



THE HIDDEN POWER OF
BLEND MODES
IN ADOBE® PHOTOSHOP®

SCOTT VALENTINE

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Adobe Press books are published by:

PEACHPIT
1249 Eighth Street
Berkeley, CA 94710
510/524-2178
800/283-9444

Peachpit is a division of Pearson Education.
For the latest on Adobe Press books, go to www.adobepress.com.
To report errors, please send a note to errata@peachpit.com.

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Copy Editor: Darren Meiss
Compositor: Danielle Foster
Indexer: Jack Lewis
Cover design and photo collage: Mimi Heft
Interior design: Mimi Heft

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ISBN 13: 978-0-321-82376-2
ISBN 10: 0-321-82376-1

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound in the United States of America

For my wife, Carla, and our own little blend, Austin.



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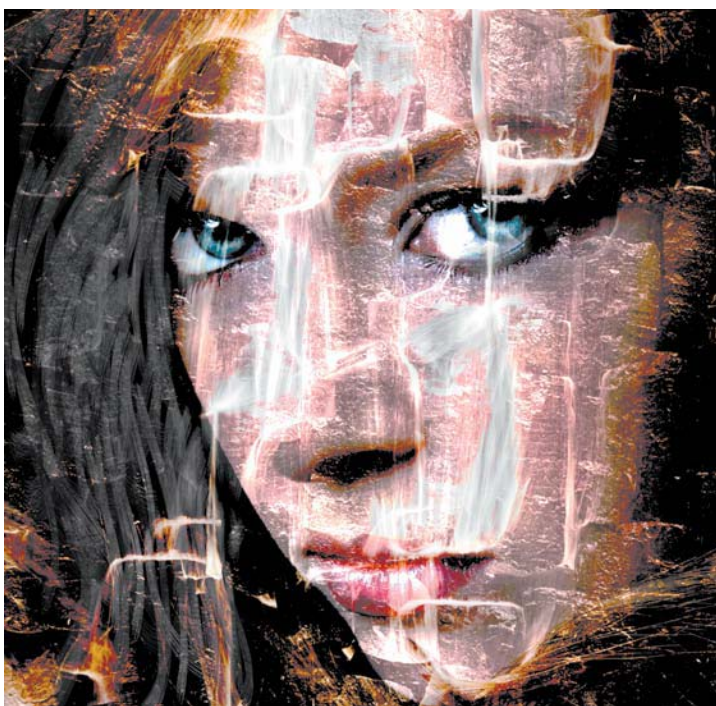
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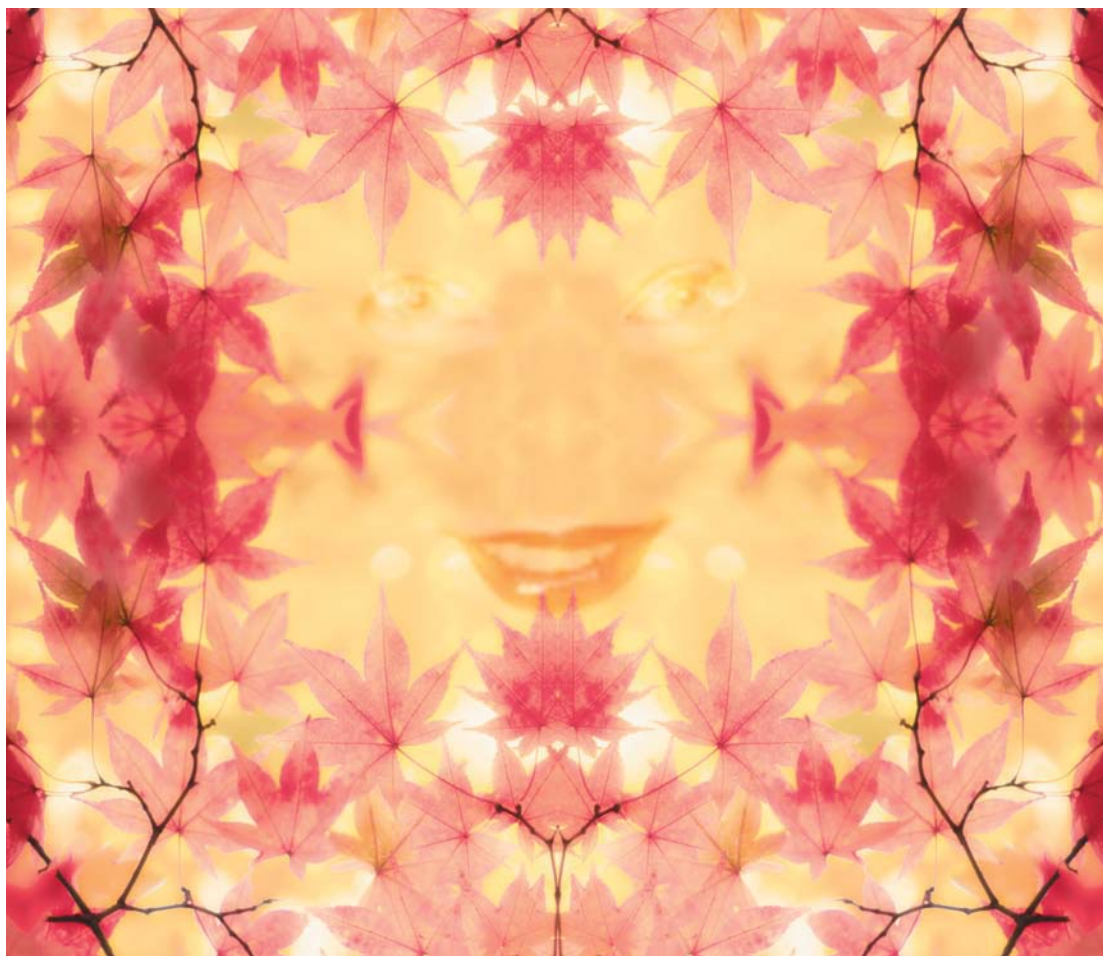
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FOREWORD

To paraphrase Einstein, “Science without art is lame; art without science is blind.” At its best, Photoshop blends math, art—and heart.

You’ll find all three in Scott Valentine, and in his merry band of contributors to this book.

To write poetry, you’d best understand grammar. Featuring well over 500 menu commands and dozens of tools, Photoshop can appear overwhelming, but like any language, it can be broken down into a series of parts. Understand how those parts relate, and you can do nearly anything.

In the language of Photoshop, blending modes are like adverbs: They govern how something is done, often making a night-and-day difference.

With their often inscrutable names (what the heck is “Linear Dodge (Add),” complete with parenthesis?), blending modes can draw blank stares from even seasoned Photoshop vets. These mathematical formulae, however, are vital to producing things as “simple” as the common drop shadow effect. So, how does one efficiently grok enough theory (but not too much), while keeping the focus on real-world results?

That's where Scott comes in. Much to the envy of us arts-and-letters-only types, Scott combines a technical mind (he's trained as a physicist) with the down-to-earth generosity of a great teacher. These qualities have won him the support of more than a dozen industry luminaries (Julianne Kost, Eismann, RC Concepcion, Matt Kloskowski, and Calvin Hollywood, to name a few) who have contributed tips and recipes to this book.

Aimed at intermediate users—but with enough info to get beginners up to speed plus a few advanced tricks for the pros—*The Hidden Power of Blend Modes* will have you saying “Wow, I didn't know Photoshop could do that (or, at least, could do it that quickly).”

Happy blending,

John Nack





CHAPTER 4

PHOTOGRAPHIC MANIPULATION & COMPOSITING

These techniques are aimed at creative interpretations and special effects. They tend to be a little more extreme, and many recipes can be combined quite easily.



Blend modes are a great way to add texture and color to your compositions. They are very easy to experiment with, letting you explore all kinds of options. For my image, Ephemeral, I combined the following modes to achieve a subtle, balanced, mysterious feeling:

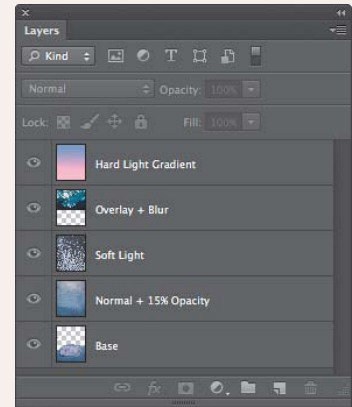
- Soft Light—Lower contrast than Overlay, and used for the ripples
- Overlay—Applied to the mountain reflection for contrast, but with low opacity and a slight blur
- Hard Light—A gradient layer to add color to the ice and mountains
- Normal—Applied to the pebbles at low opacity

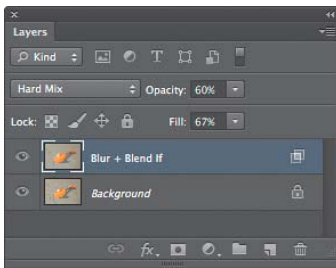
I usually know what I want each layer to add to my final image, but sometimes I like to wander through the blend modes before making up my mind, which can provide some wonderfully unexpected results. You can easily do this by moving through each blend mode in turn. With the Move tool selected (V), press Shift++ (plus) or Shift+- (minus) to scroll through the modes.

Overlay and Soft Light blend my images together without dominating, while lowering opacity alone was enough to keep some interesting texture from the pebbles. Hard Light provided just the right splash of color. It was important that the elements not fight for attention, but build in harmony and lead the eye.

JULIEANNE KOST

JKOST.COM





- 1 Duplicate the background layer.
- 2 Blur the copy with Gaussian blur to about 0.5% to 1.0% of the long pixel dimension.
- 3 Set the blend mode of the copy to Hard Mix.
- 4 Reduce the Fill to between 20% and 70%.
- 5 Reduce the Opacity.
- 6 Adjust the Blend If sliders.

You can use this method to increase contrast and saturation in otherwise dull images. However, it can quite easily blow out highlights, and darker images will tend to oversaturate in some areas.

As you adjust the settings, pay attention to the highlights and shadows, but don't be afraid to push them into clipping (solid black or white). You can ease the impact on these areas by using Blend If on the layer adjustments to restore detail. (See General Techniques for more details.)

Duplicate your background layer and give it a slight blur, just enough to smooth out hard edges. The duplicate should be set to Hard Mix. Then lower the Fill value until you get a pleasing blend. Try going all the way to zero and fading the values back up rather than trying to find the right balance starting from 100. Doing so will ensure that you don't overdo the effect.

When you have a nice balance of contrast, lower the Opacity value to reduce some of the saturation. For additional refinement, drag the Blend If sliders.

An alternative approach is to use this method for balancing low-contrast image areas by applying a layer mask and painting in the effect. To do this, fill the layer mask with black, and then use a soft-edged brush to paint white directly on the mask to selectively reveal the adjustments. ■