Editing Your Photos
(And What Apps to Use)

When it comes to Instagram, the word *editing* is often the redheaded stepchild that no one wants to talk to at the party. Sure, editing tools can be used for evil (shaving pounds off your body isn't good for anyone), but when applied in the right way, they can turn good photos into double tap–worthy ones. You don't need to transform yourself or your photos into an unrecognizable state (authenticity is so much better than a heavy hand on an editing app any day); rather, use them to enhance the sharpness, color saturation, brightness, and other technical elements that make an amateur shot look super professional.

Now, don't get me wrong—I break out. My dresses get wrinkled. I stand in positions that look unflattering on camera and get stuck with dreaded "camel toe." And, when it makes sense, I *lightly* fix some of these things (*lightly* being the operative word here) with editing apps. I don't believe in using these apps to completely alter your face or body. But I do believe photos can have unflattering elements that can be edited so that you're presenting yourself in the best possible light. (Fixing photo "blemishes" isn't solely reserved for those that sprout on your face; random cigarette butts on the street or a rogue piece of garbage can also be removed for a better photo.)

I use three apps—Snapseed, VSCO Cam, and blogger-favored Facetune—plus Instagram's own built-in editing tools for my postproduction magic. When thoughtfully applied, working with editing apps almost feels like postproduction for a magazine shoot or a blog entry post. As such, the editing process deserves ample time and energy if you choose to do it. I have a pretty regimented editing protocol: start with Snapseed for brightness and contrast, then Facetune for any unwanted clothing wrinkles or acne abolishment, and then VSCO Cam for a very, very light filter so that the images in my grid all look uniform (more on page 34).

But before I start fine-tuning, I crop my photo to Instagram's original square-intended proportions. Cropping doesn't necessarily mean cutting something out of an image (though a rogue tourist, lingering shadow, or crumpled napkin ruining the edge of a food shot is fair game for the chopping block), but it helps to use your phone's built-in cropping tools to home in on the image you want to post.

For example, I don't love using my camera's zoom. I think it distorts images and tends to make things blurry and weird. So instead of zooming in on, say, a flat lay of my favorite beauty products so that I get everything into the shot, I'll actually take the photo from a bit farther away (a foot and a half above is a good starting point, depending on how much you want to get into the shot) and crop to zoom later.

Your iPhone has a built-in editing tool that works for this purpose. Open your image, tap Edit at the bottom of the screen, and tap the icon that looks like two rotating half squares intersecting, just next to the Cancel button. Crop your photo until the subject you want to post fills the square.

Cropping is great for food photos, flat lays, and accessory details that need to stay sharp and clear (again, not ideal scenarios for using the zoom feature). If you'd rather edit your image first and crop later, Instagram has an in-app crop tool that works wonders, too, as do the editing apps I mention below.

Check out the following pages for more detail on how I edit.

1

SNAPSEED

For enhancing the brightness, contrast, shadow levels, and saturation of a photo. My favorite thing about this app is its handy Selective Adjust tool, which lets you brighten, saturate, or desaturate specific areas within a whole photo. So if you happen to be holding a pretty bouquet, you can isolate the blooms and saturate their colors. This is also super helpful if a photo isn't evenly lit and needs brightening in certain spots. I use contrast controls sparingly so that my photos don't have a fake, granulated look that too high a contrast creates.

There is also a feature called Transform, which allows you to adjust the perspective along the vertical six or the horizontal axis, and you can also rotate the image.

2

FACETUNE

Once a photo is bright and clear, import it into Facetune. Since this app is similar to Photoshop in its functionality, it's tempting to get caught in a trap of giving yourself porcelain skin, bigger boobs, a tinier waist, and anything else normally reserved for the plastic surgeon's office. Again, this is your feed and you can do whatever you want to your photos, but I prefer my photos to be real and authentic, so I use Facetune's Smooth tool to smooth out only the most major of zits or unflattering body-angle situations (aforementioned camel toe or see-through shirts that would make my father blush included), as well as any heavy dress or shirt wrinkles that the steamer missed. The app's Patch tool is perfect for getting rid of cigarette butts, and Details—my favorite feature of the app—brings out the details in jewelry close-ups, product shots, and any architectural backgrounds.

3

VSCO CAM

This app is actually its own camera, which I don't use (as I mentioned in chapter 1, I prefer my iPhone's standard camera). Instead, I like VSCO for its collection of super-minimal, clean filters. I don't use heavy filters on any of my pictures and I especially never use anything that changes them in a dramatic way. But VSCO filters come with a sliding scale so that you can pump a filter's intensity up or down. I use one specific VSCO filter on a very low intensity for some of my pictures so that my grid has a uniform aesthetic (I like my feed to have a certain vibe, despite all of the different subjects that live on it). Another cool thing about VSCO is that it has its own Grid feature, which gives you a testing space and lets you plan out your Instagram grid before you hit Publish.

4

INSTAGRAM'S EDITING TOOLS

Instagram keeps getting more sophisticated in its own in-app editing capabilities, which you can access by tapping on the wrench icon once you've selected a photo to post. It has similar brightening, saturation, and contrast tools to those in Snapseed—so at times, when a raw photo is nearly post ready, you can skip Snapseed and Facetune altogether and head directly here. My favorite editing gizmo within Instagram is the Adjust tool, which lets you level outlines and get a perfectly straight photo. Within Adjust is a proportion function, another favorite for fixing anything that happens to look like I took the shot in a fun-house mirror.

1 2
3 4

1   The original photo was taken at night under incandescent lighting, which makes this image a bit yellow and too warm.

2   Using Snapseed, I brightened the photo, brought down the warmth, and gave it more contrast.

3   Using Facetune's Details feature, I sharpened just the sunglasses.

4   I applied a light VSCO filter and posted this image onto Instagram.

1 2
3 4

1   The original photo that was taken by my assistant at my jobsite. Note the random coffee cup (not mine) on the left.

2   Using Facetune's Patch feature, I made the coffee cup disappear.

3   Using Snapseed, I made the photo brighter and less warm and cropped the image.

4   I sharpened the image using Instagram's sharpening tool and posted it.

1   The original photo I took in London on a gloomy gray day didn't highlight the pretty pink door on this town house.

2   Using Snapseed's Transform feature, I straightened the image so all the lines are more aligned. I also brightened it and gave more contrast to the photo so the colors pop.

3   Using VSCO Cam, I found a filter that added a pink overlay to the photo, which resembled how the door and building looked in person.

4   I sharpened the image on Instagram and posted the final version.

1   The original, unedited photo.

2   Using Snapseed, I brightened the overall image, then selected certain parts of the background to brighten while leaving our skin untouched.

3   I added a VSCO Cam filter and then posted onto Instagram.

Et voilà! Postproduction editing might seem like a lot of work, but you've already taken the time to style and compose a cool shot, so why not put in the extra effort to fine-tune it to pro status?

A word on shadows. When it comes to an Instagram shot, the word *shadow* can be dirty. You don't want a shadow covering your face or darkening the bagel-and-lox plate that should otherwise be brightening your brunch. There are times when shadows are menacing—for example, if someone is standing near you during a daylight shoot and you can see their shadow but not them (photobomb fail), or if you're standing in direct sunlight and your nose is casting a beak over your face.

However, when used correctly, shadows are actually a great way to get artsy with a shot and help contextualize a post's time of day (cereal and morning sun, anyone?).

Interesting shadows can be created by blinds and window coverings (think sunlight flooding into a bedroom through horizontal blinds), patterns from light that shines through tree leaves (those lucky enough to live in a warm climate will find killer patterns in palm-tree leaves, in particular), and even the way that the sun's rays might hit your shoes or pants.

As with so many elements in photography, there isn't a right or wrong way to deal with shadows—you have to experiment and have fun with your shots and look at potentially weird lighting situations as an opportunity to get creative.