

Uncover the inside tips and tricks of the trade for organizing, correcting, editing, sharpening, retouching, and presenting your photos like a pro



the photoshop[®]
elements10
book

for digital photographers

Scott Kelby and Matt Kloskowski



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book

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THE PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS 10 BOOK FOR **DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHERS**

**The Photoshop Elements
10 Book for Digital
Photographers Team**

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*To my amazingly wonderful 14-year-old son
Jordan, who continues to amaze me with his
compassion, work ethic, integrity, brains, and heart.*

I could not be more proud to be your dad.

—SCOTT

*To my youngest son Justin,
for always making me smile.*

I love you buddy!

—MATT

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS (SCOTT)

In every book I've ever written, I always thank my amazing wife Kalebra first, because I couldn't do any of this without her. In fact, I couldn't do *anything* without her. She's just an incredible woman, an inspiration to me every day, and the only thing more beautiful than how she looks on the outside is what's inside. As anyone who knows me knows, I am the luckiest guy in the world to have made her my wife 22 years ago this year. Thank you, my love, for saying "Yes."

I want to thank my wonderful son Jordan, and the most adorable little girl in the world, my daughter Kira, for putting a smile on my face and a song in my heart, each and every day. Thanks to my big brother Jeff for continuing to be the type of guy I'll always look up to.

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To my wife, Diana: You've been my best friend for 12 years, and I've had the time of my life with you as we enjoy watching our family grow. No matter what the day brings, you always have a smile on your face when I come home. I could never thank you enough for juggling our lives, being such a great mom to our kids, and for being the best wife a guy could ever want.

To my oldest son, Ryan: Your inquisitive personality amazes me and I love sitting down with you for "cuddle" time at night. And even though you always grenade launcher yourself to a win, I enjoy our quality Xbox 360 time. By the way, you're grounded from playing until I get better!

To my youngest son, Justin: I have no doubt that you'll be the class clown one day. No matter what I have on my mind, you always find a way to make me smile. Plus, there's nothing like hearing your eight-year-old shout, "Say hello to my little friend!" as an RPG missile comes flying at you in a video game.

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To Scott Kelby: Having my name on a cover with yours is an honor, but becoming such good friends has truly been a privilege and the ride of my life. I've never met anyone as eager to share their ideas and encourage success in their friends as you are. You've become the greatest mentor and source of inspiration that I've met. More importantly, though, you've become one heck of a good friend. Thanks man!

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To you, the readers: Without you, well...there would be no book. Thanks for your constant support in emails, phone calls, and introductions when I'm out on the road teaching. You guys make it all worth it.

OTHER BOOKS BY SCOTT KELBY

The Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 3 Book for Digital Photographers

Scott Kelby's 7-Point System For Adobe Photoshop CS3

The Digital Photography Book, volumes 1, 2 & 3

Photo Recipes Live: Behind the Scenes

Professional Portrait Retouching Techniques for Photographers Using Photoshop

The Adobe Photoshop CS5 Book for Digital Photographers

The Photoshop Channels Book

Photoshop CS4 Down & Dirty Tricks

The iPhone Book

Mac OS X Leopard Killer Tips

Getting Started with Your Mac and Mac OS X Tiger

OTHER BOOKS BY MATT KLOSKOWSKI

*Photoshop Compositing Secrets: Unlocking the Key to Perfect Selections
& Amazing Photoshop Effects for Totally Realistic Composites*

Layers: The Complete Guide to Photoshop's Most Powerful Feature

The Photoshop Elements 5 Restoration & Retouching Book

Photoshop CS2 Speed Clinic

The Windows Vista Book

Illustrator CS2 Killer Tips

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Scott is a photographer, designer, and an award-winning author of more than 50 books, including *The Digital Photography Book*, volumes 1, 2 & 3, *The Adobe Photoshop Lightroom Book for Digital Photographers*, *The Photoshop Channels Book*, *Scott Kelby's 7-Point System for Adobe Photoshop CS3*, and *The Adobe Photoshop CS5 Book for Digital Photographers*.

Scott's book, *The Digital Photography Book*, vol. 1, is the best-selling book ever on digital photography. In 2010, Scott became the #1 best-selling author across all photography book categories. From 2004–2009, he held the honor of being the world's #1 best-selling author of all computer and technology books, across all categories.

His books have been translated into dozens of different languages, including Chinese, Russian, Spanish, Korean, Polish, Taiwanese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Dutch, Swedish, Turkish, and Portuguese, among others, and he is a recipient of the prestigious Benjamin Franklin Award.

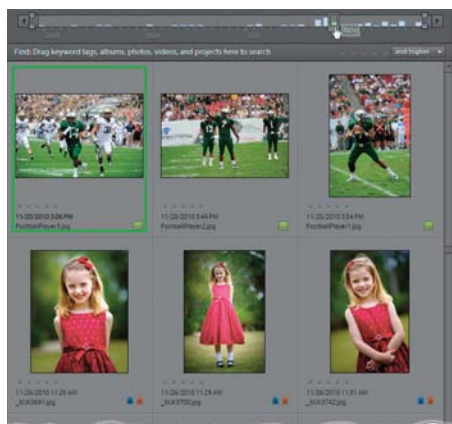
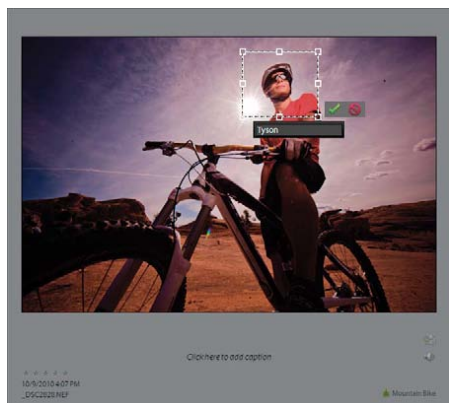
Scott is Training Director for the Adobe Photoshop Seminar Tour and Conference Technical Chair for the Photoshop World Conference & Expo. He's featured in a series of Adobe Photoshop online training courses and DVDs and has been training Adobe Photoshop users since 1993.

For more information on Scott, visit www.scottkelby.com.



Matt Kloskowski

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CHAPTER 1 1

Organized Chaos

Managing Photos Using the Organizer

Importing Your Photos 2

Backing Up Your Photos
to a Disc or Hard Drive 6

Importing Photos from Your Scanner 8

Automating the Importing of Photos
by Using Watched Folders 9

Changing the Size of
Your Photo Thumbnails 10

Seeing Full-Screen Previews 11

Sorting Photos by Date and
Viewing Filenames 13

Adding Scanned Photos?
Enter the Right Time & Date 14

Finding Photos Fast by Their
Month & Year 15

Tagging Your Photos
(with Keyword Tags) 16

Auto Tagging with Smart Tags 19

Tagging Multiple Photos 21

Assigning Multiple Tags
to One Photo 22

Tagging Images of People 23

Sharing Your Keyword Tags
with Others 26

Albums: It's How You Put Photos
in Order One by One 27

Using Smart Albums for
Automatic Organization 28

Choosing Your Own Icons
for Keyword Tags 30

Deleting Keyword Tags or Albums 31

Seeing Your Photo's Metadata (EXIF Info) 32

Adding Your Own Info to Photos 33

Finding Photos 34

Finding Duplicate Photos 37

Finding Photos Using the Date View 39

Seeing an Instant Slide Show 41

Comparing Photos 44

Reducing Clutter by
Stacking Your Photos 46

Sharing Your Photos 48

CHAPTER 2 53
Raw Justice
Processing Your Images Using Camera Raw

Opening RAW, JPEG, and TIFF Photos
into Camera Raw 54

Miss the JPEG Look? Try Applying
a Camera Profile 56

The Essential Adjustments: White Balance 58

The Essential Adjustments #2: Exposure 62

Letting Camera Raw Auto Correct Your Photos 68

The Fix for Shadow Problems: Fill Light 69

Adding “Snap” (or Softening) to
Your Images Using the Clarity Slider 71

Making Your Colors More Vibrant 73

Cropping and Straightening 74

Editing Multiple Photos at Once 78

Saving RAW Files in Adobe’s
Digital Negative (DNG) Format 80

Sharpening in Camera Raw 81

Camera Raw’s Noise Reduction 86

Removing Red Eye in Camera Raw 87

The Trick for Expanding the
Range of Your Photos 89

Black & White Conversions in Camera Raw 93

CHAPTER 3 97
Scream of the Crop
How to Resize and Crop Photos

Cropping Photos 98

Auto-Cropping to Standard Sizes 102

Cropping to an Exact Custom Size 104

Cropping into a Shape 107

Using the Crop Tool to Add More Canvas Area 110

Auto-Cropping Gang-Scanned Photos 112

Straightening Photos with the Straighten Tool 113

Resizing Digital Camera Photos 115

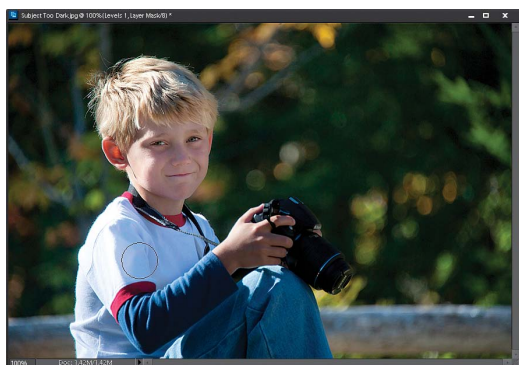
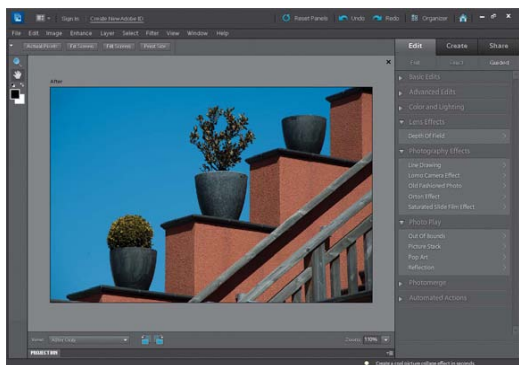
Resizing and How to Reach Those
Hidden Free Transform Handles 118

Making Your Photos Smaller (Downsizing) 119

Automated Saving and Resizing 121

Resizing Just Parts of Your Image
Using the Recompose Tool 123





CHAPTER 4 131

Jonas Sees in Color

Color Correction Secrets

Before You Color Correct Anything,
Do This First! 132

The Advantages of Adjustment Layers 134

Photo Quick Fix 138

Getting a Visual Readout (Histogram)
of Your Corrections 143

Color Correcting Digital Camera Images 144

Dave’s Amazing Trick for Finding
a Neutral Gray 152

Studio Photo Correction Made Simple 154

Adjusting Flesh Tones 156

Warming Up (or Cooling Down) a Photo 159

Color Correcting One Problem Area Fast! 161

Getting a Better Conversion from
Color to Black and White 164

Correcting Color and Contrast
Using Color Curves 169

CHAPTER 5 175

Little Problems

Fixing Common Problems

Using the Smart Brush Tool to
Select and Fix at the Same Time 176

Removing Digital Noise 181

Focusing Light with Digital
Dodging and Burning 183

Opening Up Shadow Areas
That Are Too Dark 188

Fixing Areas That Are Too Bright 190

When Your Subject Is Too Dark 192

Automatic Red-Eye Removal 195

Instant Red-Eye Removal 197

Fixing Problems Caused by
Your Camera’s Lens 199

The Elements Secret to
Fixing Group Shots 203

Blending Multiple Exposures
(a.k.a. Pseudo-HDR Technique) 207

CHAPTER 6 215

Select Start

Selection Techniques

Selecting Square, Rectangular, or Round Areas 216

Saving Your Selections 221

Softening Those Harsh Edges 222

Selecting Areas by Their Color 224

Making Selections Using a Brush 226

Getting Elements to Help You Make Tricky Selections 227

Easier Selections with the Quick Selection Tool 228

Removing People (or Objects) from Backgrounds 230

CHAPTER 7 235

Retouch Me

Retouching Portraits

Quick Skin Tone Fix 236

The Power of Layer Masks 238

Removing Blemishes and Hot Spots 243

Lessening Freckles or Facial Acne 245

Removing Dark Circles Under Eyes 248

Removing or Lessening Wrinkles 250

Brightening the Whites of the Eyes 252

Making Eyes That Sparkle 256

Whitening and Brightening Teeth 259

Repairing Teeth 262

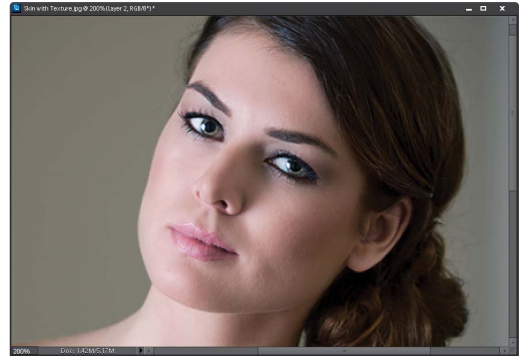
Digital Nose Jobs Made Easy 271

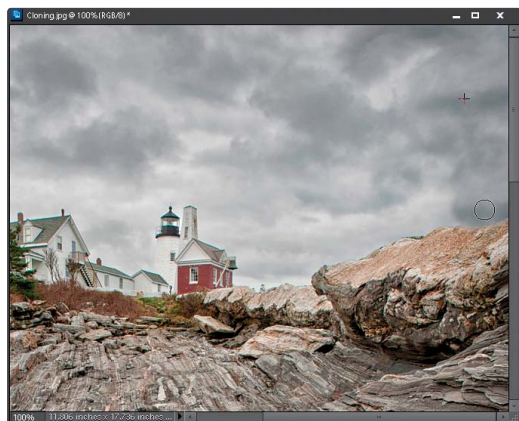
Transforming a Frown into a Smile 273

Slimming and Trimming 275

Advanced Skin Softening 278

Fixing Reflections in Glasses 287





CHAPTER 8	295
Clone Wars	
Removing Unwanted Objects	
Cloning Away Distractions	296
Removing Spots and Other Artifacts	300
Removing Distracting Objects (Healing Brush)	302
The Magic of Content-Aware Fill	306
Automatically Cleaning Up Your Scenes (a.k.a. The Tourist Remover)	310
CHAPTER 9	315
Side Effects	
Special Effects for Photographers	
Automatic Special Effects	316
Creating a Picture Stack Effect	317
The Orton Effect	320
Enhancing Depth of Field	324
Trendy Desaturated Portrait Look	328
Getting the Grungy, High-Contrast Look Right Within Camera Raw	338
Converting to Black and White	341
Panoramas Made Crazy Easy	343
Creating Drama with a Soft Spotlight	346
Burned-In Edge Effect (Vignetting)	349
Using Color for Emphasis	352
The Faded Antique Look	354
Matching Photo Styles	360
Replacing the Sky	364
Neutral Density Gradient Filter	367
Skylight Filter Effect	371
Taming Your Light	373
Creating Photo Collages	375
Scott's Three-Step Portrait Finishing Technique	379
Fake Duotone	384
Simulating Film Grain	386

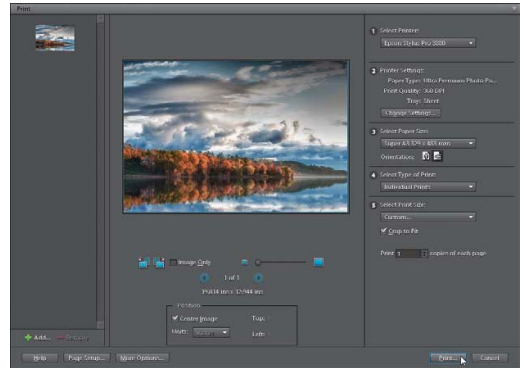
CHAPTER 10 389
Sharpen Your Teeth
Sharpening Techniques

Basic Sharpening 390
Creating Extraordinary Sharpening 397
Luminosity Sharpening 400
Edge Sharpening Technique 403
Advanced Sharpening
Using Adjust Sharpness 406

CHAPTER 11 411
Fine Print
Step-by-Step Printing and Color Management

Setting Up Your
Color Management 412
Calibrating Your Monitor 413
Getting Pro-Quality Prints
That Match Your Screen 416
Making the Print 420
My Elements 10 Workflow
from Start to Finish 425

INDEX 430



THE QUICK Q&A YOU'RE GOING TO WISH YOU READ FIRST

Q. So why am I going to wish I read this first?

A. Because there's a bunch of important stuff found only in here (like where to download the practice files so you can follow along), and if you skip this short Q&A, you'll keep saying things to yourself like, "I wish they had made these photos available for download" or "I wonder if there's a website where I can download these photos?" and stuff like that. But there's more here than that—in fact, this whole section is just to help you get the most out of the book. So, take two minutes and give it a quick read.

Q. Is Matt new to this book?

A. Actually, this is the fifth edition of the book with Matt as my co-author, and I'm thrilled to have him on board (mostly because I gave him all the hard stuff. Okay, that's not the real reason. Just a perk). Matt's one of the leading experts on Elements, was a featured columnist for the *Adobe Photoshop Elements Techniques* newsletter, and along with his online Elements classes, articles, and well...he's "the man" when it comes to Elements 10 (by the way, throughout the book, we just call it "Elements" most of the time—it's just shorter). So, I asked (read as: begged) him to be my co-author, and the book is far better because of his involvement.

Q. How did you split things up?

A. I (Scott) wrote the chapters on Camera Raw, printing, photographic special effects, sharpening, resizing and cropping, and the special workflow tutorial at the end of the printing chapter. Matt provided the chapters on organizing, color correction, image problems, selections, retouching, and removing unwanted objects, as well as a video on showing your work (including using the Create and Share functions).

Q. Is this book for Windows users, Mac users, or both?

A. Elements 10 is available for both Windows and Macintosh, and the two versions are nearly identical. However, there are three keys on the Mac keyboard that have different names from the same keys on a PC keyboard, but don't worry, we give you both the Windows and Mac shortcuts every time we mention a shortcut (which we do a lot).

Q. I noticed you said "nearly identical." What exactly do you mean by "nearly"?

A. Well, here's the thing: the Editor in Photoshop Elements 10 is the same on both platforms, but the Organizer (where we sort and organize our images) was only made available on the Mac starting with Elements 9. As a result, there are some Organizer functions that still aren't available on the Mac yet, and we've noted it in the book wherever this is the case.

Q. What's the deal with the chapter intros?

A. They're actually designed to give you a quick mental break, and honestly, they have little to do with the chapters. In fact, they have little to do with anything, but writing these off-the-wall chapter intros is kind of a tradition of mine (so don't blame Matt—it's not his fault), but if you're one of those really "serious" types, you can skip them because they'll just get on your nerves.

Q. How did you develop the original content for this book?

A. Each year, I'm fortunate enough to train literally thousands of professional digital photographers around the world at my live seminars, and although I'm doing the teaching, at every seminar I always learn something new. Photographers love to share their favorite techniques, and during the breaks between sessions or at lunch, somebody's always showing me how they "get the job done." It's really an amazing way to learn. Plus, and perhaps most importantly, I hear right from their own lips the problems and challenges these photographers are facing in their own work in Elements, so I have a great insight into what photographers really want to learn next. Plus, I'm out there shooting myself, so I'm constantly dealing with my own problems in Elements and developing new ways to make my digital workflow faster, easier, and more fun. That's because (like you) I want to spend less time sitting behind a computer screen and more time doing what I love best—shooting! So as soon as I come up with a new trick, or if I learn a slick new way of doing something, I just can't wait to share it with other photographers. It's a sickness, I know.

Q. So what's not in this book?

A. We tried not to put things in this book that are already in every other Elements book out there. For example, we don't have a chapter on the Layers palette or a chapter on the painting tools or a chapter showing how each of Elements' 110 filters look when applied to the same photograph. We just focused on the most important, most asked-about, and most useful things for digital photographers. In short—it's the funk and not the junk.

Q. So where are the photos we can download and the video?

A. You can download the photos and watch the video on showing your work at <http://kelbytraining.com/books/elements10>. Of course, the whole idea is that you'd use these techniques on your own photos, but if you want to practice on ours, we won't tell anybody. Although Matt and I shot most of the images you'll be downloading, I asked our friends over at iStockphoto.com and Fotolia.com to lend us some of their work, especially for the portrait retouching chapter (it's really hard to retouch photos of people you know, and still be on speaking terms with them after the book is published). So, I'm very grateful to iStockphoto.com and Fotolia.com for lending us (you, we, etc.) their images, and I'm particularly thankful they let us (you) download low-res versions of their photos used here in the book, so you can practice on them, as well. Please visit their sites—they've got really great communities going on there, and it wouldn't hurt if you gave them a great big sack of money while you're there. At the very least, make a stock shot of a big stack of money and upload that. It might turn into an actual big stack of money.

Q. Okay, so where should I start?

A. You can treat this as a "jump-in-anywhere" book because we didn't write it as a "build-on-what-you-learned-in-Chapter-1" type of book. For example, if you just bought this book, and you want to learn how to whiten someone's teeth for a portrait you're retouching, you can just turn to Chapter 7, find that technique, and you'll be able to follow along and do it immediately. That's because we spell everything out. So if you're a more advanced Elements user, don't let it throw you that we say stuff like "Go under the Image menu, under Adjust Color, and choose Levels" rather than just writing "Open Levels." We did that so everybody could follow along no matter where they are in the Elements experience. Okay, that's the scoop. Thanks for taking a few minutes to read this, and now it's time to turn the page and get to work.



Photographer: Matt Kloskowski

Exposure: 1/200

Focal Length: 52mm

Aperture Value: *f/9*



Jonas Sees in Color

color correction secrets

As soon as I saw this album title, I knew I had to use it, because my five-year-old daughter is a big fan of the Jonas Brothers (which on some level should make the Jonas Brothers sad, not only because I doubt that their goal was a fan base that still rides a trike, but because by the time she's seven, they will already be "old news" to her, and when I bring up their name, she'll look at me like I'm "forty-a-hundred," which is how old she thinks I am anyway). Anyway, I knew this was a lock for the title, but then I clicked on the album cover, fully expecting to see Kevin, Joe, and Nick Jonas (familiar faces in our home), but instead it was a totally different band. In fact, the name of the band was also Jonas Sees in Color. You see, I "assumed" that because the word Jonas was in there, that it would be the title of a Jonas Brothers album, but that's what happens when you assume (what's that old saying, "When you assume,

that makes a sum of a and e"?). Anyway, I wondered on some level if, with that name, the band was trying to do the same thing with their name that some companies do with their product names, so someone not paying close attention might, for example, buy a Buckstar bag of coffee off the grocer's shelf, when they thought they were buying Starbucks, because of the sound-alike name and the package's similar look and feel. If that were the case, then someone looking to buy a Jonas Brothers song might actually buy one from Jonas Sees in Color, but in this case, it's entirely possible they might like the Jonas Sees in Color songs better (hey, don't bank your career on the attention span of a five-year-old). This got me to thinking, and long story short—that's precisely why I changed my pen name to J. Kelby Rowling, and my next book is titled *Harry Porter and the Odor of the Pen Tool*.

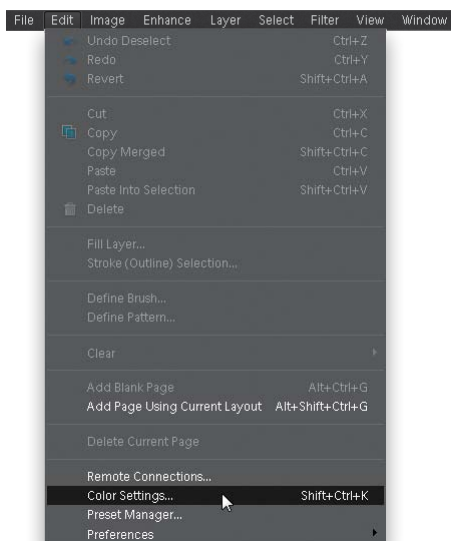


Before You Color Correct Anything, Do This First!

Okay, before you start along your merry color correcting way, there are a couple of settings that you should consider changing. These settings can definitely affect the results you get, so make sure you read this first. Also, keep in mind that these changes will remain as your defaults until you change them again, so you don't have to do this each time you open Elements.

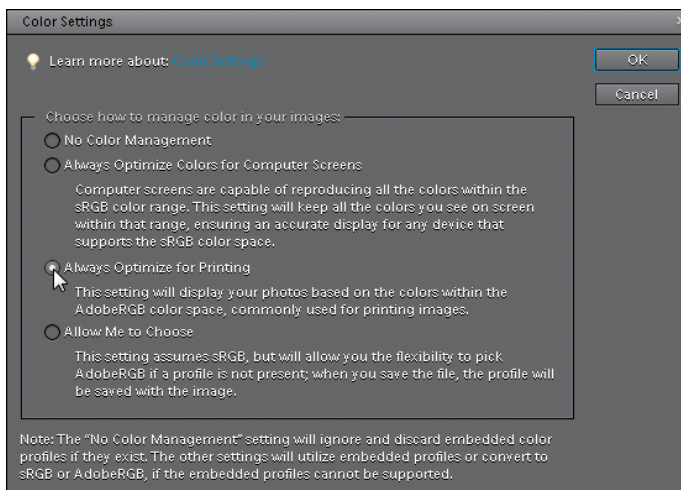
Step One:

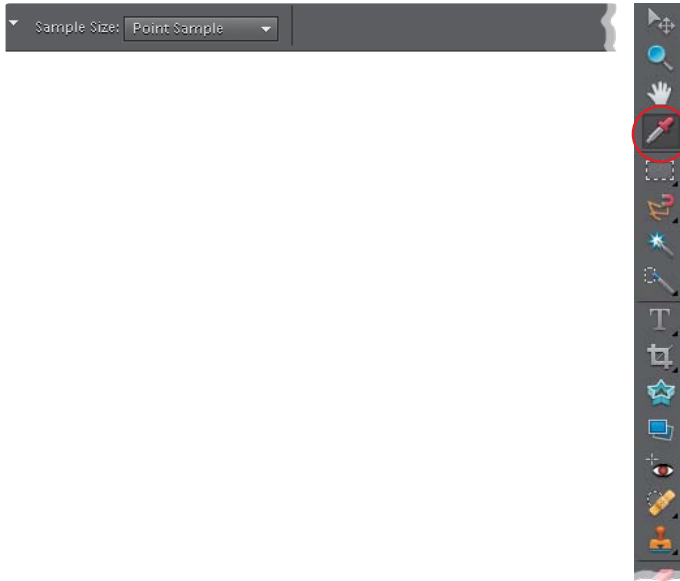
From the Edit menu, choose **Color Settings** (or press **Ctrl-Shift-K** [Mac: **Command-Shift-K**]).



Step Two:

In the Color Settings dialog, choose from the four options: No Color Management, Always Optimize Colors for Computer Screens, Always Optimize for Printing, or Allow Me to Choose. To a large degree, your choice will depend on your final output; but for photographers, I recommend using Always Optimize for Printing because it reproduces such a wide range (a.k.a. gamut) of colors using the Adobe RGB profile (if your photos don't already have a profile assigned), and it's ideal if your photos will wind up in print. **Note:** For more on color management, see Chapter 11.





Step Three:

Now we're moving to a completely different area. Press the letter **I** to switch to the Eyedropper tool. In the Options Bar, the default Sample Size setting for this tool (Point Sample) is fine for using the Eyedropper to steal a color from within a photo and make it your Foreground color. However, Point Sample doesn't work well when you're trying to read values in a particular area (such as flesh tones), because it gives you the reading from just one individual pixel, rather than an average reading of the surrounding area under your cursor.

Step Four:

For example, flesh tones are actually composed of dozens of different colored pixels (just zoom way in and you'll see what I mean); and if you're color correcting, you want a reading that's representative of the area under your Eyedropper, not just a single pixel within that area, which could hurt your correction decision-making. That's why you need to go to the Options Bar, under the Sample Size pop-up menu, and choose **3 by 3 Average**. This changes the Eyedropper to give you a reading that's the average of 3 pixels across and 3 pixels down in the area that you're sampling. Once you've completed the changes on these two pages, it's safe to go ahead with the rest of the chapter and start color correcting your photos.

The Advantages of Adjustment Layers

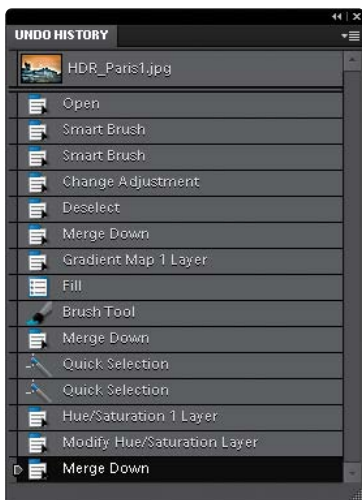
Before we really dive into color, we need to spend two minutes with the Adjustments palette. Of all the enhancements in Elements 8, the Adjustments palette was at the top of the list, because it streamlined our workflow so dramatically that even if you had never used adjustment layers before, you had to start working with them. In fact, from this point in the book on, we're going to try to use adjustment layers every chance we get, because of all the advantages they bring. Here's a quick look at them and why we need them:

Advantage One: Undos That Live Forever

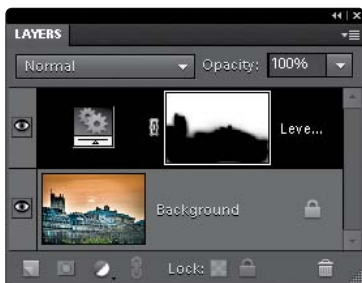
By default, Elements keeps track of the last 50 things you've done in the Undo History palette (from the window menu, choose **Undo History** to open it), so if you need to undo a step, or two, or three, etc., you can press **Ctrl-Z** (**Mac: Command-Z**) up to 50 times. But, when you close your document, all those undos go away. However, when you make an edit using an adjustment layer (like a Levels adjustment), you can save your image as a layered file (just save it in Photoshop format), and your adjustment layers are saved right along with it. You can reopen that document days, weeks, or even years later, click on that adjustment layer, and either undo or change that Levels (or whatever other one you used) adjustment. It's like an undo that lives forever.

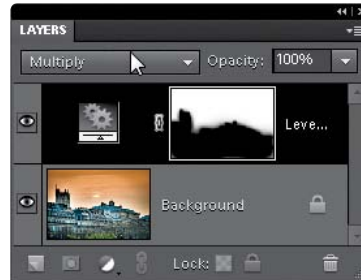
Advantage Two: Built-In Masks

Each adjustment layer comes with a built-in layer mask, so you can easily decide which parts of your photo get the adjustment just by painting. If you want to keep an area of your photo from having the adjustment, just get the Brush tool (**B**) and paint over it in black. There's more on layer masks to come. They offer tremendous flexibility, and since they don't actually affect the pixels in your image, they're always undoable.



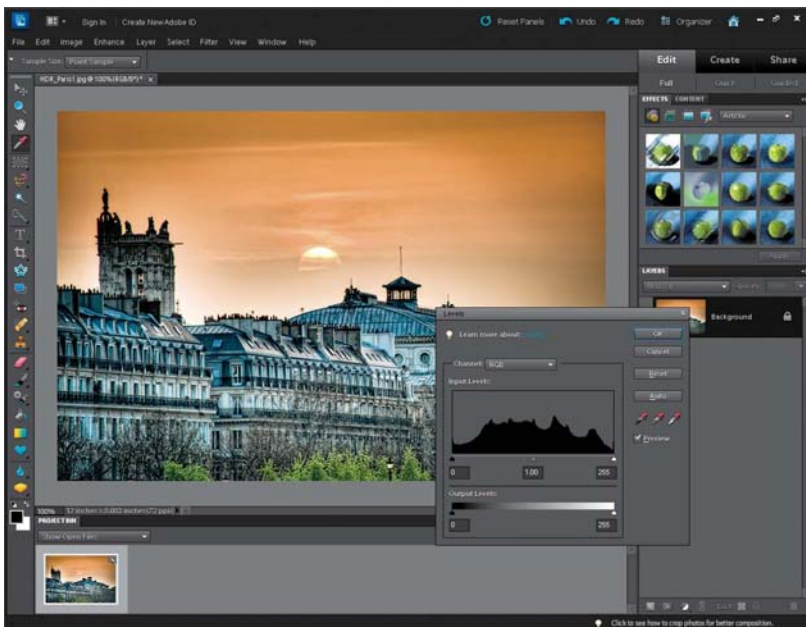
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Advantage Three: Blend Modes

When you apply an adjustment layer, you get to use the layer blend modes. So if you want a darker version of your adjustment, you can just change the layer blend mode of your adjustment layer to Multiply. Want a brighter version? Change it to Screen. Want to make a Levels adjustment that doesn't affect the skin tone as much? Change it to Luminosity. Sweet!



Advantage Four: Everything Stays Live

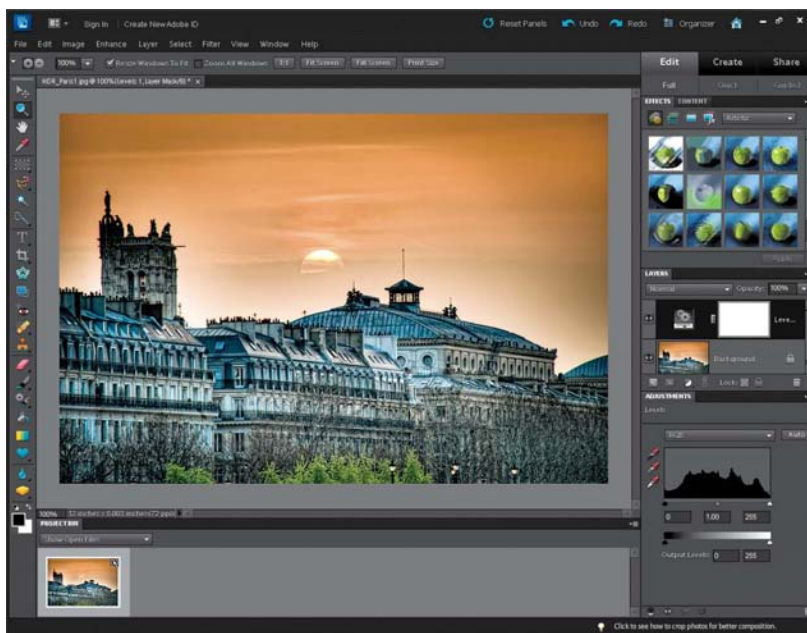
Back in previous versions of Elements, when you created an adjustment layer (let's say a Levels adjustment layer, for example), it would bring up the floating dialog (like the Levels dialog seen here). While it was onscreen, the rest of Elements was frozen—you couldn't make changes or do anything else until you closed the dialog by either applying your adjustment or clicking Cancel. But thanks to the Adjustments palette, everything stays live—you just go to the Adjustments palette (which will open when you add an adjustment layer) and make your changes there. There is no OK or Apply button, so you can change anything anytime. This will make more sense in the next step.

Continued



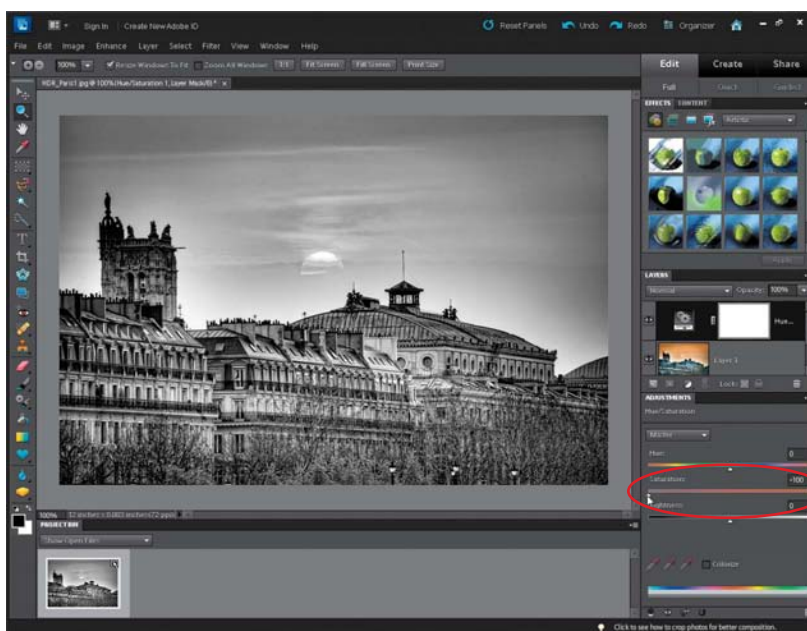
Step One:

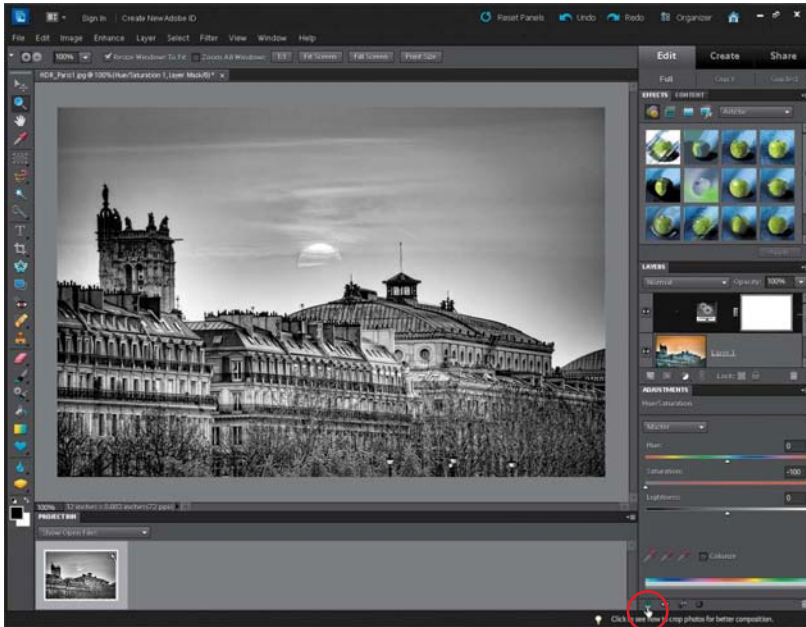
The best way to understand this whole “live” thing is to try it, so go open any photo (it really doesn’t matter which one), then click on the Create New Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers palette (it’s the half-black/half-white circle) and choose **Levels** from the pop-up menu to open the Adjustments palette. Rather than bringing up the Levels dialog in front of your image (and freezing everything else), the Adjustments palette displays the Levels controls, so you can make your adjustments while everything stays live—you can adjust your Levels sliders, go up to the Layers palette and change the blend mode of a layer, or paint a few brush strokes, then grab another slider and adjust it. There’s no OK button, and again, everything stays live. This is bigger than it sounds (ask anyone who has used an earlier version of Elements).



Step Two:

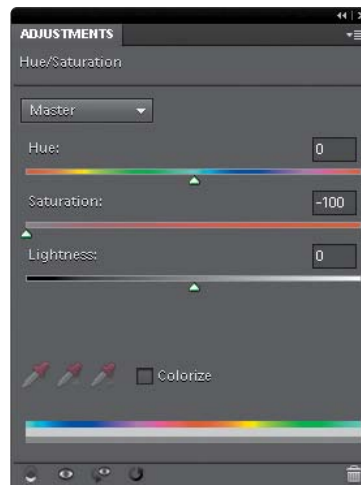
Let’s delete our Levels adjustment layer by clicking-and-dragging it onto the Trash icon at the bottom of the Layers palette, and then let’s add a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer by clicking on the Create New Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the palette again, but this time choose **Hue/Saturation** from the pop-up menu. When the Hue/Saturation controls appear in the Adjustments palette, drag the Saturation slider all the way over to the left to remove the color, for the look you see here.





Step Three:

Now, the way adjustment layers work is this: they affect every layer below them. So, if you have five layers below your active layer, all five layers will have their color desaturated like this. However, if you want this adjustment layer to just affect the one single layer directly below the active layer (and not the others), then click on the clipping icon (it's the first icon on the left at the bottom of the Adjustments palette, shown circled here in red). This clips the adjustment layer to the layer directly beneath it and now the adjustment layer will only affect that layer.



Step Four:

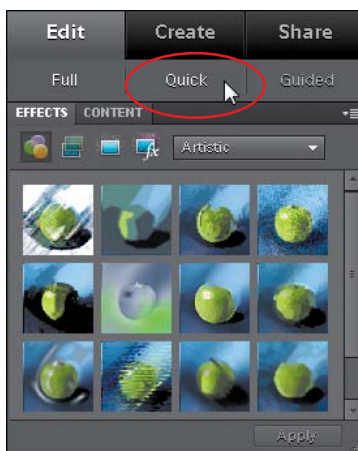
There are some other options when working with adjustment layers: To edit any adjustment layer you've already created, just click on it once in the Layers palette and its controls will appear in the Adjustments palette. To hide any adjustment layer you've created, click on the Eye icon (either at the bottom of the Adjustments palette, or to the left of the adjustment layer itself in the Layers palette). To reset any adjustment layer controls to their default settings, click the round arrow icon (the fourth from the left) at the bottom of the Adjustments palette. To see a before/after of just your last adjustment layer change, click the icon to the left of the Reset icon.

Photo Quick Fix

Elements' Quick Fix does exactly what it says. It quickly fixes your photos and it's a great tool if you don't have a lot of experience with color correction or fixing lighting and tonal issues. Basically, if you know that something is wrong but you're not sure where to go, then give Quick Fix a try first. As you become more comfortable in Elements, you'll outgrow Quick Fix and want to use Levels and Unsharp Mask and all that cool stuff, but if you're new to Elements, Quick Fix can be a fantastic place to start.

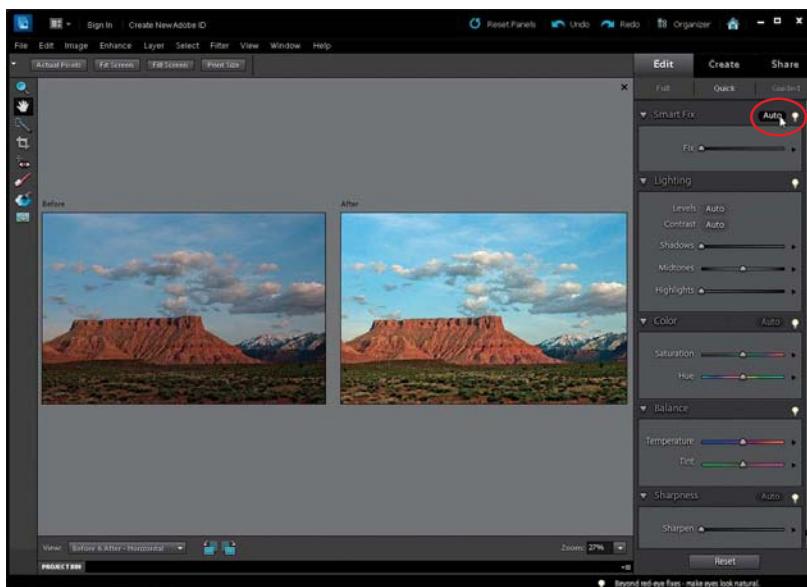
Step One:

Open the photo that needs color correcting (in the example we'll use here, our photo [shown below] needs the works—color correction, more contrast, and some sharpening). So, click on Quick at the top of the Edit tab to go to Quick Fix mode.

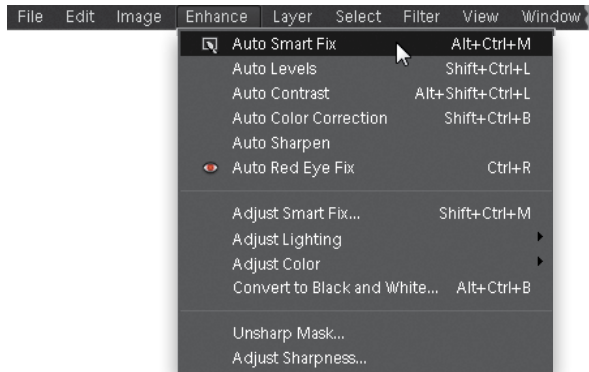


Step Two:

The Quick Fix window will show you side-by-side, before-and-after versions of the photo you're about to correct (before on the top or left, after on the bottom or right). To see this view, go to the View pop-up menu at the bottom left of the window and select **Before & After (Horizontal or Vertical)**. To the right of your side-by-side preview is a group of nested palettes offering tonal and lighting fixes you can perform on your photo. Start with the Smart Fix palette at the top. Click the Auto button and Smart Fix will automatically analyze the photo and try to balance the overall tone (adjusting the shadows and highlights), fixing any obvious color casts while it's at it. In most cases, this feature does a surprisingly good job. There's also a Fix slider within Smart Fix that you can use to increase (or decrease) the effect of the Smart Fix.

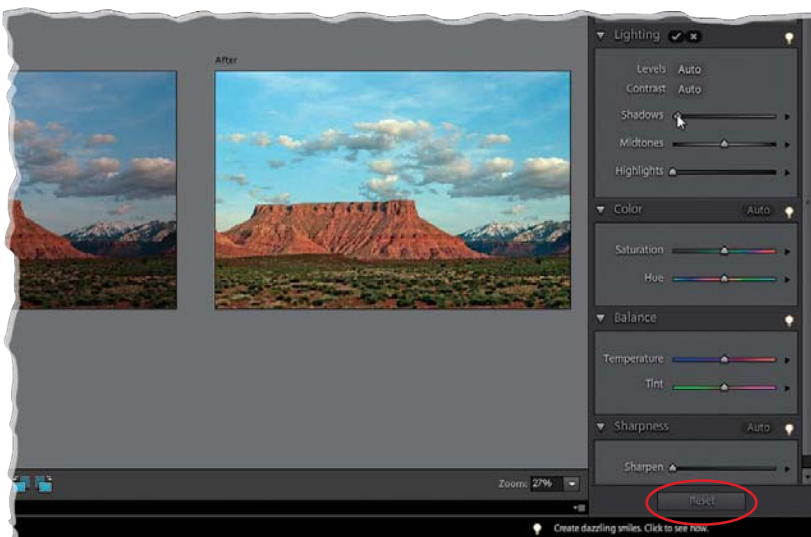


MATT KLOSKOWSKI



TIP: Auto Smart Fix

By the way, you can also access the Auto Smart Fix command without entering Quick Fix mode by going under the Enhance menu and choosing **Auto Smart Fix** (or just press the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl-Alt-M [Mac: Command-Option-M]**). However, there are two advantages to applying the Smart Fix here in Quick Fix mode: (1) you get the Fix slider, which you don't get by just applying it from the menu or the shortcut; and (2) you get a side-by-side, before-and-after preview so you can see the results as you're making your edits. So if it turns out that you need additional fixes (or Smart Fix didn't work as well as you'd hoped), you're already in the right place.



Step Three:

If you apply Smart Fix and you're not happy with the results, don't try to stack more "fixes" on top of that—instead, click the Reset button that appears at the bottom of the Palette Bin to reset the photo to how it looked when you first entered Quick Fix mode. If the color in your photo looks a little flat and needs more contrast, try the Levels Auto button, found in the Lighting palette (the second palette down). I generally stay away from Auto Contrast, as Auto Levels seems to do a better job. There's another very powerful tool in this palette—the Shadows slider. Drag it to the right a little bit, and watch how it opens up the dark shadow areas in your photo (mainly in the rock and ground here). When you're done with the slider, click the Commit check mark in the palette header.

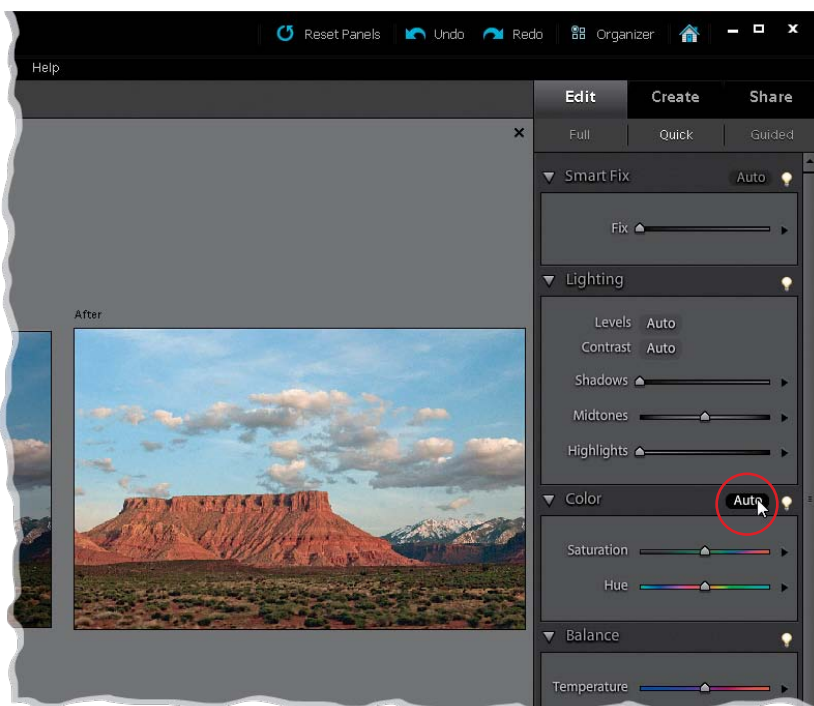
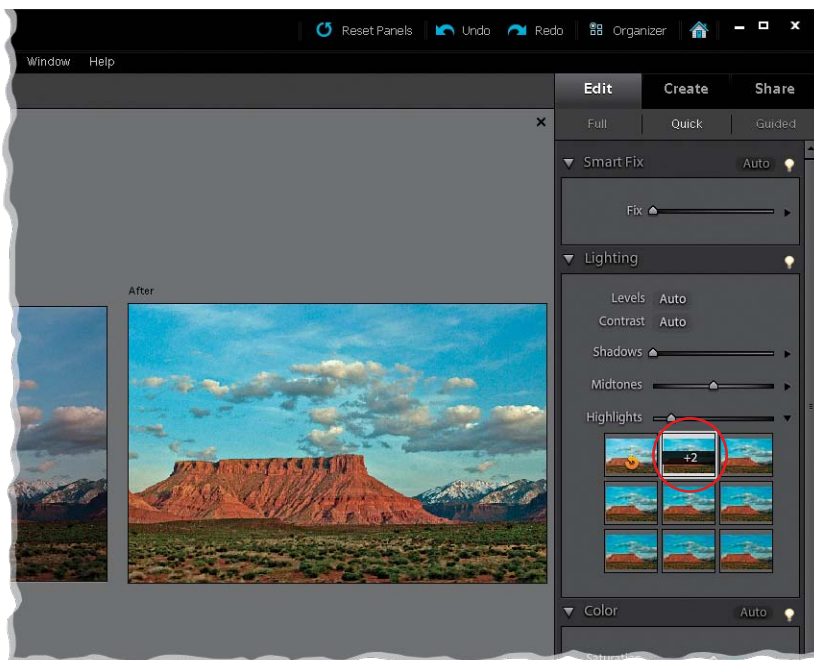
Continued

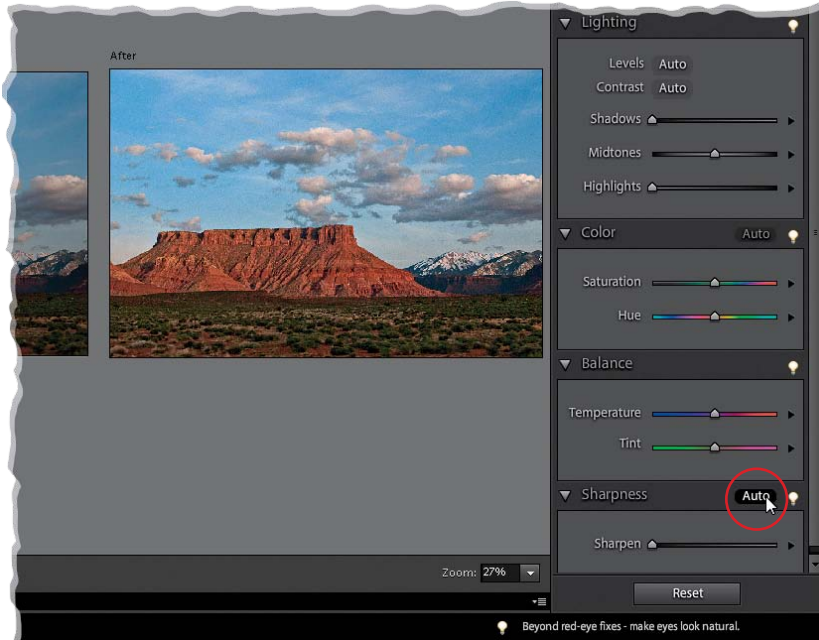
Step Four:

You'll notice a right-facing arrow to the right of each slider in Quick Fix. Just click on an arrow and a group of thumbnails will appear below the slider. As you hover your cursor over each thumbnail, you'll see a preview of your image with that setting, so you don't have to drag the slider back and forth. If you like one, but want just a little more (or less) of the setting, click-and-drag from side to side on a thumbnail to move the slider in increments of 1. This lets you adjust each setting in a more visual (and sometimes precise) way. Now, on to more Quick Fixing.

Step Five:

The next palette down, Color, has an Auto button that (surprisingly enough) tries to remove color casts and improve contrast like Smart Fix and Levels do, but it goes a step further by including a midtones correction that can help reduce color casts in the midtone areas. Hit the Reset button to remove any corrections you've made up to this point, and then try the Auto button in the Color palette. See if the grays in the photo don't look grayer and less red. In fact, with this photo, everything looks cooler and less red. Here's the thing, though: just because it looks cooler doesn't mean that it's right. Elements is just trying to neutralize the photo. In this case, I personally like the warmer feel, but it's a creative choice by you at this point. The Saturation and Hue sliders here are mostly for creating special color effects (try them and you'll see what I mean). You can pretty much ignore these sliders unless you want to get "freaky" with your photos. In the Balance palette, the Temperature and Tint sliders will let you manually remove color casts, but honestly, the Auto button in the Color palette is probably going to be your best bet.





Step Six:

After you've color corrected your photo (using the Auto buttons and the occasional slider), the final step is to sharpen your photo (by the way, to maintain the best quality, this should be the final step—the last thing you do in your correction process). Just click the Auto button in the Sharpness palette and watch the results. If the photo isn't sharp enough for you, drag the Sharpen slider to the right to increase the amount of sharpening, but be careful—oversharpening can ruin the photo by becoming too obvious, and it can introduce color shifts and "halos" around objects.



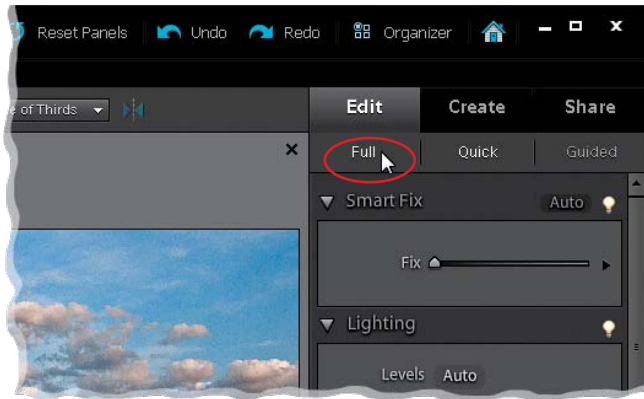
Step Seven:

There are a few other things you can do while you're here (think of this as a one-stop shop for quickly fixing images). Below the Preview area are icons you can click to rotate your photo (this photo doesn't need to be rotated, but hey, ya never know). In the Toolbox on the left, there's a Red Eye Removal tool, if your photo needs it. Just click-and-drag over the problem area in your After preview for red-eye control. The Toolbox also has tools for whitening teeth, making skies blue, and making your photo black and white, but you'll probably find you like other techniques shown in this book for those tasks better. You know what the Zoom and Hand tools do (they zoom you in, and then move you around), and you can also crop your photo by using the Crop tool within the After preview, so go ahead and crop your photo down a bit, if needed. Lastly, you can make a selection with the Quick Selection tool.

Continued

Step Eight:

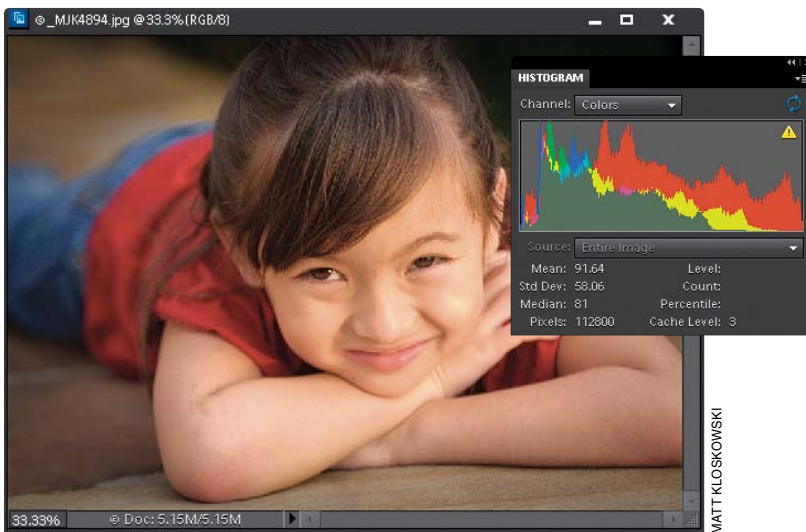
Okay, you've color corrected, fixed the contrast, sharpened your image, and even cropped it down to size (if it needed it). So how do you leave Quick Fix mode and return to the regular Elements Editor? Just click on Full at the top of the Edit tab (the same area you went to, to get into Quick Fix mode). It basically applies all the changes to your photo and returns you to the normal editing mode.

*Before**After*



A histogram is a graph that shows you the tonal range of your photos (lights, darks, and grays). It's usually seen in the Levels dialog, but here's the thing: as you make Levels adjustments, the histogram there isn't updated live. That's why there's a palette dedicated to showing the histogram. That means you can have it open while you're making adjustments to your photos and get a live reading of how your histogram is looking while you edit.

Getting a Visual Readout (Histogram) of Your Corrections



Step One:

Open the photo that needs a tonal adjustment. Now, go under the Window menu and choose **Histogram** to open the Histogram palette. (By the way, this palette is only available in Elements' Full Edit mode—not in Quick Fix mode.)

Step Two:

Go under the Enhance menu and choose **Auto Smart Fix**. Take a look in the Histogram palette and you'll see how the Auto Smart Fix command affected the photo's histogram. *Note:* If you see a small symbol in the upper right-hand corner of the graph that looks like a tiny yellow yield sign with an exclamation point in it (as seen in Step One), that's a warning that the histogram you're seeing is not a new histogram—it's a previous histogram cached from memory. To see a fresh histogram, click directly on that warning symbol and a new reading will be generated based on your current adjustment.



Color Correcting Digital Camera Images

Ever wonder why the term “color correction” gets thrown around so much? That’s because every digital camera (and even most scanners used for capturing traditional photos) puts its little signature (i.e., color cast) on your photos. Most times it’s a red cast, but it can also be blue or green. Don’t get me wrong—they are getting better, but the color cast is still there. Here’s how to help combat those color problems in Elements:

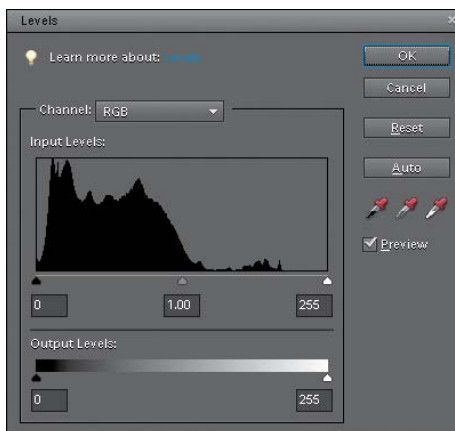
Step One:

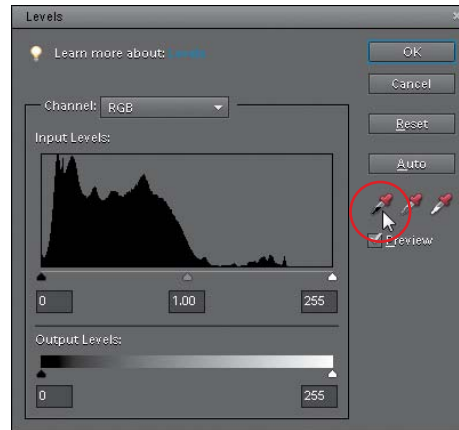
Open the digital camera photo you want to color correct.



Step Two:

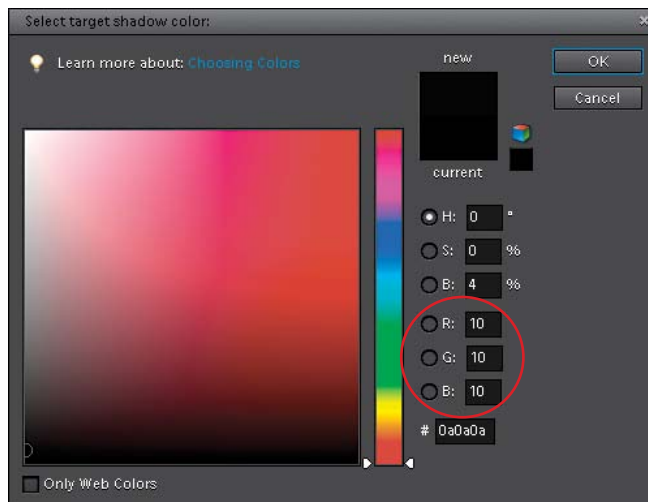
Go under the Enhance menu, under Adjust Lighting, and choose **Levels** (or press **Ctrl-L [Mac: Command-L]**). The dialog may look intimidating at first, but the technique you’re going to learn here requires no previous knowledge of Levels, and it’s so easy, you’ll be correcting photos using Levels immediately.





Step Three:

First, we need to set some preferences in the Levels dialog so we'll get the results we're after when we start correcting. We'll start by setting a target color for our shadow areas. To set this preference, in the Levels dialog, double-click on the black Eyedropper tool (it's on the right-hand side of the dialog, the first Eyedropper from the left). A Color Picker will appear asking you to "Select target shadow color." This is where we'll enter values that, when applied, will help remove any color casts your camera introduced in the shadow areas of your photo.



Step Four:

We're going to enter values in the R, G, and B (red, green, and blue) fields of this dialog.

For R, enter 10

For G, enter 10

For B, enter 10

TIP: Tab to Change Fields

To move from field to field, just press the **Tab** key.

Then click OK. Because these figures are evenly balanced (neutral), they help ensure that your shadow areas won't have too much of one color (which is exactly what causes a color cast—too much of one color).

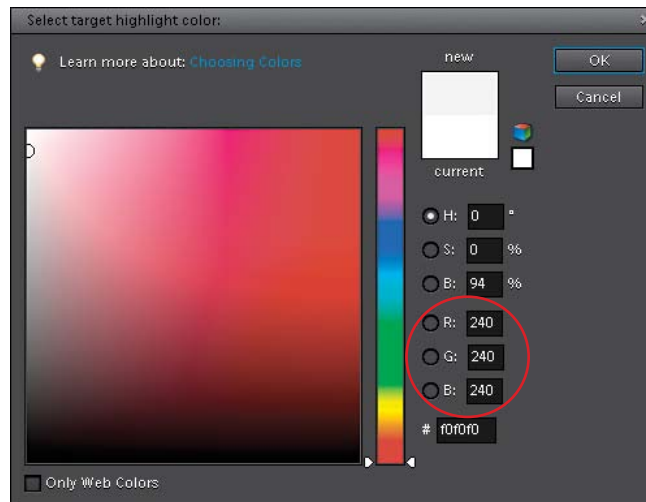
Continued

**Step Five:**

Now we'll set a preference to make our highlight areas neutral. Double-click on the highlight Eyedropper (the third of the three Eyedroppers in the Levels dialog). The Color Picker will appear asking you to "Select target highlight color." Enter these values:

For R, enter 240
For G, enter 240
For B, enter 240

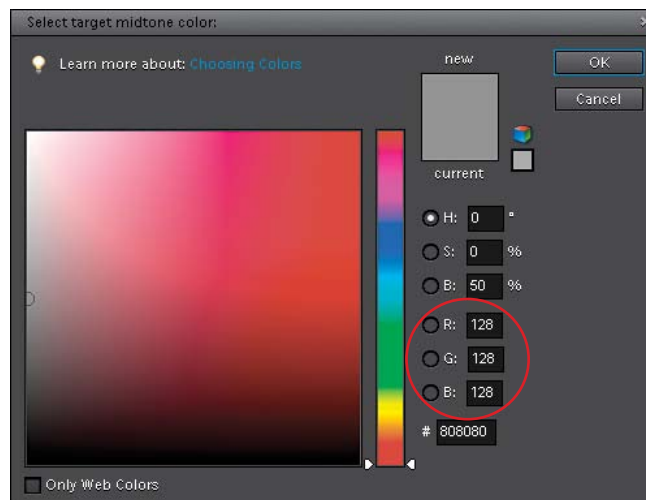
Then click OK to set those values as your highlight target.

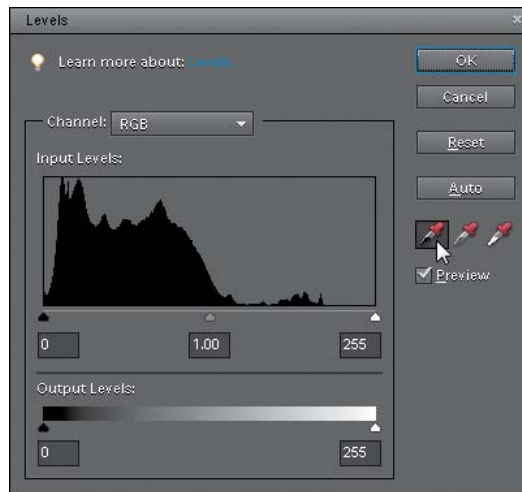
**Step Six:**

Finally, set your midtone preference. You know the drill—double-click on the midtones Eyedropper (the middle of the three Eyedroppers) so you can "Select target midtone color." Enter these values in the R, G, and B fields (if they're not already there by default):

For R, enter 128
For G, enter 128
For B, enter 128

Then click OK to set those values as your midtone target.





Step Seven:

Okay, you've entered your preferences (target colors), so go ahead and click OK in the Levels dialog (without making any changes to your image). You'll get an alert dialog asking you if you want to "Save the new target colors as defaults?" Click Yes, and from that point on, you won't have to enter these values each time you correct a photo, because they'll already be entered for you—they're now the default settings.

Step Eight:

You're going to use these Eyedropper tools that reside in the Levels dialog to do most of your correction work. Your job is to determine where the shadow, midtone, and highlight areas are, and click the right Eyedropper in the right place (you'll learn how to do that in just a moment). So remember your job—find the shadow, midtone, and highlight areas and click the right Eyedropper in the right spot. Sounds easy, right? It is. You start by opening Levels again, and setting the shadows first, so you'll need to find an area in your photo that's supposed to be black. If you can't find something that's supposed to be the color black, then it gets a bit trickier—in the absence of something black, you have to determine which area in the image is the darkest. If you're not sure where the darkest part of the photo is, you can use the following trick to have Elements tell you exactly where it is.

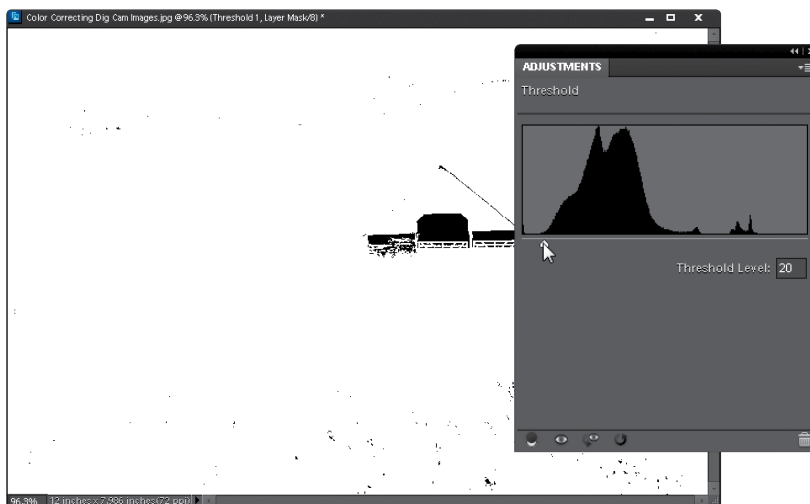
Step Nine:

Go to the bottom of the Layers palette and click on the half-black/half-white circle icon to bring up the Create New Adjustment Layer pop-up menu. When the pop-up menu appears, choose **Threshold**, which brings up the Adjustments palette with a histogram and a slider.

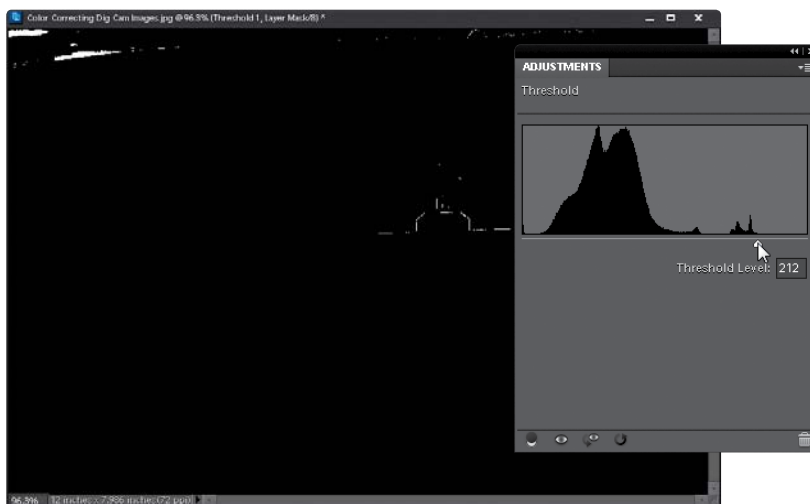
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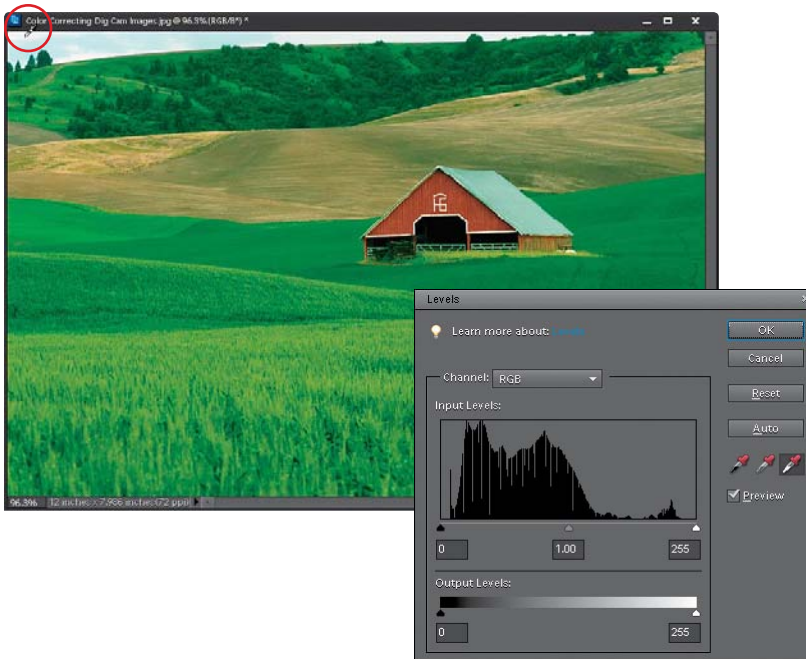
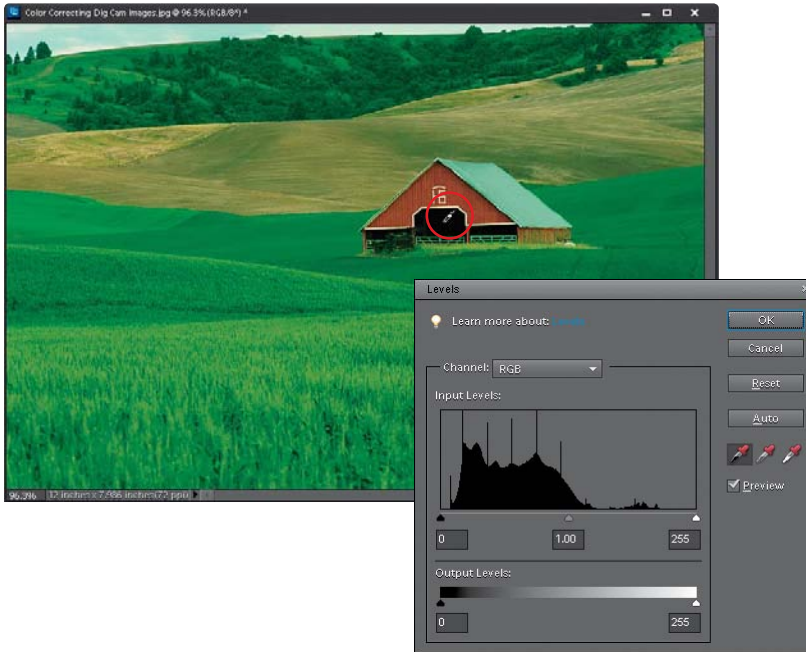
Step 10:

In the Adjustments palette, drag the Threshold Level slider under the histogram all the way to the left. Your photo will turn completely white. Slowly drag the slider back to the right, and as you do, you'll start to see some of your photo reappear. The first area that appears is the darkest part of your image. That's it—that's Elements telling you exactly where the darkest part of the image is. Now that you know where your shadow area is, make a mental note of its location. Next, find a white area in your image.

**Step 11:**

If you can't find an area in your image that you know is supposed to be white, you can use the same technique to find the highlight areas. With the Adjustments palette still open, drag the slider all the way to the right. Your photo will turn black. Slowly drag the slider back toward the left, and as you do, you'll start to see some of your photo reappear. The first area that appears is the lightest part of your image. Make a mental note of this area, as well (yes, you have to remember two things, but you have to admit, it's easier than remembering two PINs). You're now done with Threshold, so in the Layers palette, just click-and-drag the Threshold adjustment layer onto the Trash icon at the bottom of the palette, because you don't actually need it anymore.



**Step 12:**

Press Ctrl-L (Mac: Command-L) to bring up the Levels dialog again. First, select the shadow Eyedropper (the one half-filled with black) from the right side of the Levels dialog. Move your cursor outside the Levels dialog into your photo and click once in the area that Elements showed you was the darkest part of the photo (in Step 10). When you click there, you'll see the shadow areas correct. (Basically, you just reassigned the shadow areas to your new neutral shadow color—the one you entered earlier as a preference in Step Four.) If you click in that spot and your photo now looks horrible, you either clicked in the wrong spot or what you thought was the shadow point actually wasn't. Undo the setting of your shadow point by clicking the Reset button in the dialog and try again. If that doesn't work, don't sweat it; just keep clicking in areas that look like the darkest part of your photo until it looks right.

Step 13:

While still in the Levels dialog, click on the highlight Eyedropper (the one half-filled with white). Move your cursor over your photo and click once on the lightest part (the one you committed to memory in Step 11) to assign that as your highlight. You'll see the high-light colors correct.

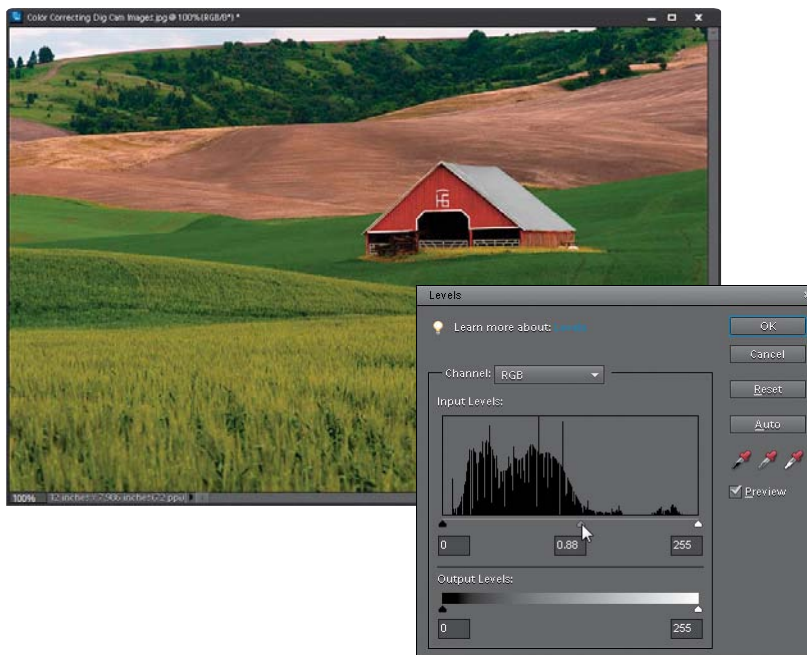
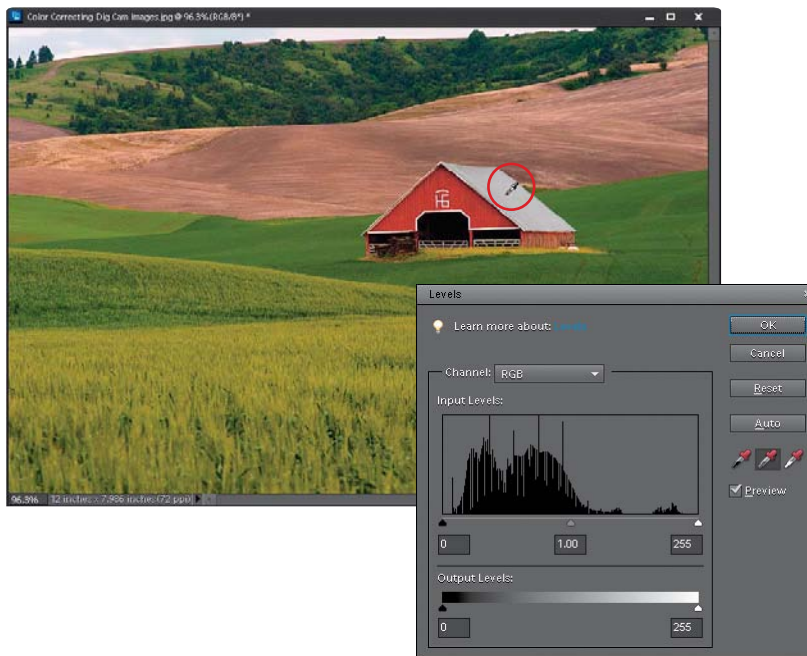
Continued

Step 14:

Now that the shadows and highlights are set, you'll need to set the mid-tones in the photo. It may not look as if you need to set them, because the photo may look properly corrected, but chances are there's a cast in the midtone areas. You may not recognize the cast until you've corrected it and it's gone, so it's worth giving it a shot to see the effect (which will often be surprisingly dramatic). Unfortunately, there's no Threshold adjustment layer trick that works well for finding the midtone areas, so you have to use some good old-fashioned guesswork (or try "Dave's Amazing Trick for Finding a Neutral Gray" next in this chapter). Ideally, there's something in the photo that's gray, but not every photo has a "gray" area, so look for a neutral area (one that's obviously not a shadow, but not a highlight either). Click the middle (gray) Eyedropper in that area. If it's not right, click the Reset button and repeat Steps 12 through 14.

Step 15:

There's one more important adjustment to make before you click OK in the Levels dialog and apply your correction. Under the histogram (that's the black mountain-range-looking thing), click on the center slider (the Midtone Input Levels slider—that's why it's gray) and drag it to the right a bit to darken the midtones of the image. This is a visual adjustment, so it's up to you to determine how much to adjust, but it should be subtle—just enough to bring out the midtone detail. When it looks right to you, click OK to apply your correction to the highlights, midtones, and shadows, removing any color casts and brightening the overall contrast.





Before



After

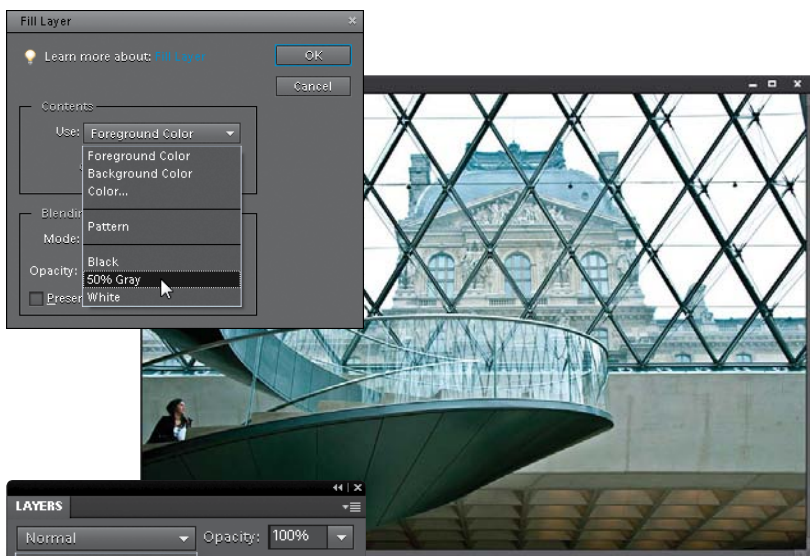


Dave's Amazing Trick for Finding a Neutral Gray

If you read the previous tutorial and are saying to yourself, “But what about that middle gray eyedropper? How do I accurately set that point?” you’re not alone. It has always been kind of tricky actually, but Dave Cross, Lead Instructor for the National Association of Photoshop Professionals (NAPP) and one of the Photoshop Guys, showed us this amazing trick. Being the friendly Canadian that he is, he even offered to let us include it in the book so everyone else can see it, as well.

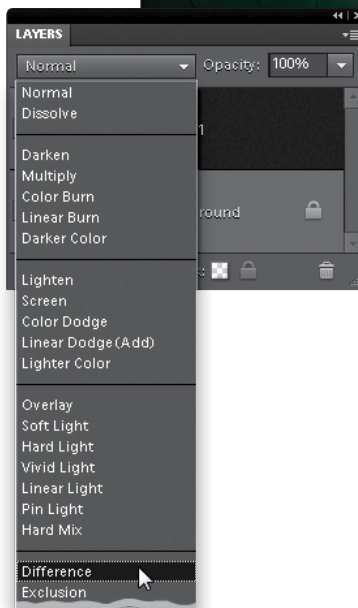
Step One:

Open any color photo and click on the Create a New Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers palette to create a new blank layer. Then, go under the Edit menu and choose **Fill Layer**. When the Fill Layer dialog appears, in the Contents section, from the Use pop-up menu, choose **50% Gray**, and then click OK to fill your new layer with (you guessed it) 50% gray.

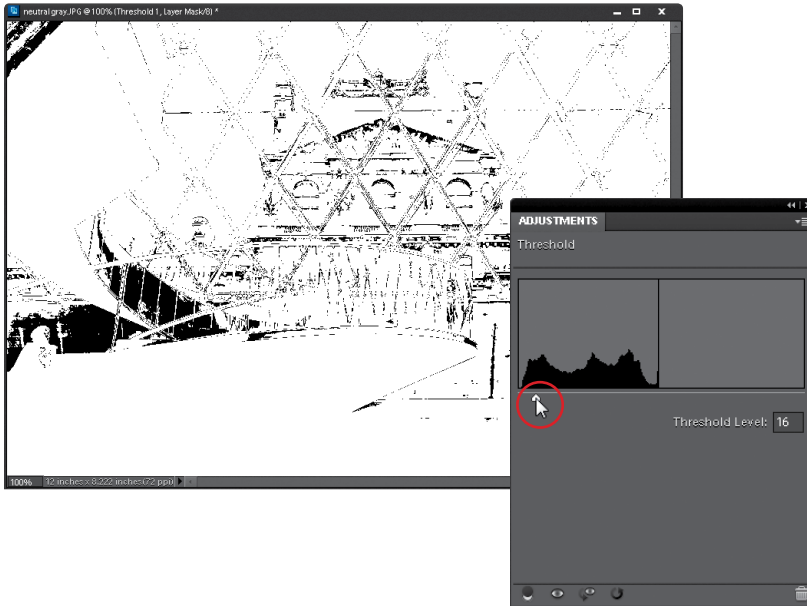


Step Two:

Now, go to the Layers palette and change the blend mode pop-up menu to **Difference**. Changing this layer’s blend mode to Difference doesn’t do much for the look of your photo (in fact, it rarely does), but just remember—it’s only temporary.



MATT KLOSKOWSKI



Step Three:

Choose **Threshold** from the Create New Adjustment Layer pop-up menu at the bottom of the Layers palette. When the Adjustments palette appears, drag the slider all the way to the left (your photo will turn completely white). Now, slowly drag the slider back to the right, and the first areas that appear in black are the neutral midtones. Make a mental note of where those gray areas are, and then click-and-drag the Threshold adjustment layer onto the Trash icon at the bottom of the palette, because you no longer need it. (In the example shown here, there are neutral midtones to the right of the woman in the bottom left of the image.)



Step Four:

Now that you know where your midtone point is, go back to the Layers palette and drag the 50% gray layer onto the Trash icon (it's also done its job, so you can get rid of it, too). You'll see your full-color photo again. Now, press **Ctrl-L (Mac: Command-L)** to open Levels, get the midtones Eyedropper (it's the middle Eyedropper), and click directly on one of the neutral areas. That's it; you've found the neutral midtones and corrected any color within them. So, will this work every time? Almost. It works most of the time, but you will run across photos that just don't have a neutral midtone, so you'll have to either not correct the midtones or go back to what we used to do—guess.

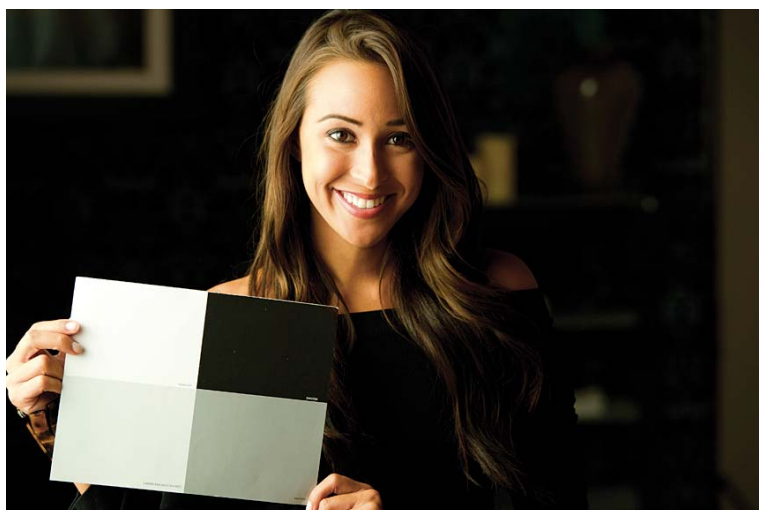


Studio Photo Correction Made Simple

If you're shooting in a studio—whether it's portraits or products—there's a technique you can use that makes the color correction process so easy that you'll be able to train laboratory test rats to correct photos for you. In the back of this book, we've included a color swatch card (it's perforated so you can easily tear it out). After you get your studio lighting set the way you want it, and you're ready to start shooting, put this swatch card into your shot (just once) and take the shot. What does this do for you? You'll see.

Step One:

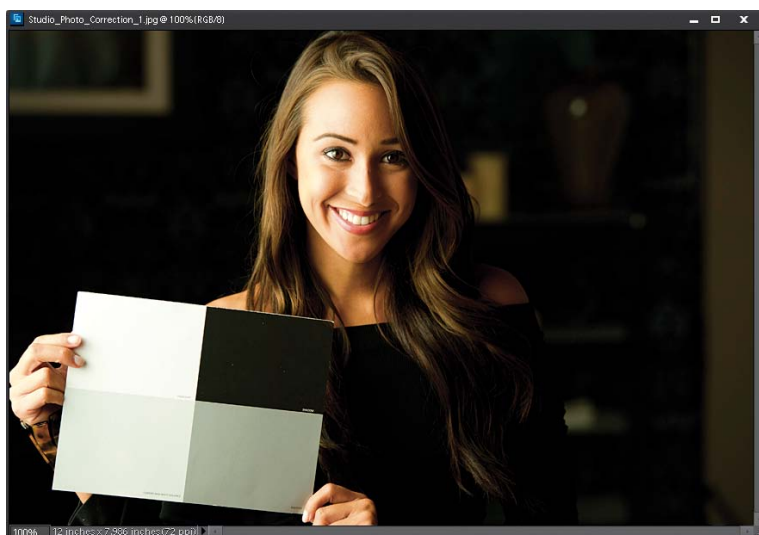
When you're ready to start shooting and the lighting is set the way you want it, tear out the swatch card from the back of this book and place it within your shot (if you're shooting a portrait, have the subject hold the card for you), and then take the shot. After you've got one shot with the swatch card, you can remove it and continue with the rest of your shoot.

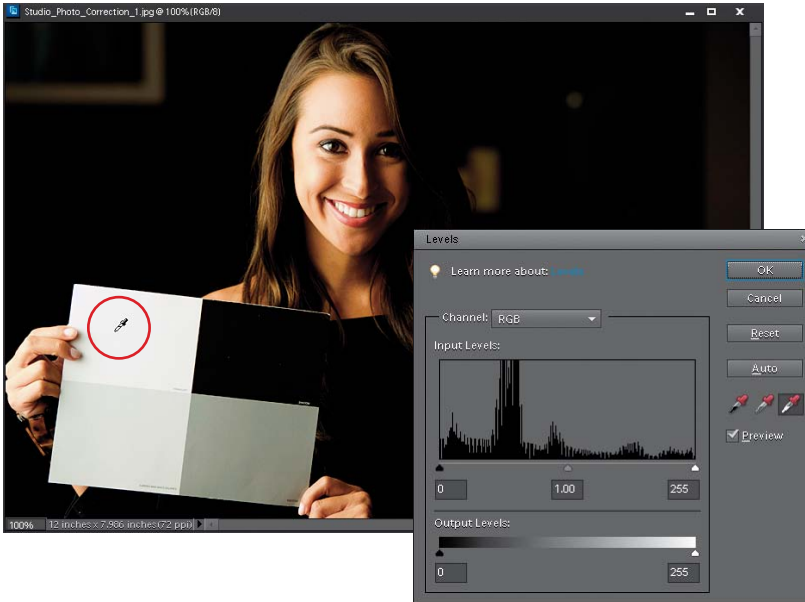


SCOTT KELBY

Step Two:

When you open the first photo taken in your studio session, you'll see the swatch card in the photo. By having a card that's pure white, neutral gray, and pure black in your photo, you no longer have to try to determine which area of your photo is supposed to be black (to set the shadows), which area is supposed to be gray (to set the mid-tones), or which area is supposed to be white (to set the highlights). They're right there in the card. *Note:* We've even included a Camera Raw White Balance swatch if you're working with RAW files. See "The Essential Adjustments: White Balance" in Chapter 2 for more info.





Step Three:

Press **Ctrl-L (Mac: Command-L)** to bring up the Levels dialog. Click the black Eyedropper on the black panel of the card (to set shadows), the middle Eyedropper on the gray panel (for midtones), and the white Eyedropper on the white panel (to set the highlights), and the photo will nearly correct itself. No guessing, no using Threshold adjustment layers to determine the darkest areas of the image—now you know exactly which part of that image should be black and which should be white.

Step Four:

If you'd like to still use this photo, then get the Crop tool (**C**) and crop the card out of the image. However, the more likely situation is that you don't want to use this photo (since it does have a big card in it), but you'd like to apply this color correction to some other photos, as I've done here. Well, now that you have the Levels settings for the first image, you can correct the rest of the photos using the same settings. Just open the next photo and press **Ctrl-Alt-L (Mac: Command-Option-L)** to apply the exact same settings to this photo that you did to the swatch card photo.

TIP: Try a Color Checker Chart

If you want to take this process a step further, many professionals use a Munsell ColorChecker color-swatch chart (from X-Rite; www.xrite.com), which also contains a host of other target colors. It's used exactly the same way: just put the chart into your photo, take one shot, and then when you correct the photo, each color swatch will be in the photo, just begging to be clicked on.



Before



After



Adjusting Flesh Tones

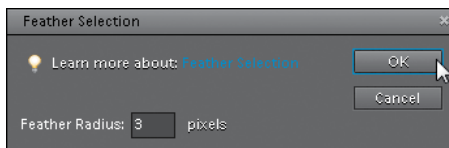
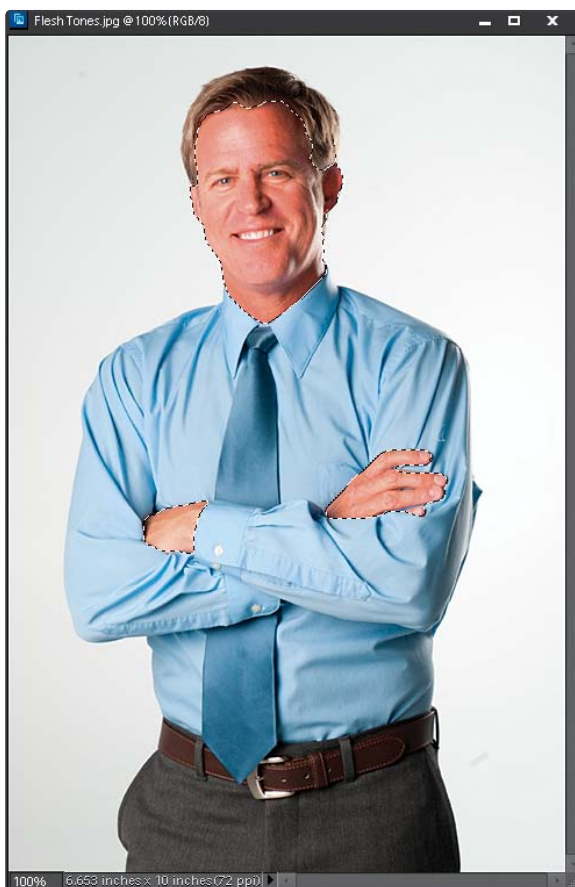
So what do you do if you've used Levels to properly set the highlights, midtones, and shadows, but the flesh tones in your photo still look too red? You can try this quick trick for getting your flesh tones in line by removing the excess red. This one small adjustment can make a world of difference.

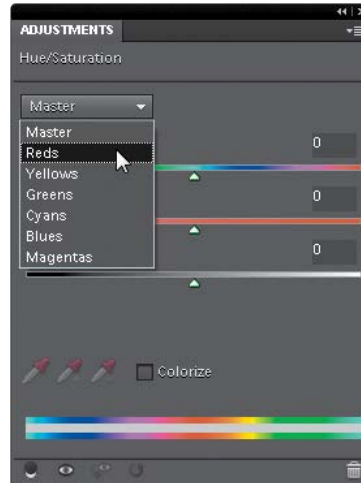
Step One:

Open a photo that needs red removed from the flesh tones. If the whole image appears too red, skip this step and move on to Step Three. However, if just the flesh-tone areas appear too red, get the Quick Selection tool (**A**) and click on all the flesh-tone areas in your photo. (Press-and-hold the Alt [Mac: Option] key to remove any areas that were selected that shouldn't have been, such as the clothes and hair.)

Step Two:

Go under the Select menu and choose **Feather**. Enter a Feather Radius of about 3 pixels, then click OK. By adding this feather, you're softening the edges of your selection, preventing a hard, visible edge from appearing around your adjustments.





Step Three:

Click on the Create New Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers palette, and choose **Hue/Saturation** from the pop-up menu. Then, in the Adjustments palette, click on the pop-up menu near the top and choose **Reds**, so you're only adjusting the reds in your photo (or in your selected areas if you put a selection around the flesh tones).



Step Four:

The rest is easy—you're simply going to reduce the amount of saturation so the flesh tones appear more natural. Drag the Saturation slider to the left to reduce the amount of red (I moved mine to -25, but you may have to go further to the left, or not as far, depending on how red your skin color is). The changes are live, so you'll be able to see the effect of reducing the red as you lower the Saturation slider. Also, if you made a selection of the flesh-tone areas, once you create the adjustment layer, it will hide the selection border from view and create a layer mask with your selection. When the flesh tones look right, you're done.

Continued



Before



After



Before digital photography, you had to adjust your camera for each particular lighting situation (the photo might come out too blue or too warm because of the lighting), and there were filters that you'd screw on to the end of a lens to help combat the effect. Well, Elements has a Photo Filter adjustment, and it works so well at warming and cooling digitally that I don't even carry those filters in my bag anymore. Here's how to use it:

Warming Up (or Cooling Down) a Photo



MATT KLOSOWSKI

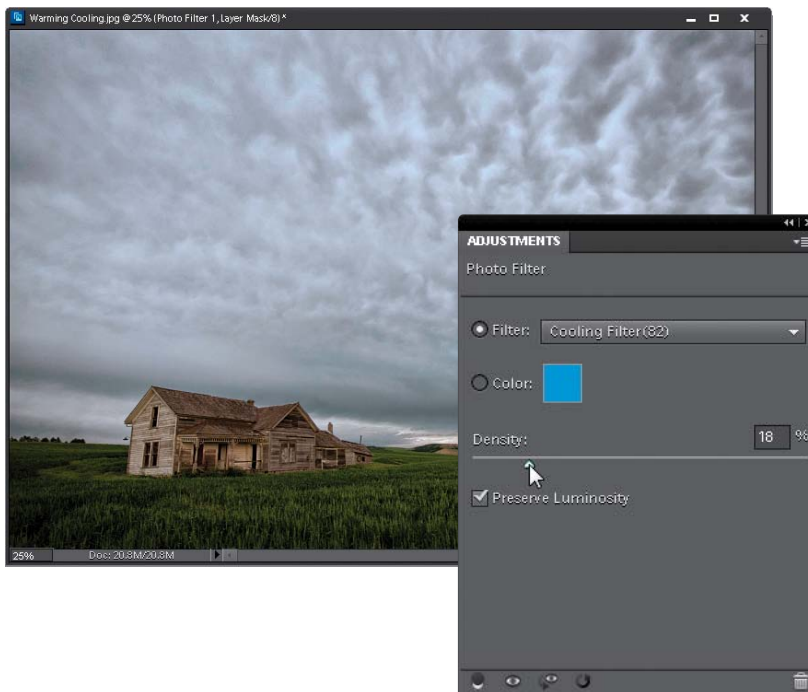
Step One:

Open the photo that needs cooling down (or warming up). In the example shown here, the photo is too warm and has a yellowish tint, so we want to cool it down and make it look more natural. Go to the Layers palette and choose **Photo Filter** from the Create New Adjustment Layer pop-up menu at the bottom of the palette (its icon looks like a half-black/half-white circle).

Continued

Step Two:

When the Photo Filter controls appear in the Adjustments palette, choose **Cooling Filter (82)** (or choose a Warming Filter if your image is too cool) from the Filter pop-up menu (this approximates the effect of a traditional screw-on lens filter). If the effect is too cool for you, drag the Density slider to the left to warm the photo up a little. I dragged mine to 18%.

**Step Three:**

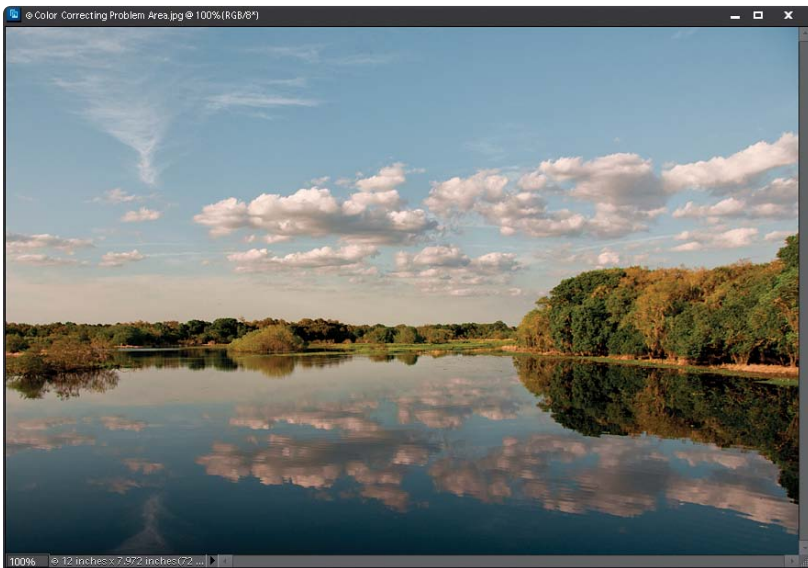
Because this Photo Filter is an adjustment layer, you can edit where the cooling is applied, so press **B** to switch to the Brush tool. In the Options Bar, click on the brush thumbnail and choose a soft-edged brush in the Brush Picker. Then, press **X** to make black your Foreground color, and begin painting over any areas that you don't want to be cool (for example, if you wanted to keep the warmth in the field and house in the foreground, you'd paint over those areas). The original color of the image will be revealed wherever you paint.





This technique really comes in handy when shooting outdoor scenes because it lets you enhance the color in one particular area of the photo, while leaving the rest of the photo untouched. Real estate photographers often use this trick because they want to present a house on a bright, sunny day, but the weather doesn't always cooperate. With this technique, a blown-out sky shot at daybreak can become a beautiful blue sky in just seconds.

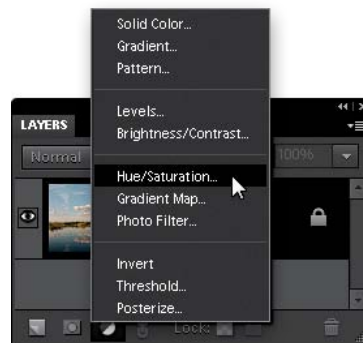
Color Correcting One Problem Area Fast!



MATT KLOSKOWSKI

Step One:

Open the image that has an area of color you would like to enhance, such as the sky.



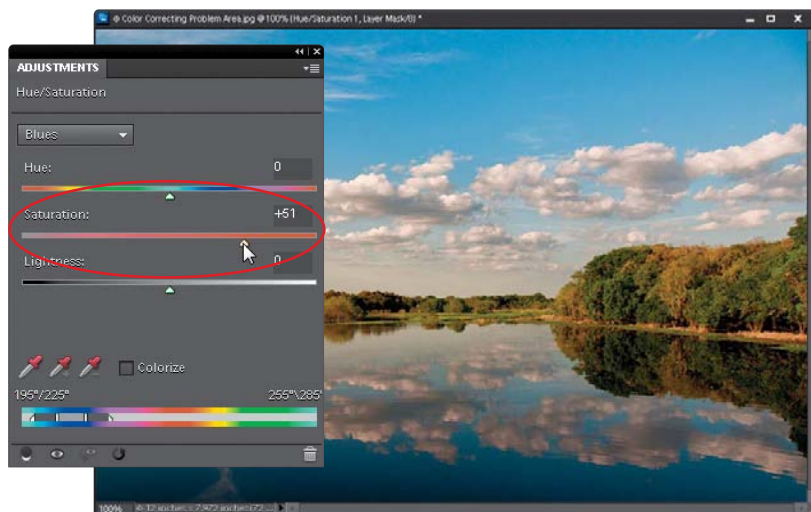
Step Two:

Go to the bottom of the Layers palette and choose **Hue/Saturation** from the Create New Adjustment Layer pop-up menu (it's the half-black/half-white circle icon). A new layer named "Hue/Saturation 1" will be added to your Layers palette and the Hue/Saturation controls will appear in the Adjustments palette. (Note: If you prefer using the Smart Brush tool [covered in Chapter 5], you'll find it has a Blue Skies option that also works pretty well in cases like this.)

Continued

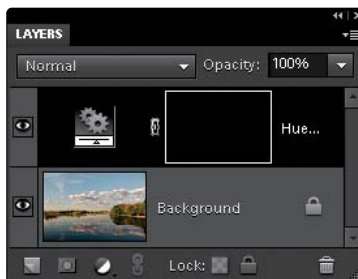
Step Three:

From the pop-up menu at the top of the Adjustments palette, choose the color that you want to enhance (Blues, Reds, etc.), then drag the Saturation slider to the right. You might also choose Cyans, Magentas, etc., from the pop-up menu and do the same thing—drag the Saturation slider to the right, adding even more color, until your image's area looks as enhanced as you'd like it. In the example here, I increased the saturation of the Blues to 51.



Step Four:

Your area is now colorized, but so is everything else. That's okay; you can fix that easily enough. Press the letter **X** to set your Foreground color to black, then press **Alt-Backspace** (Mac: **Option-Delete**) to fill the Hue/Saturation layer mask with black. Doing this removes all the color that you just added, but now you can selectively add (actually paint) the color back in where you want it.



Step Five:

Press the letter **B** to switch to the Brush tool. In the Options Bar, click on the brush thumbnail, and in the Brush Picker, choose a large, soft-edged brush. Press **X** again to toggle your Foreground color to white, and begin painting over the areas where you want the color enhanced. As you paint, the version of your enhanced photo will appear. For well-defined areas, you may have to go to the Brush Picker again in the Options Bar to switch to a smaller, hard-edged brush.



**TIP: Fixing Mistakes**

If you make a mistake and paint over an area you shouldn't have (like the trees in the background)—no problem—just press **X** again to toggle your Foreground color to black and paint over the mistake—it will disappear. Then, switch back to white and continue painting. When you're done, the colorized areas in your photo will look brighter.

*Before**After*



Getting a Better Conversion from Color to Black and White

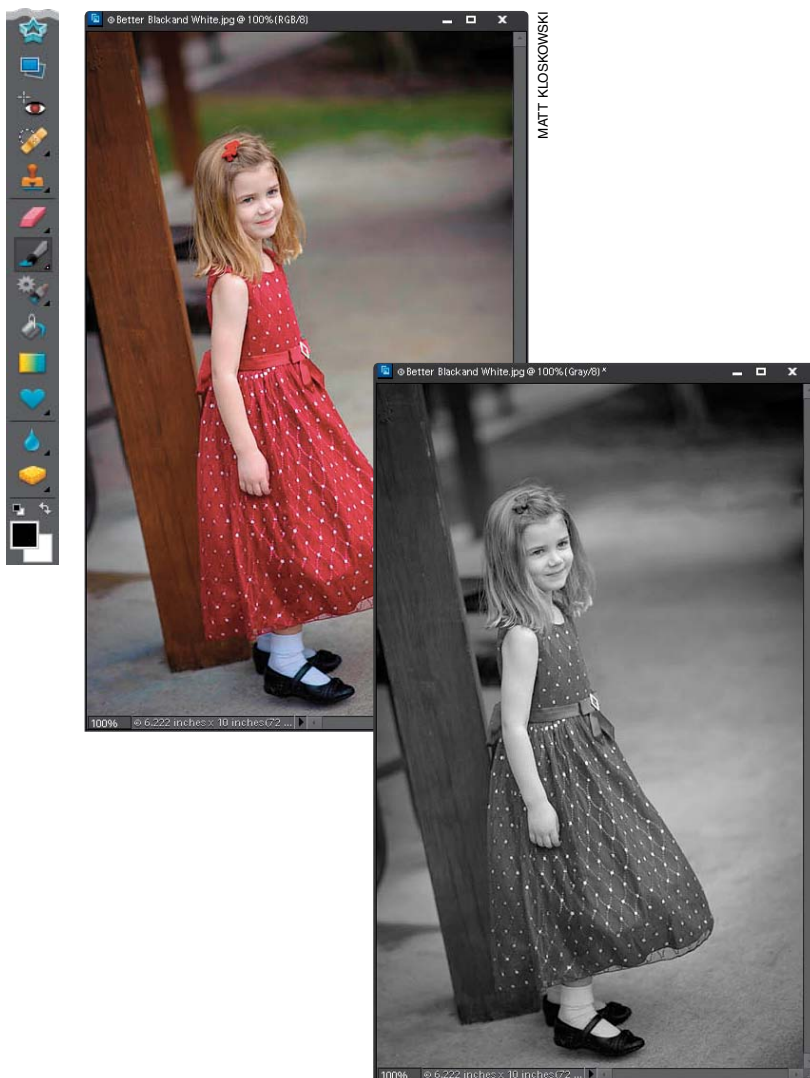
I've run into a lot of digital photographers that use the Remove Color function or change the mode to Grayscale in Elements to convert from color to black and white. Nearly every single one of them is disappointed with the results. That's because Elements simply removes the color from the photo and leaves a very bland looking black-and-white image. Plus, there are no settings, so you can't customize your black-and-white photo in any way. Here's a great technique that creates a better black and white and gives you plenty of control to really customize the way it looks.

Step One:

Open the color photo you want to convert to black and white. Press **D** to set your Foreground and Background to the default black and white.

Step Two:

To really appreciate this technique, it wouldn't hurt if you went ahead and did a regular conversion to black and white, just so you can see how lame it is. Go under the Image menu, under Mode, and choose **Grayscale**. When the "Discard color information?" dialog appears, click OK, and behold the somewhat lame conversion. Now that we agree it looks pretty bland, press **Ctrl-Z** (**Mac: Command-Z**) to undo the conversion, so you can try something better.





Step Three:

Go to the bottom of the Layers palette and choose **Levels** from the Create New Adjustment Layer pop-up menu (it's the half-black/half-white circle icon). The Levels controls will appear in the Adjustments palette and a new layer named "Levels 1." Press **X** to set your Foreground color to black, then go to the bottom of the Layers palette and choose **Gradient Map** from the Create New Adjustment Layer pop-up menu. This brings up the Gradient Map options in the Adjustments palette.



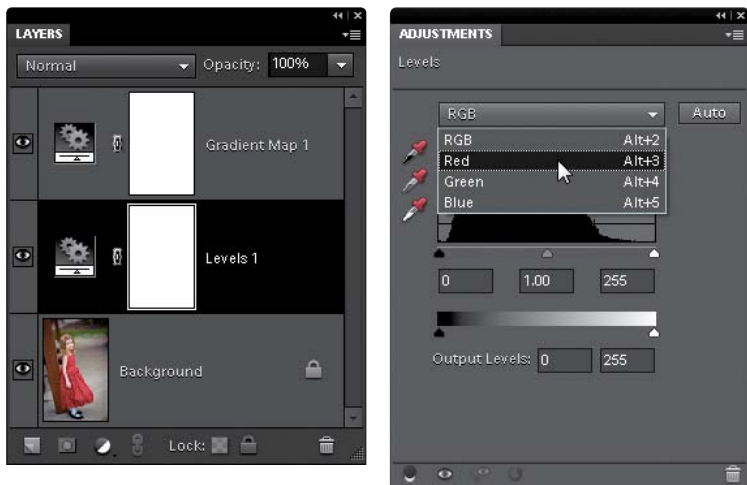
Step Four:

Just choosing Gradient Map gives you a black-and-white image (and doing just this, this one little step alone, usually gives you a better black-and-white conversion than just choosing Grayscale from the Mode submenu. Freaky, I know). If you don't get a black-to-white gradient, it is because your Foreground and Background colors were not set at their defaults. Click-and-drag the Gradient Map adjustment layer onto the Trash icon at the bottom of the palette, press **D**, then add your Gradient Map adjustment layer again. This adds another layer to the Layers palette (above your Levels 1 layer) named "Gradient Map 1."

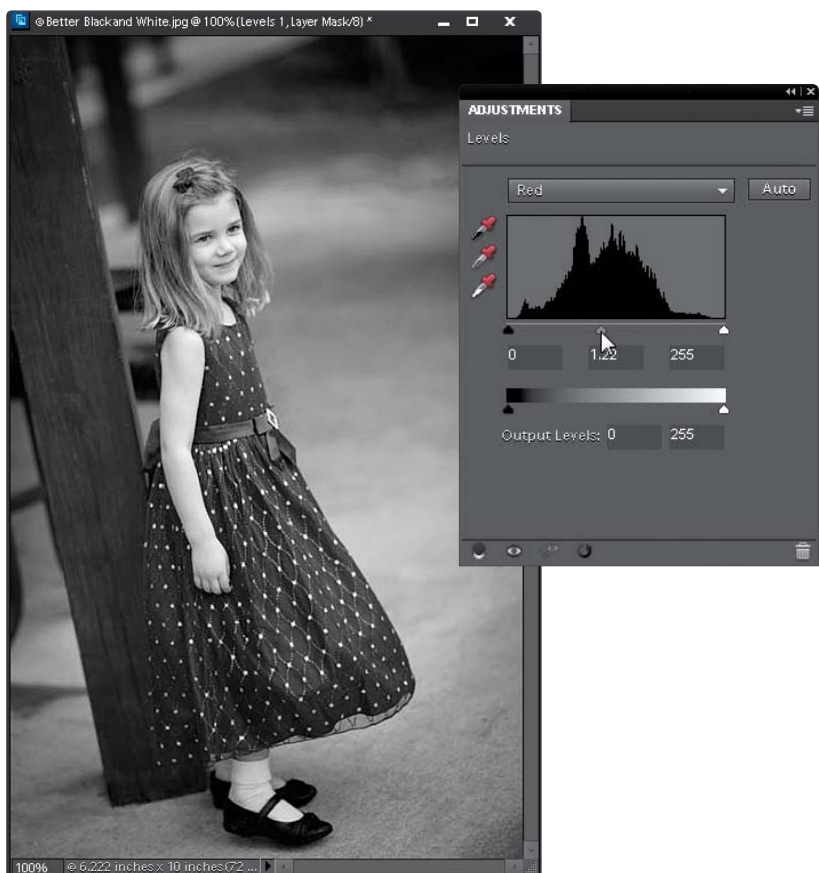
Continued

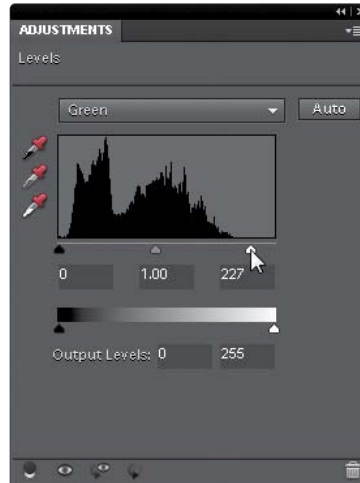
Step Five:

In the Layers palette, click on the Levels 1 layer to bring up the Levels controls in the Adjustments palette again. In the pop-up menu at the top of the palette, you can choose to edit individual color channels (kind of like you would with Photoshop's Channel Mixer). Choose the **Red** color channel.

**Step Six:**

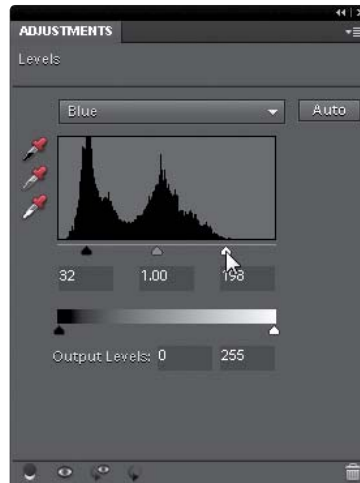
You can now adjust the Red channel, and you'll see the adjustments live onscreen as you tweak your black-and-white photo. (It appears as a black-and-white photo because of the Gradient Map adjustment layer above the Levels 1 layer. Pretty sneaky, eh?) You can drag the middle gray mid-tone Input Levels slider to the left to open the shadowy areas, especially in the skin, as shown here.





Step Seven:

Now, switch to the **Green** channel in the pop-up menu at the top of the Adjustments palette. You can make adjustments here, as well. Try increasing the highlights in the Green channel by dragging the white highlight Input Levels slider to the left, as shown here.



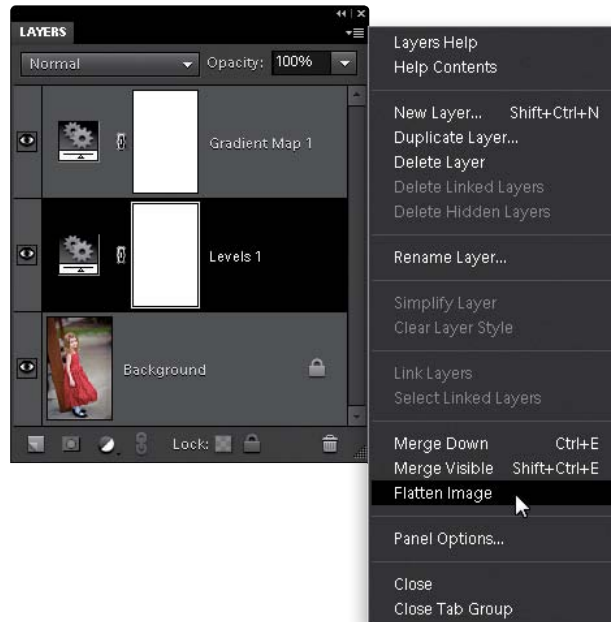
Step Eight:

Now, choose the **Blue** channel from the pop-up menu, and try increasing the highlights quite a bit and the shadows just a little by dragging the Input Levels sliders (the ones below the histogram that we've been using). These adjustments are not standards for every photo; I just experimented by dragging the sliders, and when the photo looked better, I stopped dragging. When the black-and-white photo looks good to you (good contrast, and good shadow and highlight details), just stop dragging.

Continued

Step Nine:

To complete your conversion, go to the Layers palette, click on the flyout menu at the top right, then choose **Flatten Image** to flatten the adjustment layers into the Background layer. Although your photo looks like a black-and-white photo, technically, it's still in RGB mode, so if you want a grayscale file, go under the Image menu, under Mode, and choose **Grayscale**.



Before (lame grayscale conversion)

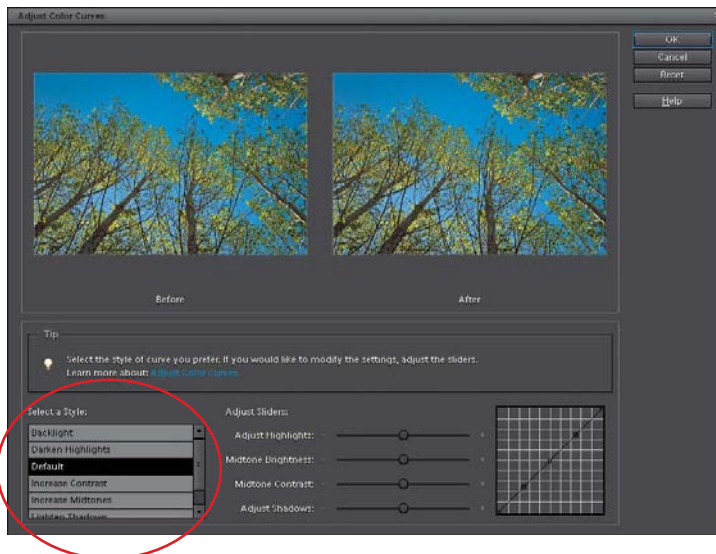
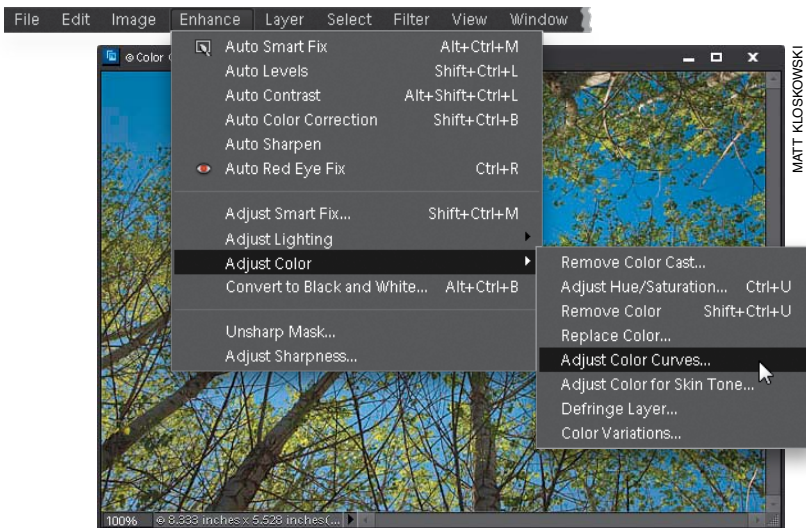


After (awesome adjustment layers conversion)



Users of the full professional version of Adobe Photoshop have had the benefit of using Curves since version 1, and it's the pros' choice for color correction without a doubt. There's only one problem—it's a bit hard for most folks to master. That's why you'll fall in love with the Color Curves adjustment—it makes using Curves so easy, it will actually make pro users of Photoshop jealous. Adobe has done a really brilliant job of giving us the power of Curves without the hassles and steep learning curve. Life is good.

Correcting Color and Contrast Using Color Curves



Step One:

Open the photo you want to adjust with Color Curves (a typical situation might be a photo that lacks contrast or has an obvious color cast, but in reality most photos can benefit from a short trip to Color Curves, so don't just save it for really messed up photos). Then go under the Enhance menu, under Adjust Color, and choose **Adjust Color Curves** (as shown here).

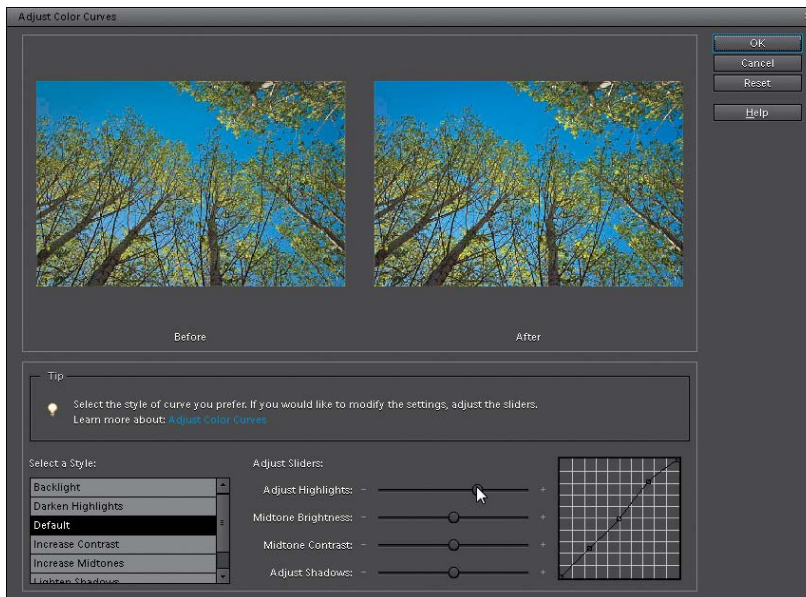
Step Two:

When the Adjust Color Curves dialog first appears, you've got two options for using it. First there's the simple fix (I know, it's not the official name, but it's what we call it). This simple fix lets you simply select what you'd like to do with your photo from a list of choices on the bottom-left side of the dialog (you can compare the before and after views to see if you're happy with the changes). Just click on a choice in the Select a Style list and it applies a color curve for you. Easy enough, right? (By the way, don't click on Solarize unless you've had a few glasses of Merlot first.) *Note:* You can only apply one curve at a time. If you want to apply more than one style adjustment, click OK, then reopen the Adjust Color Curves dialog and select another adjustment to add it.

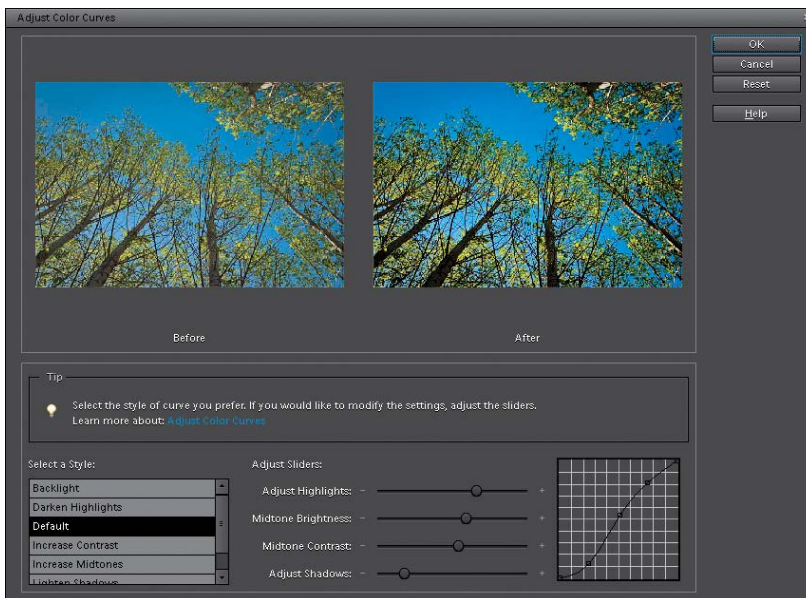
Continued

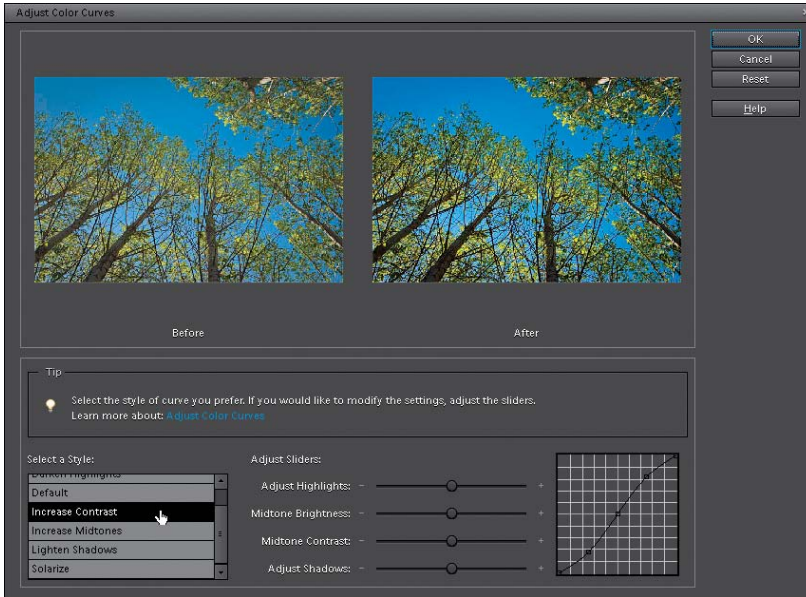
Step Three:

So, you might get lucky and find a choice that works great for you right off the bat. Your photo will look better, and life will be good. However, to reveal the real power of these curves, you'll need to go to Adjust Sliders at the bottom right of the dialog. That's where you'll see four sliders and the curve itself. Now, as you drag the sliders, you'll see how the curve is affected. For example, drag the Adjust Highlights slider to the right, and you'll see the top-right curve point move upward. That's because the highlights are controlled by that upper-right point.

**Step Four:**

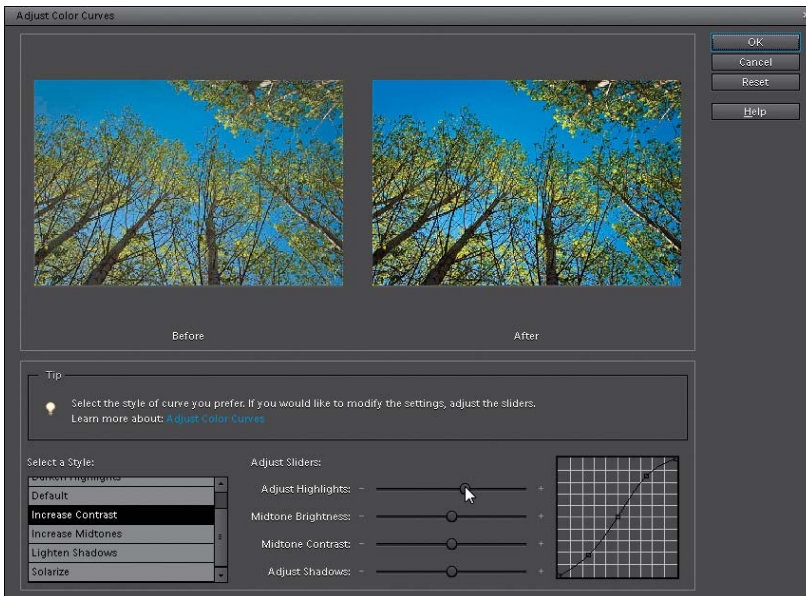
The center point represents the mid-tones in your photo. Try dragging the Midtone Brightness slider to the right, and look over at the curve. See how the center point moves upward? Now, drag the Midtone Contrast slider to the left, and watch how the contrast increases. Anytime you make the curve steeper, it adds contrast to your photo, but you don't want it to get too steep, or your photo will lose quality. Lastly, drag the Adjust Shadows slider to the left. Notice how the shadow point on the curve (the far-left point) moves downward, darkening the shadow area. These sliders make it easy to adjust the tone and contrast in your photo without having to manually move points on the curve (like you do in the pro version of Photoshop).





Step Five:

Now, let's click the Reset button and start over from scratch. Let's fix the problem photo we have here, using nothing but Adjust Color Curves. First, let's start with the preset styles and see if any of them look better than our current photo. To me, the Increase Contrast style looks better than the original photo, so go ahead and click on that. It makes a great starting point for our correction.



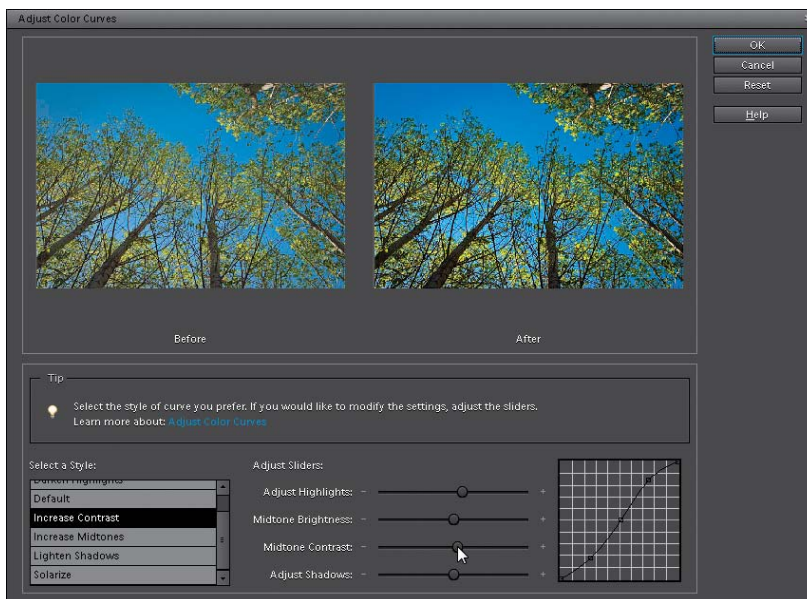
Step Six:

Okay, here's the problem (at least as I see it). Although we increased the contrast, and I think the photo certainly looks better than it did, it seems a little dark, and it looks like it's lacking highlights. So, drag the Adjust Highlights slider over to the right a little bit and see how that looks. Now, to me, that looks better (but hey, that's just me). There is no official government agency that determines whether your photo has enough highlights or not, so the choice is really up to you—the photographer). In fact, since it's up to you (or me, in this case), I think I might even drag it a little farther to the right, to really open up the highlights.

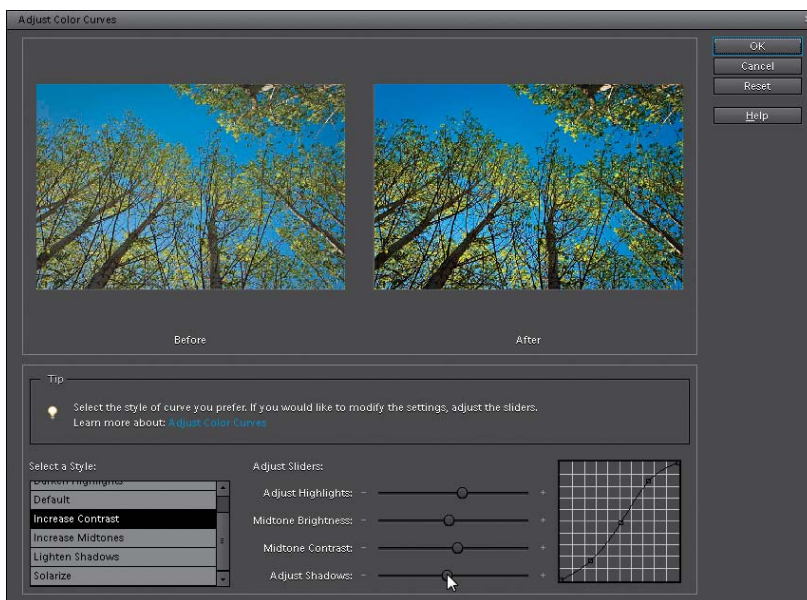
Continued

Step Seven:

Now, if it were me (and it is, by the way), I'd then drag the Midtone Contrast slider to the right a bit to add more contrast in the midtones. I won't do this for every photo, but for this photo, it seems to look better. That's the great thing about these sliders—you can drag one to the left, and if your photo looks better, then great. If it doesn't, drag it to the right and see how that looks. If it looks better when you drag it to the right, then great. If not, drag it back to the center and leave it alone. In this case, I dragged both ways, and I like the way the midtone contrast looked when I had the slider dragged to the right a bit, so that's where I'm leaving it.

**Step Eight:**

My final two tweaks are to drag the Midtone Brightness slider to the left, then the right, to see which one looks better. I like the way it looks when I drag it to the left, so to the left it stays. I know this sounds like a really simplistic way to adjust your photos, but it's deeper than you think. If you drag a slider in either direction, and your photo looks better, then how could that be wrong? Lastly, let's drag the Adjust Shadows slider. Dragging just a little bit to the left seemed to make the shadow areas darker, while dragging it to the right made them look washed out. So, needless to say, I left it a little to the left. If you look at the curve itself, you'll see the classic "S" shape (known as the "S" curve), which is pretty common in curve correction, as that shape adds contrast and helps to make colors rich and saturated. So, in short, don't be afraid to slide those sliders.





Before



After

Index

[] (Bracket keys), 92, 244, 280
3D Pixelate transition, 42–43
50% Gray option, 152, 184, 386
50% magnification setting, 390
100% size view, 71, 82, 84

A

acne removal, 245–247
Add Noise filter, 330, 387
Adjust Color Curves dialog, 169–172
Adjust Color for Skin Tone dialog, 237
Adjust Highlights slider, 170, 171
Adjust Intensity sliders, 342
Adjust Shadows slider, 170, 172
Adjust Sharpness control, 406–408
adjustment layers, 134–137

- advantages of using, 134–135
- color corrections with, 136, 157, 225
- creating new, 136
- how they work, 137
- retouching portraits with, 252, 260
- selections and, 217, 222

Adjustments palette, 134

- color channel controls, 166–167
- Gradient Map options, 165
- Hue/Saturation controls, 157, 161–162
- Levels controls, 136, 179
- Photo Filter controls, 160
- Threshold Level slider, 148, 153

Adobe RGB color space, 412
Advanced Dialog button, 5
Album Details pane, 27
albums, 27–29

- creating, 27, 426
- deleting, 31
- Smart, 28–29

Albums palette, 27
Alignment tool, 213, 311
all-purpose sharpening, 394
Ames, Kevin, 250
Amount slider

- Adjust Sharpness control, 407, 408
- Camera Raw Sharpening section, 82
- Correct Camera Distortion filter, 202
- Unsharp Mask dialog, 391, 395

Angle controls, 370, 404
antique photo effect, 354–359
artifact removal, 300–301
Aspect Ratio pop-up menu, 102, 106
Auto corrections, Camera Raw, 68, 93
Auto Smart Fix command, 139, 143
Auto White Balance setting, 58
Auto-Analyzer, 19–20
Auto-Enhance checkbox, 228
automated processing, 121–122
Automatic Download checkbox, 4
automatic red-eye removal, 195–196
automatic special effects, 316

B

backgrounds

- blurring, 232, 380
- cropping to remove, 114
- desaturation effect applied to, 331
- selecting subjects from, 230–231

backing up photos, 6–7
barrel distortion, 201
basic sharpening, 390–396
black-and-white conversions

in Camera Raw, 93–95
in Photoshop Elements, 164–168, 341–342
Blacks slider, 65–66, 70, 94
blemish removal, 243–244
blend modes, 135
blending multiple exposures, 207–213
Blue Skies effect, 161, 180
blur

- background, 232, 380
- Depth Of Field effect, 324–327
- Gaussian Blur filter, 232, 245, 279, 359, 380
- options for removing, 407
- Orton effect, 321
- Surface Blur filter, 334

Blush slider, 237
Bracket keys ([]), 92, 244, 280
bright areas, 190–191
Brightness slider, 67, 94
Brush Picker

- Brush tool and, 91, 246
- Clone Stamp tool and, 248
- Selection Brush tool and, 226

Brush tool

- color correction and, 160, 162–163
- dodging/burning and, 184–186
- double processing and, 91–92
- emphasizing color using, 352–353
- fill flash technique and, 193–194
- layer masks and, 241–242
- portrait retouching and, 246–247, 253, 255, 258, 280–282
- sharpening process and, 399
- special effects and, 329, 374
- See *also* Healing Brush tool; Smart Brush tool

brushes

- making selections using, 226
- sizing/resizing, 92, 205, 244, 280

burned-in edge effect, 349–351, 357–358
burning and dodging method, 183–187

C

calibrating your monitor, 413–415
Camera Calibration icon, 56
Camera Profiles, 56–57
Camera Raw, 53–95

- Auto corrections, 68, 93
- black-and-white conversions, 93–95
- Blacks slider, 65–66, 70, 94
- Brightness slider, 67, 94
- Camera Profiles, 56–57
- Clarity slider, 71–72, 93
- clipping warning, 62–64
- Contrast slider, 94
- Crop tool, 74–76
- double processing in, 89–92
- Exposure slider, 62, 63–64, 94
- Fill Light slider, 69–70
- Full Screen view, 82
- high-contrast look created in, 338–340
- multiple photo editing in, 78–79
- Noise Reduction section, 86
- opening photos in, 54–55
- Recovery slider, 64–65
- Red Eye Removal tool, 87–88
- Saturation slider, 73, 93
- saving to DNG format from, 80
- Sharpening section, 81–85
- Straighten tool, 77
- Temperature slider, 59, 60
- Tint slider, 60
- Vibrance slider, 73
- White Balance settings, 58–61

See also **RAW images**

cameras. See **digital cameras**

canvas area, 110–111

Canvas Options pop-up menu, 114

captions

- adding to photos, 10, 33
- finding photos using, 35

capture sharpening, 81

circular selections, 219–220

Clarity slider, 71–72, 93

Clean Edges dialog, 344

clipping

- highlights, 62–65, 66
- shadows, 66

clipping warning, 62–64, 65

Clone Stamp tool

- portrait retouching and, 248–249, 267–268
- unwanted object removal and, 296–299, 303–304

Cloud Contrast effect, 176–177

clutter, reducing, 46–47

collages, 375–378

collections. See **albums**

color

- changing in objects, 225
- converting to black-and-white, 93–95, 164–168, 341–342
- emphasizing objects with, 352–353
- noise reduction methods, 86, 181–182
- optimizing for printing, 132
- removing from layers, 283, 328
- sampling from duotones, 384
- selecting areas by, 224–225

Color blend mode, 352, 385

color cast, 144

color channels, 166–167

color correction, 131–173

- Color Curves for, 169–173
- converting images to B&W, 164–168
- cooling down photos, 159–160
- digital camera images and, 144
- finding neutral gray for, 152–153
- flesh tone adjustments, 156–158
- Histogram palette and, 143
- Levels dialog and, 144–147, 149–150, 153, 155
- problem areas and, 161–163
- Quick Fix mode for, 138–142
- selection adjustments and, 225
- settings for, 132–133
- steps in process of, 144–151
- studio photos and, 154–155
- warming up photos, 159–160

Color Curves, 169–173

- Adjust Sliders, 170–172
- Reset button, 171

color management, 412–419

- monitor calibration, 413–415
- paper profiles and, 416–419, 423
- Photoshop Elements configuration, 412
- printer configuration, 422–424

color noise, 86, 181–182

Color palette, 140

Color Picker, 145, 146

Color Settings dialog, 132, 412

color space configuration, 412

color swatch card, 61, 154–155

Color Variations dialog, 354–355

ColorChecker chart, 155

comparing photos, 44–45

Content-Aware Fill, 306–309

contrast

- black-and-white image, 94, 342
- Color Curves corrections, 169–173
- high-contrast look, 333–340
- RAW image adjustments, 71, 94

Contrast slider

- Camera Raw, 94
- Photoshop Elements, 342

Convert to Black and White dialog, 341–342

Cookie Cutter tool, 107–109

cooling down photos, 159–160

Cooling Filter, 160

copying and pasting images, 239

Correct Camera Distortion filter, 199–203

- Amount slider, 202
- Midpoint slider, 202
- Remove Distortion slider, 201
- Scale slider, 200
- Vertical Perspective slider, 199

Create Category dialog, 17

Create Keyword Tag dialog, 17

Create Subfolder(s) pop-up menu, 2

Crop icon, 76

Crop tool, 98

- Camera Raw, 74–76
- canvas area added with, 110–111
- custom size options, 104–106
- Overlay features, 100–101
- standard size options, 102–103

cropping photos, 98–112

- canceling crops, 100
- custom size options for, 104–106
- gang-scanned images and, 112
- lens distortion fixes and, 201
- panorama stitching and, 344
- recomposing and, 128
- Rule of Thirds overlay for, 100–101
- scene cleanup and, 313
- shading feature for, 98–99
- shapes used for, 107–109
- slimming subjects and, 276
- standard size options for, 102–103
- steps in process of, 98–100
- straightening and, 114

Cross, Dave, 152

Curves, Color, 169–173

custom crop

- Camera Raw, 75
- size settings, 104–106

Custom Name option, 3

Custom Shape Picker, 107

D

Daily Note option, 40

dark circle removal, 248–249

dark subject fixes, 192–194

Darken blend mode, 348

Darken Highlights slider, 191, 220

date information

- adding to scanned photos, 14
- finding photos by, 15, 35, 39–40
- sorting photos by, 13

Date View feature, 39–40

Delete Options, 3

deleting

- duplicate photos, 38
- keyword tags or albums, 31
- photos from memory cards, 3
- See also **removing**

Density slider, 160

Depth Of Field effect, 324–327

Desaturate command, 328

desaturated portrait effect, 328–332

Deselect command, 219, 276

Destination Settings screen, 7
Detail slider, 83
Difference blend mode, 152, 290
digital cameras
 camera profiles, 56–57
 color cast issues, 144
 lens distortion problems, 199–202
Digital Negative (DNG) format, 76, 80
digital photos
 backing up, 6–7
 color correcting, 131–173
 comparing, 44–45
 cropping, 98–112
 finding, 15, 34–40
 fixing problems in, 175–213
 importing, 2–5, 425
 info added to, 33
 metadata info for, 5, 32
 previewing, 11–12
 recomposing, 123–129
 renaming, 3
 saving, 5
 sharing, 48–50
 sharpening, 389–408
 sizing/resizing, 115–122
 sorting, 13
 stacking, 38, 46–47
 straightening, 113–114
 tagging, 16–25
digital workflow, 425–429
disc backups, 6–7
Display button, 11, 39, 41, 44
distortion problems, 199–202
 barrel distortion, 201
 lens vignetting, 202
 perspective distortion, 199–200
distracting object removal, 302–309
 Clone Stamp tool for, 303–304
 Content-Aware Fill for, 306–309
 Healing Brush tool for, 302–304
Divide Scanned Photos option, 112
DNG file format, 76, 80
DNG Profile Editor, 57
Dodge and Burn tools, 183
dodging and burning method, 183–187
double processing, 89–92
downsizing photos, 119–120
duotone effect, 384–385
duplicate photos, 37–38
duplicating layers, 245, 250, 256, 352, 400

E
Edge Blending checkbox, 212
edge sharpening, 403–405
edge vignette effect, 335–337, 339–340, 381–382
Edit Keyword Tag dialog, 30
editing
 adjustment layers, 137
 multiple photos, 78–79
 RAW images, 58–79
 workflow for, 427–428
effects. *See* **special effects**
Elements Editor
 cropping photos in, 98, 102, 104, 107
 Guided Edit feature, 204, 287, 316
Elliptical Marquee tool, 219, 222
Emboss filter, 404
Eraser tool
 eyeglass reflections and, 290
 Group Shot merge and, 206
 scene cleanup and, 312
 special effects and, 337, 353, 382
Esc key, 45, 100
EXIF data, 13, 32
exporting keyword tags, 26
exposure adjustments, 62–67
Exposure slider, 62, 63–64, 94
external hard drive, 6
extraordinary sharpening, 397–399
Eye icon, 137, 239, 283
eye retouching
 brightening whites of eyes, 252–254
 dark circle removal, 248–249
 lightening eye sockets, 255
 sparkle added to eyes, 256–258
Eyedropper tool
 color correction and, 145–147, 149–150, 155
 fake duotone effect and, 384
 neutral midtones and, 153
 sample size settings, 133
eyeglass reflections, 287–292
Eye-One Display calibration, 413–415

F
Facebook
 downloading friend list from, 24, 48
 sharing photos to, 48–50
face-recognition feature, 23–25
facial retouching. *See* **retouching portraits**
faded antique effect, 354–359
fake duotone effect, 384–385
Feather Selection dialog
 color correction and, 156
 portrait retouching and, 260, 267
 selection edge softening and, 223, 350
files
 automatically renaming, 122
 processing multiple, 121–122
 viewing names of, 13
fill flash technique, 193–194
Fill Layer dialog, 152
Fill Light slider, 69–70
Film Grain filter, 386
film grain simulation effect, 386–387
filmstrip view, 12
filters. *See*
finding photos, 34–40
 date info for, 15, 35, 39–40
 duplicate photos, 37–38
 methods used for, 34–36
fixing image problems, 175–213
 bright areas, 190–191
 camera lens distortion, 199–202
 dark subjects, 192–194
 digital noise, 181–182
 focusing light, 183–187
 group shots, 203–206
 pseudo-HDR technique, 207–213
 red-eye removal, 195–198
 shadow areas, 188–189
 Smart Brush adjustments, 176–180, 194
Flashlight effect, 347–348
Flatten Image command, 168, 180, 313, 330, 335, 401
Flatten Stack command, 47
flesh tone adjustments, 156–158
focusing light, 183–187, 373–374
folders, watched, 9
Forward Warp tool, 262–266
Fotolia.com website, xv
freckle or acne removal, 245–247
Free Transform
 accessing the handles of, 118

- resizing images using, 118, 120, 239
- selection scaling and, 219, 231, 365
- slimming subjects using, 275–276

frown-into-smile technique, 273–274

Full Backup, 7

Full Screen view

- Camera Raw, 82
- Elements Organizer, 11, 41, 44

full-screen previews, 11–12

G

gang-scanned photos, 112

Gaussian Blur filter

- background blur and, 232
- faded antique effect and, 359
- portrait finishing technique and, 380
- portrait retouching and, 245, 279

Gaussian Blur removal option, 407

Get Photos from Scanner dialog, 8

Getting Media dialog, 195

glasses, reflections in, 287–292

Golden Ratio overlay, 100

Gradient Editor, 369

Gradient Fill dialog, 367–368, 369–370

Gradient Map adjustment layer, 165

Gradient Picker, 367, 377

Gradient tool, 377

Grayscale mode, 164, 168

Grid overlay, 100

Group Shot feature, 203–206, 287–288

grungy high-contrast look, 338–340

Guided Edit feature, 204, 287, 316

H

halos, 83

hard drive backups, 6–7

Hard Light blend mode, 404

hardware calibration, 413–415

HDR (High Dynamic Range) photography, 207

Healing Brush tool

- distracting object removal and, 302–304
- portrait retouching and, 243–244, 249, 250
- recomposed images and, 129

See also **Spot Healing Brush tool**

high ISO noise, 86

High Pass filter, 284

high-contrast look

- Camera Raw technique for, 338–340
- Photoshop Elements technique for, 333–337

Highlight Details slider, 209

Highlight Skintones option, 128

highlights

- clipping warning for, 62–64, 65
- color correcting, 146, 149
- darkening, 190–191
- recovering, 64–65
- specular, 66

Histogram palette, 143

history, finding photos by, 36

Hollywood, Calvin, 333

hot spot removal, 243–244

Hue slider, 225

Hue/Saturation adjustments

- color correction and, 136, 157, 161–162
- faded antique effect and, 356
- portrait retouching and, 260–261, 269
- selections and, 225

I

ICC profiles, 417, 418

icons

- Crop, 76
- keyword tag, 30
- Stack, 46, 47

image files

- automatically renaming, 122
- processing multiple, 121–122

See also **digital photos**

Image Size dialog

, 115–117

importing

- digital photos, 2–5, 425
- scanned photos, 8, 14

Incremental Backup

, 7

information

- adding to photos, 33
- metadata, 5, 32

inkjet printer profiles

, 416–419

Input Levels slider

, 193, 222

Inverse command

, 221, 222, 229

Invert command

, 334, 374

ISO setting

, 86

iStockphoto.com website

, xv, 384

J

JPEG photos

- cropping in Camera Raw, 74, 76
- opening in Camera Raw, 55

K

kelbytraining.com website

, xv

keyword tags

, 16–26

- applying multiple, 22
- assigning to photos, 16, 18, 21–22, 426
- choosing icons for, 30
- creating, 16–17
- deleting, 31
- finding photos using, 34
- people recognition and, 23–25
- removing from photos, 21
- selecting photos for, 21
- sharing, 26
- Smart Tags, 19–20

Keyword Tags palette

, 16, 19, 22, 26, 34

L

Lasso tool

- image fixes and, 190
- portrait retouching and, 237, 259, 267, 268
- selections made with, 227, 364

layer blend modes

, 135

layer masks

, 238–242

- adjustment layers and, 134
- advantages of using, 241
- blending images with, 91–92
- brushes and, 241–242
- photo collages and, 376, 377, 378
- retouching portraits with, 246, 257–258, 279–282
- selections and, 239–240
- sharpening photos with, 398–399
- special effects and, 329–330
- thumbnails for, 240
- viewing, 281

Layer via Copy command

, 245, 250, 256, 352, 400

layers

- creating merged, 334
- desaturating, 328
- duplicating, 245, 250, 256, 352, 400

See also **adjustment layers**

Layers palette

, 91, 194, 289

Lens Blur removal option

, 407

lens distortion problems

, 199–202

- barrel distortion, 201

- lens vignetting, 202
 - perspective distortion, 199–200
- Lens Effects palette**, 326
- lens vignetting**, 202
- Levels Auto button**, 139
- Levels controls, Adjustments palette**, 136
 - black-and-white conversions and, 165, 166–167
 - color correction and, 136
 - dark subject fixes and, 192
 - portrait retouching and, 270
 - selection techniques and, 217, 222
 - taming light using, 373
- Levels dialog**
 - adjustment layers and, 135, 136
 - color correction and, 144–147, 149–150, 153, 155
 - special effects and, 357
- light**, focusing, 183–187, 373–374
- Lighten blend mode**, 246, 248
- Lighten Shadows slider**, 189, 191, 220, 335
- Lighten Skin Tones preset**, 194
- Lighting Effects filter**, 346–348
- Lighting palette**, 139
- Lightness slider**, 261
- Liquify adjustments**
 - frown-into-smile technique, 273–274
 - nose size reduction, 271–272
 - tooth repair, 262–266
- Load Selection dialog**, 221
- Luminosity blend mode**, 129, 374, 380, 401
- luminosity sharpening**, 379, 400–402

M

- Macintosh computers**
 - color management options on, 422, 423
 - Organizer functions on, xiv
- Magic Wand tool**, 224–225
- Magnetic Lasso tool**, 227
- magnification settings**, 390
- Mark for Protection tool**, 125
- Mark for Removal tool**, 125, 127
- marquees**. *See* selections
- Mask for Protection tool**, 127
- Masking slider**, 84
- matching photo styles**, 360–363
- Maximize Mode**, 110
- maximum sharpening**, 393
- Media Browser button**, 39
- memory cards**
 - deleting photos on, 3
 - importing photos from, 2–5
- merging**
 - layers, 334–335
 - multiple exposures, 207–213
- metadata information**, 5, 32, 425
- Midpoint slider**, 202
- Midtone Brightness slider**, 170, 172
- Midtone Contrast slider**, 170, 172, 191, 220, 335
- midtone**
 - adjusting in Camera Raw, 67
 - color correcting, 146, 150
 - finding neutral, 152–153
- moderate sharpening**, 393
- monitor calibration**, 413–415
- Motion Blur removal option**, 407
- Move tool**, 231, 376
- Multiply blend mode**, 336, 339, 357, 381

N

- naming/renaming**
 - imported files, 3, 425
 - multiple files automatically, 122

- negative Clarity adjustment**, 72
- neutral density gradient effect**, 367–370
- neutral gray**, 61, 152–153
- New Layer dialog**, 183–184
- New Smart Album dialog**, 28

noise

- adding, 321, 330, 331, 387
- reducing, 86, 181–182

- Normal blend mode**, 291

- nose retouching**, 271–272

notes

- adding to photos, 33, 40
- Daily Note option, 40
- finding photos using, 35

- numbering photos**, 122

O

object removal

- Clone Stamp tool for, 296–299, 303–304
- Content-Aware Fill for, 306–309
- Healing Brush tool for, 302–304
- Quick Selection tool for, 230–231
- See also* **unwanted object removal**

Opacity settings

- edge sharpening and, 405
- fill flash technique and, 194
- portrait retouching and, 246, 248, 251, 254, 286
- special effects and, 332, 348, 350, 381, 387

- Open Settings Dialog button**, 42

Organizer, 1–50

- albums in, 27–29
- backup options in, 6–7
- comparing photos in, 44–45
- Date View feature, 39–40
- exporting tags from, 26
- finding photos in, 15, 34–40
- full-screen previews in, 11–12
- importing photos into, 2–5
- info added to photos in, 33
- Mac computers and, xiv
- scanning images into, 8, 14
- sharing photos from, 48–50
- sizing thumbnails in, 10
- slide show option, 41–43
- sorting photos by date in, 13
- stacking photos in, 38, 46–47
- tagging photos in, 16–25
- viewing metadata info in, 32
- Watch Folders feature, 9

- Orton effect**, 320–323

- output sharpening**, 81

- oval selections**, 219–220

- overexposure**, 190–191, 322

- Overlay blend mode**, 184, 329, 335, 368, 387

- Overlay features**, Crop tool, 100–101

P

palettes

- Adjustments, 134
- Albums, 27
- Color, 140
- Histogram, 143
- Keyword Tags, 16, 19, 22, 26, 34
- Layers, 91, 194, 289
- Lens Effects, 326
- Lighting, 139
- Photo Play, 317
- Properties, 32, 33
- Quick Edit, 41, 44
- Quick Organize, 41, 44
- Sharpness, 141

- Smart Fix, 138
 - Undo History, 134
 - panoramas, 343–345
 - paper profiles, 416–419, 423
 - paper size options, 420
 - Paste Into Selection command, 218, 365
 - Pearly Whites effect, 261
 - Pen tool, 267
 - Pencil tool, 205, 288, 312
 - people-recognition feature, 23–25
 - perspective distortion, 199–200
 - Photo Downloader, 2, 5, 195, 425
 - Photo Filter adjustments, 159–160, 232, 371
 - Photo Play palette, 317
 - photographs
 - scanning into Organizer, 8, 14
 - See also digital photos
 - Photomerge Exposure feature, 207–213
 - Automatic modes, 208–210, 213
 - Manual mode, 210–213
 - Simple Blending option, 208, 213
 - Smart Blending option, 209–210, 213
 - Photomerge Group Shot feature, 204–205, 287–288
 - Photomerge Panorama feature, 343–345
 - Photomerge Scene Cleaner, 311–313
 - Photomerge Style Match feature, 360–363
 - Picture Stack effect, 317–319
 - pin-registered photos, 90
 - plus-sign cursor, 297
 - portraits
 - color correcting, 154–155
 - desaturation effect, 328–332
 - finishing technique, 379–383
 - pseudo-HDR technique, 207
 - sharpening, 379, 392
 - See also retouching portraits
 - Preferences dialog, 4
 - Preserve Current Filename in XMP checkbox, 3
 - Preserve Details slider, 182
 - preset crop sizes, 102
 - Preset Picker, 176, 179
 - previewing thumbnails, 11–12
 - Print dialog, 420–424
 - printing process
 - optimizing colors for, 132, 412
 - paper profiles for, 416–419, 423
 - setting options for, 420–424
 - Process Multiple Files dialog, 121–122
 - profiles
 - camera, 56–57
 - printer, 416–419, 423
 - Project Bin, 204, 205, 288
 - Properties palette, 32, 33
 - pseudo-HDR technique, 207–213
 - Pucker tool, 271–272
- ## Q
- Quick Edit palette, 41, 44
 - Quick Fix mode, 138–142
 - Quick Organize palette, 41, 44
 - Quick Selection tool, 228–229
 - Auto-Enhance checkbox, 228
 - color correction and, 156
 - making selections with, 221, 229, 230–231
 - portrait retouching and, 259
 - special effects and, 326–327
- ## R
- Radius slider
 - Adjust Sharpness control, 407
 - Camera Raw sharpening section, 83
 - High Pass filter dialog, 284
 - Unsharp Mask dialog, 391, 395
 - RAW images, 53–95
 - auto correcting, 68, 93
 - camera profiles, 56–57
 - color vibrance in, 73
 - converting to black-and-white, 93–95
 - cropping, 74–76
 - double processing, 89–92
 - editing multiple, 78–79
 - exposure adjustments, 62–67
 - fill light used in, 69–70
 - highlight adjustments, 62–65
 - noise reduction, 86
 - opening in Camera Raw, 54–55
 - punch added to, 71
 - red-eye removal, 87–88
 - saving in DNG format, 80
 - shadow adjustments, 65–66
 - sharpening, 81–85
 - softening effect, 72
 - white balance settings, 58–61
 - See also Camera Raw
 - Recompose tool, 123, 124–128
 - Recovery slider, 64–65
 - Rectangular Marquee tool
 - selection techniques and, 216, 218, 239
 - vignette effects and, 336, 339, 350, 357, 381
 - rectangular selections, 216–217
 - Red Eye Removal tool
 - Camera Raw, 87–88
 - Photoshop Elements, 197–198
 - red-eye removal, 195–198
 - automatic process of, 195–196
 - Camera Raw feature for, 87–88
 - instant method for, 197–198
 - Reduce Noise filter, 181–182
 - Refine Edge dialog, 336, 340, 358, 382
 - reflections in eyeglasses, 287–292
 - Remove Color command, 164, 229, 283, 385
 - Remove Distortion slider, 201
 - Remove Keyword Tag option, 21
 - removing
 - blur from photos, 407
 - color from layers, 283, 328
 - distracting objects, 302–309
 - eyeglass reflections, 287–292
 - keyword tags, 21
 - red-eye, 87–88, 195–198
 - spots and artifacts, 300–301
 - subjects from backgrounds, 230–233
 - unwanted objects, 295–313
 - See also deleting
 - renaming. See naming/renaming
 - Rendering Intent options, 424
 - Resample Image option, 116, 117, 119
 - Reset button, 139, 171
 - resizing. See sizing/resizing
 - resolution
 - increasing, 115–117
 - viewing size and, 120
 - retouching portraits, 235–292
 - blemish removal, 243–244
 - brightening whites of eyes, 252–254
 - dark circle removal, 248–249
 - eye socket brightening, 255
 - eyeglass reflection removal, 287–292
 - freckle or acne removal, 245–247
 - frown-into-smile technique, 273–274
 - layer masks and, 246, 257–258, 279–282
 - nose size reduction, 271–272

- repairing teeth, 262–270
- skin tone fix, 236–237
- slimming/trimming technique, 275–277
- softening skin, 278–286
- sparkle added to eyes, 256–258
- whitening teeth, 259–261
- wrinkle removal, 250–251
- RetouchPro.com website**, 278
- round selections**, 219–220
- Rule of Thirds overlay**
 - cropping photos using, 100–101
 - hiding, 102, 105
- rulers**, 115
- S**
- “S” curve**, 172
- sampling**, 133, 296, 299, 384
- Saturation slider**
 - B&W conversion and, 93
 - color correction and, 157, 162
 - Photomerge Exposure and, 210
 - portrait retouching and, 260, 269
 - RAW images and, 73
 - special effects and, 356
- Save Options dialog**, 80
- Save Selection dialog**, 221
- saving**
 - automated processing and, 121–122
 - digital photos, 5
 - keyword tags, 26
 - RAW files, 80
 - selections, 221
- Scale slider**, 200
- Scale to Fit Media checkbox**, 421
- scaling selections**, 219, 231
- scanned photos**
 - date/time settings, 14
 - dividing gang-scanned images, 112
 - importing into Organizer, 8
- scene cleanup**, 310–313
- Scenic Landscape style**, 341
- Screen blend mode**, 252, 255, 356
- searching for photos**. See **finding photos**
- Select Transition dialog**, 42
- Selection Brush tool**, 226
- selections**, 215–233
 - brush for making, 226
 - changing color of, 225
 - color-based, 224–225
 - layer masks and, 239–240
 - Quick Selection tool, 228–229, 230
 - rectangular, 216–217
 - removing subjects from backgrounds, 230–233
 - round or circular, 219–220
 - saving, 221
 - scaling, 219, 231
 - snapping to edges of, 227
 - softening edges of, 222–223
 - square, 218–219
 - tricky, 227
- Set Date and Time dialog**, 14
- Set Date Range dialog**, 35
- shadows**
 - adjusting in Camera Raw, 65–66
 - clipping warning for, 66
 - color correcting, 145, 149
 - fill light for, 69–70
 - lightening, 188–189
- Shadows slider**
 - Lighting palette, 139
 - Photomerge Exposure feature, 209
- Shadows/Highlights dialog**, 189, 191, 220, 335
- shapes**
 - cropping photos into, 107–109
 - selections based on, 216–220
- sharing**
 - keyword tags, 26
 - photos to Facebook, 48–50
- sharpening techniques**, 389–408
 - Adjust Sharpness control, 406–408
 - basic sharpening, 390–396
 - Camera Raw, 81–85
 - color correction and, 141
 - edge sharpening, 403–405
 - extraordinary sharpening, 397–399
 - layer masks and, 398–399
 - luminosity sharpening, 400–402
 - portrait sharpening, 379, 392
 - sample settings, 85, 391–396
 - soft subjects and, 392
 - Web graphics and, 394
 - workflow order and, 428
- Sharpness palette**, 141
- Show Strokes checkbox**, 313
- showing your work**, xv, 41, 428
- Simple Blending option**, 208, 213
- simulated film grain effect**, 386–387
- sizing/resizing**
 - automated, 122
 - brushes, 92, 205, 244, 280
 - cropped photos, 102–106
 - digital camera photos, 115–122
 - downsizing process and, 119–120
 - dragging between documents and, 120
 - Free Transform handles for, 118, 120
 - parts of images, 123–129
 - thumbnails, 10
- skies**
 - color correcting, 161–163
 - Smart Brush adjustment, 161, 176–180
 - technique for replacing, 364–366
- skin softening**, 72, 278–286
- skin tone fix**, 236–237
- skylight filter effect**, 371–372
- slide shows**, 41–43
 - presentation options, 42
 - transitions for, 42–43
 - video on creating, 41
- slimming/trimming technique**, 275–277
- Smart Albums**, 28–29
- Smart Blending option**, 209–210, 213
- Smart Brush tool**, 176–180
 - adjustment settings in, 179
 - presets in, 176, 179, 180, 194, 261
 - steps for using, 176–178
- Smart Fix options**, 138–139
- Smart Tags**, 19–20
- smiles**, changing frowns into, 273–274
- snap-to-edges feature**, 227
- Soft Light blend mode**, 186, 285, 329, 372, 386
- soft spotlight effect**, 346–348
- soft subject sharpening**, 392
- softening techniques**
 - edges of selections, 222–223
 - skin softening, 72, 278–286
 - vignettes, 340, 350, 382
- sorting photos**, 13
- sparkling eyes**, 256–258
- special effects**, 315–387
 - automatic or built-in, 316
 - black-and-white conversions, 341–342
 - burned-in edge effect, 349–351, 357–358

- Camera Raw used for, 338–340
- collage creation, 375–378
- Depth Of Field effect, 324–327
- desaturated portrait effect, 328–332
- emphasizing objects with color, 352–353
- faded antique effect, 354–359
- fake duotone effect, 384–385
- high-contrast look, 333–340
- matching photo styles, 360–363
- neutral density gradient effect, 367–370
- Orton effect, 320–323
- panoramas, 343–345
- Picture Stack effect, 317–319
- portrait finishing technique, 379–383
- simulated film grain effect, 386–387
- sky replacement technique, 364–366
- skylight filter effect, 371–372
- soft spotlight effect, 346–348
- taming your light, 373–374
- vignetting, 349–351
 - workflow order and, 427–428
- specular highlights**, 66
- Spot Healing Brush tool**, 301–302, 306–308
- spot removal**, 300–301
- square selections**, 218–219
- sRGB color space**, 412
- Stack icon**, 46, 47
- stacking photos**, 38, 46–47
- standard photo sizes**, 102–103
- stock photo websites**, xv, 384
- Straighten tool**
 - Camera Raw, 77
 - Photoshop Elements, 113–114
- straightening photos**, 77, 113–114
- studio photo correction**, 154–155
- Style Bin**, 360–361
- Style Match feature**, 360–363
- styles**
 - brushes for working with, 363
 - sliders for adjusting, 362–363
- Surface Blur filter**, 334
- swatch card**, 61, 154–155

T

- tabbed viewing**, 110
- tags**. See **keyword tags**
- taming light**, 373–374
- Tan slider**, 237
- target cursor**, 296
- teeth**
 - repairing, 262–270
 - whitening, 259–261
- Temperature slider**, 59, 60
- text search field**, 36
- Threshold adjustment layer**, 147–148, 153
- Threshold slider**, Unsharp Mask, 391, 396
- thumbnails**
 - layer mask, 240
 - previewing, 11–12
 - Quick Fix mode, 140
 - sizing/resizing, 10
- TIFF photos**
 - cropping in Camera Raw, 74, 76
 - opening in Camera Raw, 55
- Timeline**, 15, 34
- Tint slider**, 60
- Toggle Film Strip button**, 12
- Tolerance setting**, 225
- tonal adjustments**, 143
- tools**. See **tools**
- tourist removal**, 310–313

- Transfer Tones checkbox**, 361
- transitions for slide shows**, 42–43
- Transparency slider**, 211
- tripods**, 213, 310

U

- UnCheck All button**, 5
- underexposed subjects**, 192–194
- Undo command**, 164, 272, 308, 377
- Undo History palette**, 134
- Unsharp Mask filter**
 - Adjust Sharpness control vs., 406
 - basic sharpening and, 390–396
 - digital noise and, 331
 - extraordinary sharpening and, 397–398
 - luminosity sharpening and, 401
 - portrait finishing technique and, 379
 - portrait retouching and, 256–257
 - resized photos and, 119, 120
 - sample settings, 391–396
 - See also **sharpening techniques**
- Unstack Photos command**, 47
- unwanted object removal**, 295–313
 - Clone Stamp tool for, 296–299, 303–304
 - Content-Aware Fill for, 306–309
 - distracting objects and, 302–309
 - Healing Brush tool for, 302–304
 - scene cleanup and, 310–313
 - spots/artifacts and, 300–301
 - tourists and, 310–313
- uploading Facebook photos**, 50

V

- Versace, Vincent**, 346
- Version Sets**, 196
- Vertical Perspective slider**, 199
- Very Pearly Whites effect**, 261
- Vibrance slider**, 73
- video downloads**, xv, 41, 48, 428
- vignette effects**
 - burned-in edge effect, 349–351, 357–358
 - edge vignette effect, 335–337, 339–340, 381–382
- vignetting problems**, 202, 343
- Visually Similar Photo Search dialog**, 37–38
- Vivid Landscapes style**, 341, 342
- Vivid Light blend mode**, 333

W

- Warming Filter**, 160, 232, 371
- warming up photos**, 159–160
- Warp tool**, 273–274
- Watch Folders dialog**, 9
- Web sharpening**, 394
- White Balance settings**, 58–61, 94
- White Balance tool**, 60, 61
- whitening**
 - whites of eyes, 252–254
 - yellow teeth, 259–261
- workflow order**, 425–429
- wrinkle removal**, 250–251

Z

- Zoom tool**
 - Camera Raw, 71, 82, 86
 - Photoshop Elements, 197, 256, 312
- zooming in/out**, 390