
- Note: You can also use any other shape instead of the ellipse, for example the Rounded Rectangle to give a squarer vignette.
- Note: You can also convert the ellipse to a shape (right click on it and Convert to Curves). Then click on any node and tilt or drag these. You can drag any point on the shape (not a node) or add a node by just clicking anywhere on the shape. This allows you to change the shape to create lighter focus on key items and remove focus (darkening) non-essential items. Delete any node by clicking on it and pressing 'delete'.
- Note: For a white vignette: Make the rectangle white, the ellipse black and the blend mode of the group Screen. Make the group Opacity 100%.
- Note: You can delete the bottom image layer and save just the group layer (containing the rectangle and ellipse as a separate file. You can then later load it as a separate image and cut-and-paste the layer into any image, adjusting the rectangle and ellipse to suit.

### Method 16: Layer Effects (fx) Gradient Overlay (radial)

This offers a flexible method without adding layers. You can shift the focus point but cannot distort the shape of the ellipse as in Method 15.

- Click 'fx' at bottom of Layers panel to bring up the Layer Effects panel.
- Click on 'Gradient Overlay'. Ensure the box is checked and the Gradient Overlay name is highlighted.
- Blend Mode: Multiply. Opacity: 50% (or adjust this to suit). Type: Elliptical. Click on Gradient colour icon and Reverse to get white on left and black on right (so ellipse is white in the middle).
- Change the size and shape of the ellipse with Scale X and Scale Y.
- Move the central focus point of the ellipse with Offset X and Offset Y.
- Tilt the ellipse with Angle.
- Click on the Gradient colour icon and slide the vertical bar in the colour line to change the gradient of the vignette.
- Click Close to hide Layer Effects Panel. Click 'fx' on layer panel to re-open it.
- Note: For a white vignette: Click on Gradient and Reverse to have black on left and white on right of colour line. Change Blend Mode to Screen. Turn Opacity right up.

### Method 17: Raw ellipse overlay

Use this in the Develop persona as a quick way to create a vignette here where you can move the focal point.



- Turn down Exposure (Basic tab on right hand panel) to darken whole image, until outer area is dark enough.
- Click on Overlay Gradient Tool on left toolbar. On top toolbar, Type: Ellipse.
- Draw ellipse to cover centre area. Don't worry that this is red. Move the ellipse as needed to key focal point within image.
- Turn up Exposure until centre area is returned to normal brightness.

### Method 18: Raw painted overlay

Use this in the Develop persona as a quick way to create a flexible vignette here.

- Select Overlay Paint Tool (B). Select suitable brush size (large) and Hardness (very soft).
- Paint in edge area that is to be darkened. This will appear red.
- Click on Basic tab on right panel. Turn down Exposure to darken edges.
- Note: You can also use the principle of Method 17, darkening the whole image first, painting in the area to keep and increasing the Exposure of this.

### Method 19: Multiple raw linear gradients

Use this in the Develop persona as a way to define areas with linear gradients, darkening unimportant areas.

- Click on Overlays tab on right hand panel.
- Click on Add Gradient Overlay (coloured circle at bottom of panel). Draw a gradient near the edge, from the edge in, with the red indicating where the change will be.
- Click on Basic tab and adjust Exposure to darken edge. Note value of Exposure.
- Repeat the above two steps as often as you like, typically using the same Exposure value. This can be done as often as wished and at any angle to build anything from a rectangular to any other shaped vignette.
- Note: You can use other controls with this, such as turning down Saturation to create a monochrome border.

### Method 20: Import a template

If you have a vignette you often use but which takes time to set up, you can save it and then import it to use with other image. This is best done with shapes rather than pixel layers as this avoids pixellation.

- Create a vignette template:
  - Use one of the approaches above that creates a new layer or group.
  - Delete the image pixel layer.
  - Save the image.
- Apply a vignette template:
  - Open your normal image file.
  - Open your template file.
  - Click on the template layer and copy it (Ctrl-C).
  - Switch to the image file and paste (Ctrl-V). The vignette layer should appear above the image layer.
  - Adjust blend modes as needed (typically to Multiply).