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ADVANCED COMPOSITING

IN PHOTOSHOP

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ADOBE® MASTER CLASS
**ADVANCED COMPOSITING
IN PHOTOSHOP**

INSPIRING ARTWORK AND TUTORIALS BY **BRET MALLEY**

ADOBE MASTER CLASS

Advanced Compositing in Photoshop

Bret Malley

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*To Erin, who makes the impossible possible without the help
of Photoshop, every minute, every hour, every day.*

*To Kellen, who is my own personal super-hero and always will be.
May the world be yours to save.*

*To my mom, who knew when not to call, and send love instead—
and stale cookies through the mail. I ate every crumb.
They were really bad...I loved them still.*

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments, viii
About the Author, ix
Introduction, x

SECTION I: BASICS

CHAPTER 1 Get Oriented, 2

Navigating the Workspace, 4
File Format Advantages, 10
Organized, Clean, Efficient, 13
Workflow Inspiration, 15

CHAPTER 2 Hidden Basics, 16

Inside My Toolbox, 18
All About the Move Tool, 18
Selection Tools and Tips, 22
Healing and Cloning Tools, 30
Brush Your Textures, 35
Conclusion, 37

CHAPTER 3 Layers and Photoshop Muscle, 38

Nondestructive Super Power, 38
Layer Organization, 41
Masking, 43
Blending Modes, 49
Smart Objects and Styles, 54
Conclusion, 55

CHAPTER 4 Favorite Adjustment Layers and Filters, 56

Adjustment Layers, 58
Featured Filters, 65
Conclusion, 71

CHAPTER 5 Photography and Compositing, 72

Types of Cameras, 72
Lenses and the Effects of Sensor Sizes, 77
Control Exposure, 78
Accessories, 82
Edit in Adobe Camera Raw, 83
Shooting for an Archive, 89
Light It!, 94
Conclusion, 96

SECTION II: TUTORIALS

CHAPTER 6 Prep and Organize Three Projects, 98

Know Your Composite Style, 98
Creating a Photo Palette, 100
Rating and Filtering in Adobe Bridge, 107
Using Tabs: Few Pieces, Big Payoff, 111
Conclusion, 113

CHAPTER 7 Making a Super Composite, 114

Begin with the Background, 114
Paste the Pieces in Place, 117

Select then Mask, 118
Adjust Curves and Color, 122
Clone This, 127
Fine-Tune Lighting and Effects, 129
Conclusion, 132

CHAPTER 8 Blending Fire, 134

Prep for the Composite, 136
Handle the Hands, 136
Remove Backgrounds with Blending
Modes, 138
Rough Sketch the Fire, 139
Browse and Position Your Flames, 141
Blend Smoke and Hands, 149
Blend Textures to Enhance, 152
Play with Color, 154
Curve the Mood, 156
Dodge and Burn with Overlay, 158
Conclusion, 159

CHAPTER 9 Atmosphere, Grit, and Demolition, 160

Gather Your Resources, 160
Straighten Up with the Adaptive Wide
Angle Filter, 162
Mask Montreal, 165
Mask the Meadow, 168
Move a Mountain, 170
Practice Cloud Control, 172
Combine the Studio and the Outdoors, 175
Complete the Demolition and Decay, 184

Add Atmospheric Perspective, 188
Finesse the Final Effects, 189
Conclusion, 194

SECTION III: INSPIRATION

CHAPTER 10 Mastering Elemental Textures, 196

Step 1: Fish for Inspiration, 198
Step 2: Get Organized, 200
Step 3: Convert to Smart Objects, 201
Step 4: Mask the Fish, 202
Step 5: Scale the Smart Objects, 203
Step 6: Give the Fish a Froggy Glare, 204
Step 7: Harness Fire and Water, 206
Step 8: Transform with Warp, 208
Step 9: Cool the Fiery Fish, 210
Step 10: Control Color but Retain Depth, 211
Step 11: Brush in Magical Lighting, 213
Step 12: Glow, 214
Conclusion, 215

MASTER VOICES: Mario Sánchez Nevado, 216

CHAPTER 11 Put Daddy Down, Please!, 220

Preparing for a Composite, 222
Step 1: Sketch the Scene, 222
Step 2: Set Up the Shot, 224
Step 3: Place the Objects, 225
Step 4: Select Your Best Images, 225

Step 5: Edit in RAW, 227
Step 6: Set the Stage with a Clear Base Image, 228
Step 7: Organize from the Beginning, 228
Step 8: Select from the Chosen, 229
Step 9: Copy and Paste in Place, 230
Step 10: Refine Selections, 231
Step 11: Add the Mask, 233
Step 12: Paint the Mask, 233
Step 13: Use Clipping Masks for Isolated Adjustments, 234
Step 14: Use Clone Stamp to Remove Unwanted Fingerprints, 236
Step 15: Combine Techniques as Needed, 238
Step 16: Adjust Lighting and Effects, 239
Conclusion, 241
MASTER VOICES: Zev and Aliza Hoover, 242

CHAPTER 12 The Hunt, 246

Step 1: Use Photography as Inspiration, 248
Step 2: Sketch Alternatives, 249
Step 3: Shoot the Subjects, 250
Step 4: Piece It Together, 251
Step 5: Mask a Group Folder, 254
Step 6: Put Hair on that Mammoth, 257
Step 7: Adjust Mammoth Lighting and Color, 260
Step 8: Make Additional Alterations, 262
Step 9: Accessorize the Caveman, 263
Step 10: Cue the Volcano, 265

Step 11: Turn Up the Temperature, 266
Conclusion, 267
MASTER VOICES: Holly Andres, 268

CHAPTER 13 Sculpting with Texture: Growth, 272

Step 1: Follow Your Props, 272
Step 2: Assemble Nature's Photo Palette, 274
Step 3: Paint Textures Together, 275
Step 4: Make a Map, 279
Step 5: Sculpt with Lighting, 282
Conclusion, 283
MASTER VOICES: Martín De Pasquale, 284

CHAPTER 14 Big Store, Big Scenery, 288

Step 1: Photograph, 290
Step 2: Build a Photo Palette and Scaffolding, 291
Step 3: Sharpen and Reduce Noise, 292
Step 4: Plant a Foreground, Grow Depth, 294
Step 5: Mask the Big Box, 296
Step 6: Sink in the Scenery, 298
Step 7: Enter Grunge, Exit the X, 302
Step 8: Turn on the Fog Machine, 304
Step 9: Adjust the Final Touches, 306
Conclusion, 307
MASTER VOICES: Erik Johansson, 308

CHAPTER 15 Epic Fantasy Landscapes, 312

- Step 1: Lay the Groundwork, 312
- Step 2: Work on Scale and Perspective, 316
- Step 3: Fill in the Scene, 317
- Step 4: Go with the Flow: Convincing Water, 319
- Step 5: Plant the Tree, 323
- Step 6: Build a Cottage, Rock by Rock, 324
- Step 7: Brush in Thatch from Scratch, 327
- Step 8: Build a Two-Board Waterwheel, 329
- Step 9: Cue the Birds, 331
- Step 10: Polish the Effects, 332
- Conclusion, 333

MASTER VOICES: Andrée Wallin, 334

Index, 338

BONUS CHAPTER 16 Fly-Time: Sci-Fi Speed, 16-2

- Step 1: Design an Alien World, 16-4
- Step 2: Add Sky Detail, 16-5
- Step 3: Paint the Ship, 16-7
- Step 4: Paint the Track Markers, 16-11
- Step 5: Apply Texture with a Vector Mask, 16-12
- Step 6: Warp to Match Spoon Reflections, 16-16
- Step 7: Add Extra Atmosphere and Glare, 16-18
- Step 8: Control Color and Finishing Touches, 16-20
- Conclusion, 16-21

MASTER VOICES: Christian Hecker, 16-22

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bret Malley is an award-winning digital artist and full-time college instructor living in Portland, Oregon, with his wife, Erin, and son, Kellen. He has an MFA in Computer Art from Syracuse University, a bachelors in digital media from University of California Santa Cruz, and teaches photography, multi-media, design, and Adobe Photoshop to university and college students of all levels and backgrounds. As a computer artist, he is crazy about digital tools and art-making of all kinds, and especially enjoys working in Photoshop, his ultimate favorite of all applications.

Bret is also an Irish bodhran drummer, hiker, juggler, snowboarder, filmmaker, traveler, didgeridoo player, and cat lover. Bret sometimes wonders why people always mention their pets in these kinds of third-person descriptions. He also likes to abide by some conventions from time to time.

Adobe Photoshop is the ideal hub for nearly limitless creativity. With it you can composite disparate images together to create a new reality—or a real mess. The goal of *Adobe Master Class: Advanced Compositing in Photoshop* is to excite your imagination and inspire you to do the first, while giving you the tools, techniques, and instruction to avoid the second. Whether you are endowing children with super-powers, envisioning endless vistas, bringing strange new creatures to life, or populating beautifully rendered dreamscapes, let this book be your guide and master class for nearly any style of Photoshop compositing, so that by its end you are able to not only composite your own highly imaginative works, but craft them like a pro.

Adobe Master Class: Advanced Compositing in Photoshop will lead your exploration into many fascinating aspects of Photoshop and the nature of compositing. After revealing some nifty techniques and features hidden behind the basic tools, layers, and adjustments, I will then move on into a whole world of editing methods for advanced image manipulation and compositing. Whether you are a quick-study Photoshop initiate or a seasoned wiz, there is always something more to learn about this brilliant application, and this book is going to help you master it!

What's in This Book?

Adobe Master Class: Advanced Compositing in Photoshop is composed of three sections:

- **Section I** provides a lively orientation to the repertoire of tools and concepts you'll need for the later tutorials, then outlines some photography basics and strategies for compositing. This first section of the book is especially good for those of you still picking up a few things or feeling fairly rusty with your Photoshop chops.
- **Section II** is filled with hands-on tutorials where you get to finally play with fire. (Think I'm kidding? Read Chapter 8.) In this section, theory turns into step-by-step instruction and practice—not to mention pure digital fun as you get to jump into a few of my worlds and build your own versions.
- **Section III** presents a wide range of inspirational project demonstrations explaining how I created different styles of composites. These are geared to get your own creative juices flowing and provide some insights and helpful tips I learned along the way.

Nested between the Section III chapters are some additional gems: the “**Masters Voices**” interviews with master digital artists who are brimming with creativity and genius knowledge of Photoshop and compositing. It is my hope that you will be as inspired as I am by these folks

and will take their words of wisdom and personal insights to heart—and then create something brilliant of your own!

Downloading the Bonus Chapter and Tutorial Resources

To keep the book focused, I had to be pretty selective about what I put in each chapter. The problem is that there is a little more information that might come in handy after you've gone through all the chapters. So as an added value for you, I have written a bonus chapter called "Fly-Time: Sci-Fi Speed." The chapter covers speed painting (creating a project as quickly as possible), which can be a fun personal challenge or an essential skill when you're on a deadline. Either way it's a stellar exercise for bringing your work and craft to another level.

To work along with me through the tutorials in Section II, you'll need each chapter's accompanying resource files. To download them, log in or set up an account at peachit.com. Enter the book's ISBN or go directly to the book's product page to register.

Once on the book's page, click the Register Your Product link. The book will show up in your list of registered products along with a link to the book's bonus content (including Bonus Chapter 16, which is not in printed versions of the

book). Click the link to access the resource files for each chapter. For example, all the files you need for Chapter 8 are contained within *Chapter8_Resources*. The files are waiting for you. Download them when you're ready to work, or log on and start downloading now so you can be ready to go once you get to Section II—just make sure you remember where you put them.

Is This Book for You?

So, the book description sounds nice and all, but how do you know for sure if the book is for you? Try this out. If you recognize yourself in the following list, then you'll benefit from the chapters to come:

- You want to learn about Photoshop and seamless editing, especially compositing.
- You like fantasy and sci-fi effects and imagery and want to try creating some yourself.
- You want to learn about blending modes and clever uses for getting stunning results.
- You want to make the most out of even the basic tools and discover their lesser known features.
- You want to learn how to paint with textures and other images from a custom photo palette.
- You want to master masking, Smart Objects, and other nondestructive workflow techniques and features.

- You are looking to learn how to shoot your own imagery and build a photo archive for any number of projects.
- You are interested in composition strategy and finishing effects for color, lighting, and other adjustments.
- You love Photoshop, but you fall asleep every time you crack open a technical book or manual about it.

In summary, this book should be for you, whoever you are and whatever your compositing goals. I sincerely hope you find it of good and entertaining use!

Dig into Photoshop

Mastering Photoshop is very much like mastering a language: Frequent repetition is the key. Practice every day if you can, and at least twice a week. Teaching Photoshop-intensive courses has shown me that *just once a week practice* is simply not enough for most of us.

While you practice, don't neglect the keyboard. My students often ask if keyboard shortcuts are really that useful. This is art, they say, not programming. Yes, the shortcuts are truly *that* useful. For the majority of people who want to use Photoshop with increased regularity and at a professional level, shortcuts help tremendously with efficiency. For a select few though, keyboard shortcuts are truly just too much. If

that group includes you, that's fine. I, myself, am dyslexic and understand when things just don't sense make. You can still accomplish just about everything without shortcuts, but definitely try to pick up a few as you go.

No matter what, get hands on as often as possible. Repetition is critical. Repetition enables you to take short term "that is neat!" memory and store it in the doing-without-thinking part of your brain. So pick something fun to work on each week and just do it! Repeatedly. You will be glad you did, eventually you'll work by using your Photoshop instincts alone. Masterful things may come of it! *Will* come of it!

I began my own computer art career as a little dude sitting on my dad's lap some 25 years ago, and I haven't really stopped using these machines to make art ever since. While my love for this medium has never changed, the creative tools available definitely have come a long-long way—and boy am I glad. Now with two degrees in the digital arts, I am still continually acquiring more tools for my craft.

Tools and techniques are nothing, however, without the passion and vision to create that we each bring to our work. My hope is that something—a tip, an idea, an image—within this book will ignite your imagination and help you bring it to life with Photoshop. As I tell all my students, anything is possible in Photoshop—now it's time to enjoy and learn how!

Favorite Adjustment Layers and Filters

COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER

- Curves
- B&W adjustment layers
- Color balance
- Hue and saturation
- Smart Filters
- Blurring
- Sharpening
- Reducing Noise
- Camera Raw filter

Remember your first few composites—those roughly cut and pasted, disjointed collages? Whether we like to admit it or not, we all go through this stage before honing our eyes and skills to craft an element of photorealism into our work. That element is what elevates a composite from a mere copy-and-paste-fest to a seamless new reality. The craft behind it is largely the craft of using filters, adjustment layers, and their masks (**FIGURE 4.1**). These features represent their own art form when used by a pro. Endlessly useful for a multitude of situations, they can be the difference between realizing your vision and consigning yet another project to the digital scrap heap of “not quite right.”

Rather than giving you a hasty flyby of every adjustment layer and filter, this chapter will push deep into my four favorite adjustment layers (along with their subterranean features), as well as the Photoshop filters that I find come in most handy for composite work. This focus will get you going for most situations and provide a solid base for the more complex tutorials and projects in Sections II and III.

► FOUR TEARS OF VICTORY (2009)





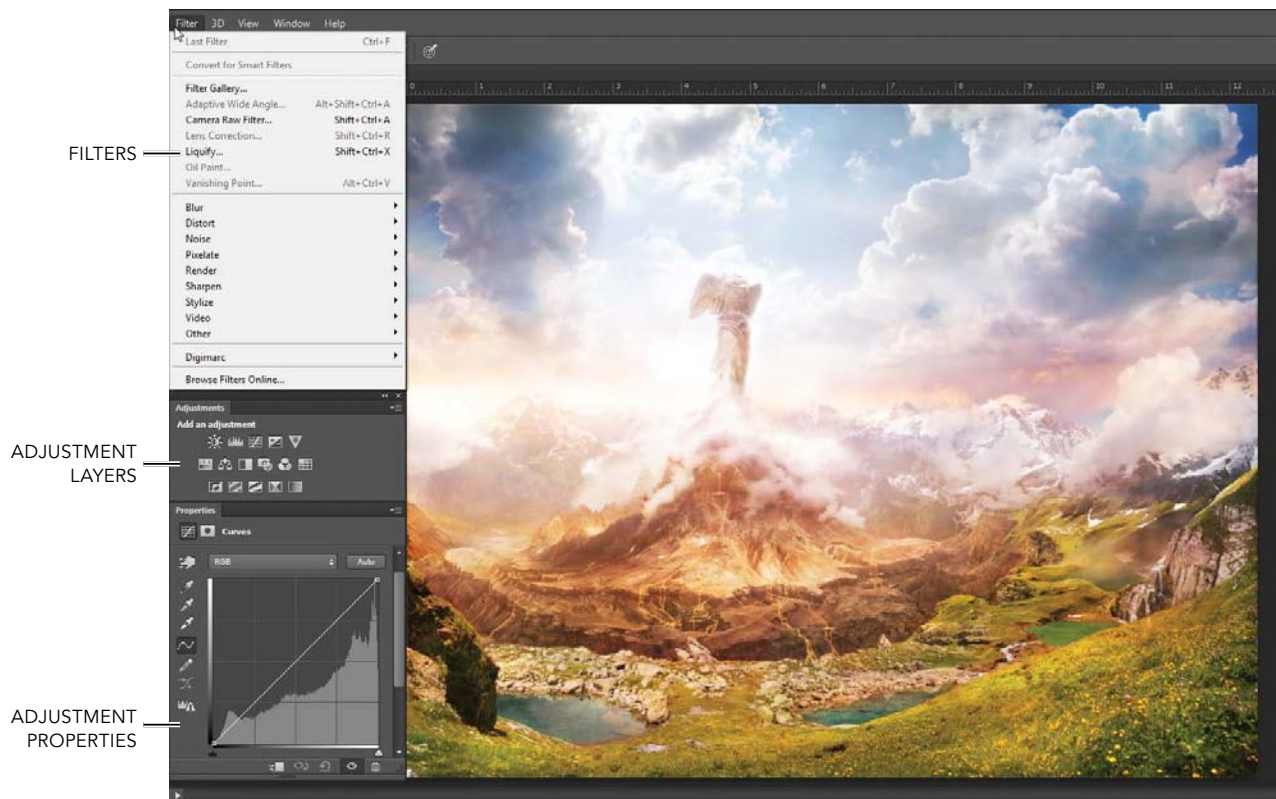


FIGURE 4.1 Filters and adjustment layers are essential for blending very different image sources into a seamless composite.

Adjustment Layers

When working nondestructively, adjustment layers are the professional way to go rather than choosing the destructive adjustments available from the Image menu. By making your adjustment as a dedicated layer with an accompanying mask (**FIGURE 4.2**), you can later fine-tune or remove your changes without any permanent alterations or loss of quality. Just like standard layers, adjustment layers affect the layers directly below them in the stack and can be independently altered by themselves. When you just want to adjust a single layer, you can restrict an adjustment layer to a single layer or group by clipping it to the layer placed directly below it (as covered in Chapter 3). As a standard feature,

every adjustment layer comes with a clean white mask for safe and nondestructive adjusting.

Although the Adjustments panel (choose Window > Adjustments to bring this up if it is not open) offers many choices, each with its own specialty, I have come to rely on four adjustment layers in particular. Whether piecing layers together seamlessly or correcting for some shortcomings of an image, I use Curves, Black & White, Color Balance, and Hue and Saturation most heavily.

Curves

Of my top four, Curves is perhaps my most used adjustment layer and is by far the most versatile, as well. It is my go-to when something is just not looking right or when I need more control over the general lights and darks of an area, when I need to isolate a tone, and much more. A Curves adjustment layer enables you to nondestructively shift tonal attributes of an image, making specific tones lighter or darker.

The controls you need are housed in the Curves Properties panel (**FIGURE 4.3**) The horizontal and vertical gradient strips along the bottom and left side of the Curves control represent the range of possible tones (from darks through midtones to lights) in an image. The diagonal line (the “curve”) represents the value of each of the tones in the gradients as they compare to each other. Notice that when you first apply a Curves adjustment layer, any point on the line corresponds to the same tone on the horizontal gradient (the scale for tones in the starting, or input, image) as on the vertical gradient (the scale for tones in the adjusted, or output, image). You’ve not adjusted anything, so the values are the same along both gradients. Click the line to add a control point, and drag the point upwards. Notice that because the point is higher, it now corresponds to a lighter shade on the vertical

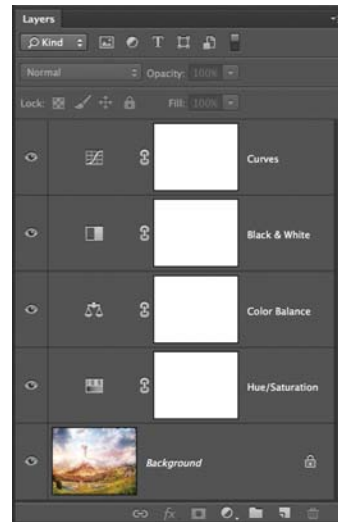


FIGURE 4.2 Each adjustment layer includes a mask for immediate nondestructive erasing of the adjustment.

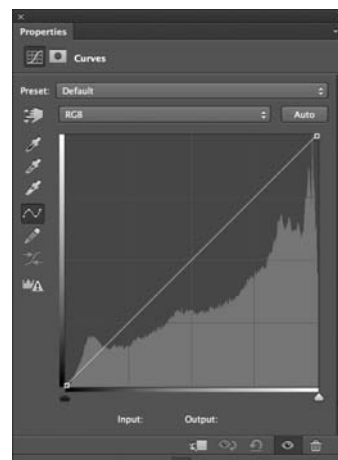


FIGURE 4.3 The Curves Properties panel contains both the controls to adjust the levels of darks, midtones, and lights in an image and a histogram that graphically represents the quantity of those tones present.

gradient than on the horizontal gradient? By dragging up, you've lightened the original tone at that point, as well as along the curve. Dragging a control point down does the opposite.

For example, in **FIGURE 4.4**, I shifted a wide range of tones lighter by lifting the single control point (perhaps not the best aesthetic choice, but a good demonstration); to see how this works, pick any point along the new curve line and compare where it lies along the horizontal gradient (the original tone) to where it aligns with the vertical gradient (the new, adjusted lighter tone). This is a good way to remember how Curves works by default: Pull a point higher means lighter, pull it lower means darker. (Note that this default changes; it inverts when you work on a grayscale image, or you can change it to match RGB.)

NOTE You can use Curves for adjusting color, as well, although I prefer to use a couple of the other adjustment layers and their sliders for this work. If you choose to try Curves for colors, however, I definitely encourage you to try individually adjusting red, green, and blue separately rather than using the default RGB, which controls them all in equal amounts. Change the color by clicking RGB in the Curves Properties panel and select one of the other additive primaries.

Curve Strategy

With a better understanding of the technical theory of Curves adjustment layers, consider some practical tips for using curves to their full potential:

- Don't try anything too radical. For example, curves with a very exaggerated S shape (such as doubling back on themselves as in **FIGURE 4.5**) create an inversion for some tones of the image, causing lights and darks to switch places with each other. (Try pressing

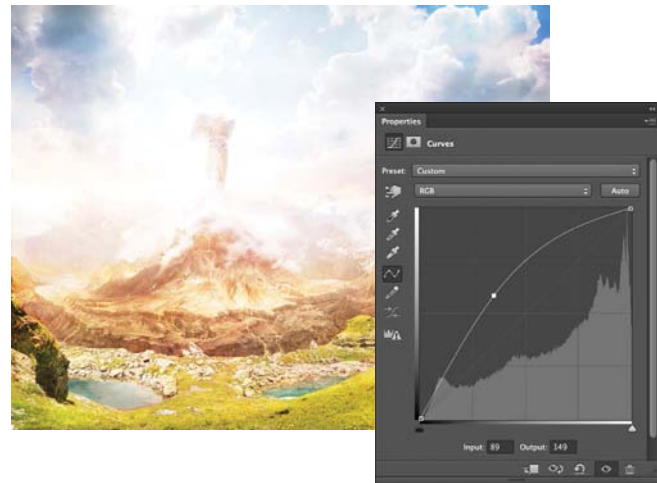


FIGURE 4.4 Pulling a curve's single control point upwards or to the left shifts the tonal values lighter and keeps the lightening effect proportional with all nearby tones as they are gently elevated along the curve.

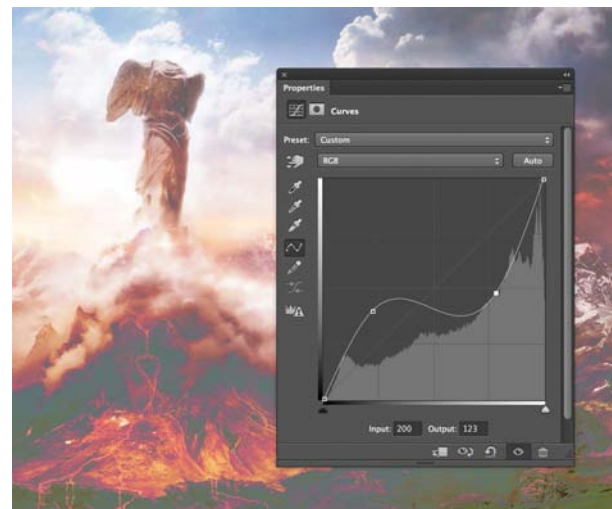



FIGURE 4.5 Curves that get too exaggerated end up looking pretty awful (like a posterizing effect) or produce inversions of lights and darks as shown here. Keep your adjustments gentle and controlled instead.

Ctrl/Cmd+I on an image layer to see the full effect of this.) The power behind Curves adjustment layers is in the subtlety and gentleness of the curve that you make.

- Use two points to create a fully controlled contrast adjustment. Click to add two control points along the curve line, one toward the bottom darks and one towards the lighter end. Slightly drop the darks control point downward and similarly bring the highlights control point upwards for a punchier look!
- Use no more than three control points along the curve whenever possible. I usually stick to adding just one or two unless I am trying to isolate a very specific tonal adjustment. The more points you make, the higher the chances are that the image might begin to look “off” or inversion begins.

- Isolate a tone by using the Sampling tool , (found to the left of the Curves histogram in the Curves Properties panel) to click on a specific area or tone in the actual image. You will see a phantom control point along the curve line demonstrating where the value falls. With a click, you can add control points for whatever distinct tone you clicked on within your image. This can be helpful for those times when you need to find a specific value and shift it lighter or darker.
- Use the mask provided with the adjustment layer to isolate your Curves adjustment to specific areas. Suppose you want to lighten one area to draw further attention to it, but you don’t want it to lighten the edges of the image. As you adjust, focus only on the critical areas, then paint black on the layer’s mask to remove the changes from areas you wish to be

POWER OF THE HISTOGRAM


Understanding the histogram, found behind the curve line in the center of the Curves Properties panel (Figure 4.3), will give you better control when working with Curves adjustment layers. The histogram is much like a speedometer in a car, giving you a readout of simple data on which you can base adjustments; knowing the current reading can help you adjust your speed (or image tones) to the desired level. (Unlike a speedometer, however, the histogram does not respond interactively as you raise or lower a point on the curve.)

The data that the histogram represents is the full tonal range from dark to light of an image, presented as a series of peaks and valleys; the higher the peak, the greater the quantity of the corresponding tone it represents, which is shown below it in the horizontal gradient. The histogram is helpful because it shows the relative quantities of each tone present, from all the deepest, darkest pixels (starting


at the left by default) through the midtones to those spots of pure white (far right by default). If an image is heavy on dark pixels, the histogram will be more mountainous at the dark end of the bottom gradient. Likewise, a higher percentage of lighter pixels produces peaks towards opposite end of the gradient.

Keep in mind, however, that histogram shapes have no bearing on the quality of the image. Two images may be equally stunning but be represented by vastly different histogram shapes. With that said, you want to avoid having a histogram that does not take up the full range, ending short with a completely flat valley after a hill at either end of the spectrum, because it will appear washed out (lacking the contrast of full black and full white). These images will need further adjusting to increase contrast, such as with Curves or Levels to regain a fuller gamut of tones.

unaffected. Alternatively, you can also make a selection before adding the adjustment layer, and Photoshop will automatically adjust only the selected area, applying a mask to everything outside of the selection.

- Use a pair of Curves. One Curves adjustment layer can be helpful for controlling, say, the darks, but when you try to get the highlights right in the same curve, it changes too much or is harder to control. Adding a second Curves adjustment layer that finesses another portion of the image, such as the lights, will keep a more even tonal adjustment than trying to do it all in one go and getting dramatic with the curve shape.
- Clip the Curves adjustment layer to a single layer below it so that you can affect that clipped layer only. This is so important for composite work where images are taken from a wide variety of sources that you must match the lights and darks consistent with the background (**FIGURE 4.6**) or each other. To clip the adjustment layer, either click the clipping icon  at the bottom of the Adjustment Properties panel or Alt/Opt-click between the adjustment layer and the layer directly below it.

Black & White

Although not specifically designed for the purpose, B&W adjustment layers can replace hours of traditional black-and-white dodging, burning, and filtering to a swift move of the slider. True, this adjustment layer will turn the content black and white, but you can control the lights and darks of each color of the original image separately to enhance certain features once in grayscale. To begin, simply click the B&W Adjustment Layer icon  in the Adjustments panel; from the Black & White Properties panel that opens you can adjust the values of each color individually (**FIGURE 4.7**). Suppose you want a green

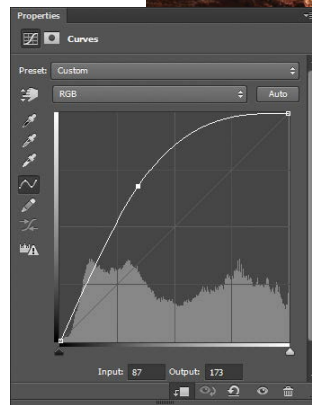


FIGURE 4.6 Adjust an individual layer by clipping the adjustment to it and then matching the lights and darks to the others around it; in this case, the piece was much too dark and needed a Curves adjustment layer to lighten it up.

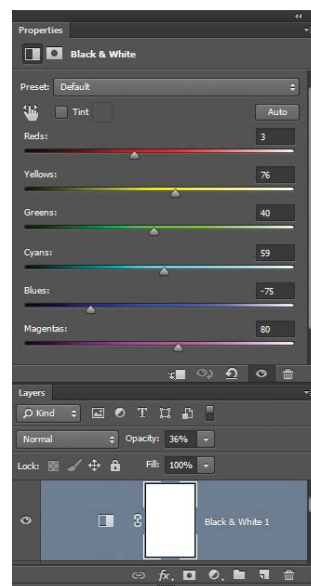



FIGURE 4.7 The mix-match of lighting amongst the elements ended up just being too overpowering in the image (left), so I added a B&W adjustment layer (right) to alter the saturation (by lowering opacity) and values of separated colors.

(converted to a mid-gray) to become an even lighter gray; find the green slider, and move it to the right to shift all the related greens lighter.

At lower opacities, the Black & White adjustment layer is phenomenal for subtly controlling saturation and the lights and darks of certain colors. (I rarely use it full force, which produces a black-and-white image.) The power of moving around the darks and lights for each color has far reaching benefits. For example, I photographed the elements of Figure 4.7 with a wide range of lighting color temperatures, edited them together with a certain vibrancy in mind, then decided I needed to tone down the colors instead. Adding a B&W adjustment layer, I lowered the opacity to under 40% until it curbed the

saturation. From there, I further adjusted the colors to lighten the yellows and darken the reds and blues slightly to create a more contrast in the composition.

TIP The Black & White Properties panel's Slider Modifier icon ( above the sliders) is especially helpful for times when you need to modify a specific color family quickly. Simply click the icon, then click and drag directly within the image to sample a color. Sampling a color within the image tells Photoshop to find the closest matching slider in the panel (just one at a time); move the cursor back and forth to adjust the color slider in the same way as using it directly.

Color Balance

As an adjustment layer, Color Balance is a good choice for blending in layers whose colors don't match those of the other elements in a composite. Perhaps the images were shot on different light settings, different cameras, or just have a different color palette in general. With a Color Balance adjustment layer, you can easily correct moderate differences. The Color Balance Properties panel contains three sliders: one ranging from cyan to red, one from magenta to green, and the last from yellow to blue. **FIGURES 4.8A** and **B** are a good example of better blending two images with Color Balance. The woman with the sword was too warm in color compared to the cooler background, so shifting the sliders over to the cooler sides (more cyan, blue, and just a hint more of green) helped dramatically with fitting the two images together. The sliders start out neutral at the center, so you easily can go back and forth to finesse the colors.

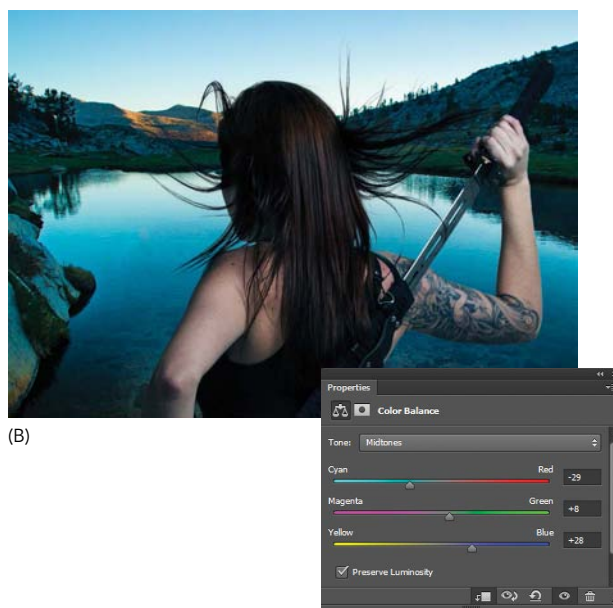
Although Photoshop offers many other ways (some a lot more refined and exacting) to help with color balance, this adjustment layer does a fairly decent job and is so straightforward and quick, it works with very little effort or tweaking, making it my go-to choice in most cases.

Hue/Saturation

As my first choice for quick color shifts and general desaturation, a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer is also great for altering a selected color using color range (revisit Chapter 3 for a reminder) and shifting the color to an entirely new hue. Combining simplified features of the Color Balance and B&W adjustment layers, Hue/Saturation includes a very basic, yet quick-to-use Saturation slider and can be good for simple neutralizing or color shifting. I find this adjustment layer especially valuable when I need to shift over a specific color. For example,



(A)



(B)

FIGURES 4.8A and **B** Color Balance is not especially refined, but is quick, efficient, and works wonderfully for most color discrepancies. When I first composited the figure with the background, I discovered I photographed her with warmer colors compared to her new, cooler surroundings (a). To cool the subject down and match the scene, I applied a Color Balance adjustment layer (b).

in **FIGURE 4.9** I needed a small green object down by the crib to help complete a compositional triangle of color. I added a Hue/Saturation adjustment and mask color range to shift just the juggling ball by the crib to the proper green.

TIP You can shift or neutralize a specific color range within the Hue/Saturation adjustment layer even without using a mask. In the Hue/Saturation Properties panel, simply select a color from the second drop-down menu (set to Master by default). You can even restrict or expand the allowed color variation using the bottom color gradient, specifying only yellow, only red, or only colors between yellow and red, for example—endless possibilities for color shifting and saturation control.

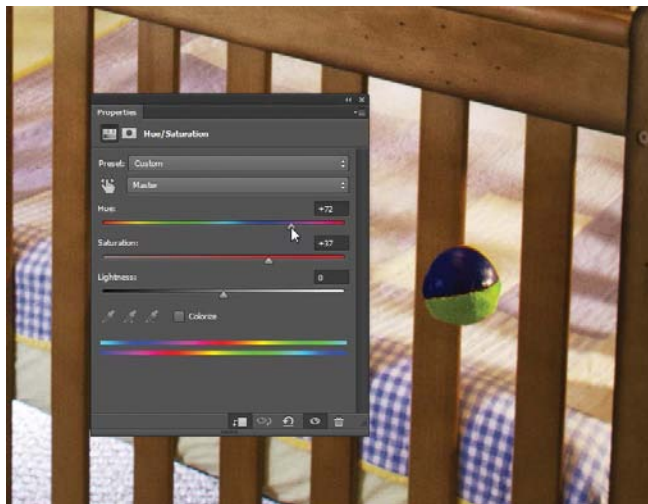


FIGURE 4.9 A Hue/Saturation adjustment layer and mask using Color Range (see Chapter 3) works especially well for isolated color changes; you can alter a selected color or restrained portion of the image. Here I changed the ball from red to green.

Featured Filters

Somewhat related to adjustment layers are filters that can be applied to a layer. Both filters and adjustment layers can dramatically alter the look and feel of an image, helping with seamlessness or adding a nice visual effect. Filters don't have a dedicated panel though, and instead live within the Filter menu (see Figure 4.1). Although many of the filters by themselves end up looking too canned and obvious for most uses, there are the few described in the next sections that stand out as invaluable for composite work. Filters such as Smart Sharpen and Reduce Noise can help with quality differences and, like color adjustments, help match images from different sources. Blurs also come in handy as an effect when you need more control of the depth, mood, or motion. In Chapter 9, you'll use them to create sunrays, while Bonus Chapter 16 demonstrates using filters to soften glare.

Smart Sharpen

What makes the Smart Sharpen filter smart is its ability to control simultaneously the amount of sharpening, noise reduction (Photoshop CC), and compensation for various kinds of blur, from motion blurs to lens blurs (**FIGURE 4.10**). This combination of strengths is more versatile than other sharpening methods (like Unsharp Mask) and is very useful when you need to match one picture element to another, as illustrated in Chapter 14.

When using Smart Sharpen, either on ordinary layers or as a Smart Filter on Smart Objects, keep a few tips in mind:

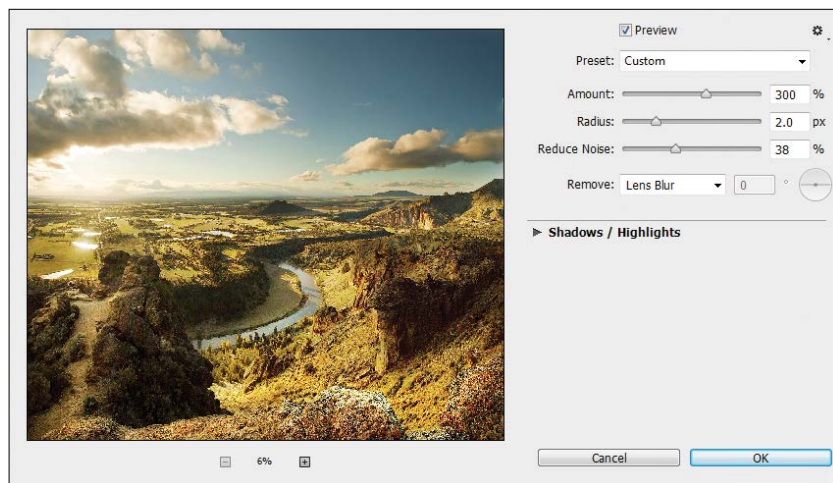
- Avoid halos created from too large a Radius and too high an Amount of sharpening applied. This not only looks bad, but it's a tell-tale sign of amateur sharpening or that you did not zoom in close enough to see what was happening. When the radius size is larger

than the blurriness you start to increase the contrast for parts that you shouldn't be increasing, parts that don't need it. Combine this with a sharpening amount that goes a bit overboard, and you have yourself a mighty halo on the outside of your edges. Start with a radius that matches the blur radius (typically 1 to 3 pixels for my own setup), then boost the Amount slider until edges pop without a dramatic light halo. For Photoshop CS6 and older versions, this usually meant

under 100%, but the CC version of this feature can easily push to 300% without overly adverse effects.

- Zoom in close to see what's being sharpened and what the effects are in regards to halos and noise, then zoom out to make sure it's actually having a good sharpening effect in a general sense. It's always a balance of too much and creating bad halos versus not enough and having very little sharpening taking place.

FIGURE 4.10 Smart Sharpen enables you to compensate for multiple kinds of blur and gives you greater flexibility than other sharpening methods.

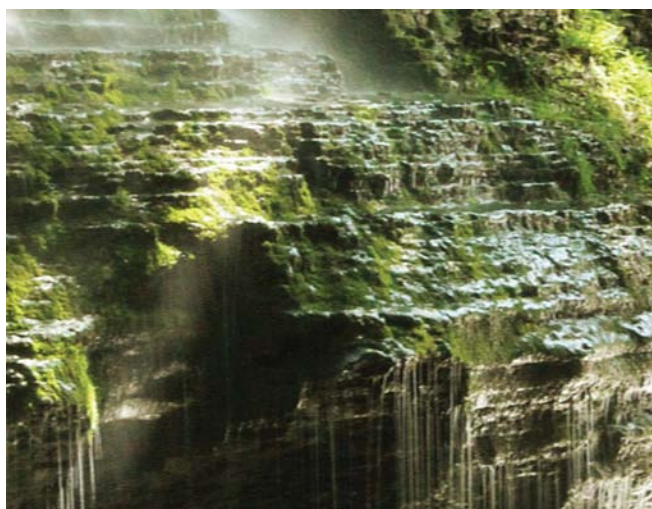


SMART FILTERS

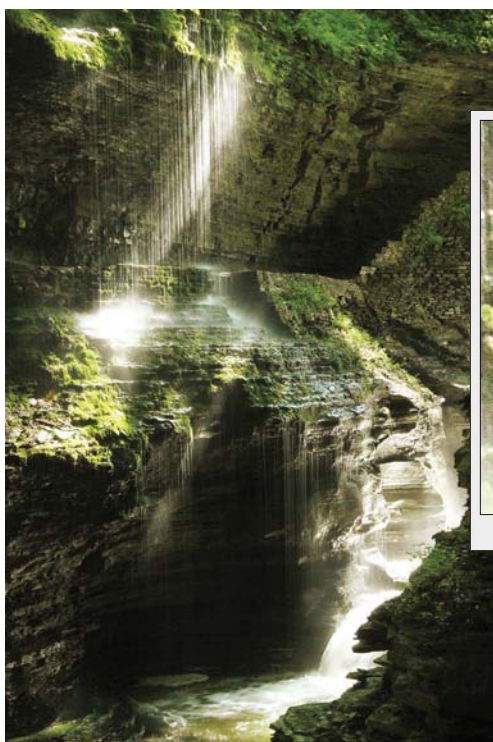
When it comes to filters, *Smart* is just another way of saying nondestructive. You can edit the settings of Smart Filters at any time after applying them to a layer or remove them entirely without permanently changing the underlying layer. You can apply Smart Filters to Smart Objects only, however, so you must first convert your layer to a Smart Object. To do so, choose Filter > Convert for Smart Filters. Once the layer you wish to filter is a Smart Object, Photoshop will consider almost any filter you apply to be

a Smart Filter (and create a separate mask, thumbnail, and Visibility icon for the filters being applied to the layer in the Layers panel).

Be aware, however, that a few filters, such as Liquify, Vanishing Point, and some of the newer specialized blurs in CS6 and CC, cannot be applied as Smart Filters. Still, for the rest of the goodies packed within the Filter menu, clicking on Convert for Smart Filter is the nondestructive way to go—the smart way to go!

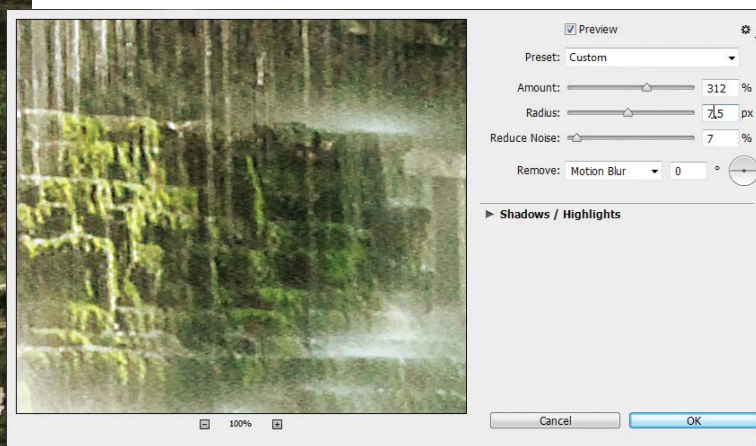


(A)



(B)

- Click and hold on the Preview image to the left of the sliders to see its original state, then release to see the effect of the current Smart Sharpen settings. This is great for toggling a fast before-and-after comparison.
- Use the Remove drop-down menu to specify the type of blur you're trying to remove. In most cases, the Gaussian or Lens Blur setting works best. When you need to sharpen away some camera motion, choose Motion Blur and set the Rotation dial angle using the line running through the center as a reference for the direction the motion blur is smearing (this fills in the Angle field automatically). From there, adjust the Amount slider until motion is looking a little more stationary (**FIGURES 4.11A and B**). Note that this does not perform miracles on unholy amounts of motion blur—it's smart, not omnipotent.



FIGURES 4.11A and B Fix mild motion blur with the motion blur removal option; set your angle that the blur is smearing, and work with the Amount slider until satisfied. Compare the results (b) with the original image (a), which contains a small amount of diagonal motion blur as I didn't have a tripod with me.

Reduce Noise

When compositing images from sources of noticeable quality and other differences, the Reduce Noise filter is one more handy tool in your seamless editing belt. Consistency is important for overall continuity and making those puzzle pieces blend without a trace is the challenge. Digital noise is often a hidden trip wire in



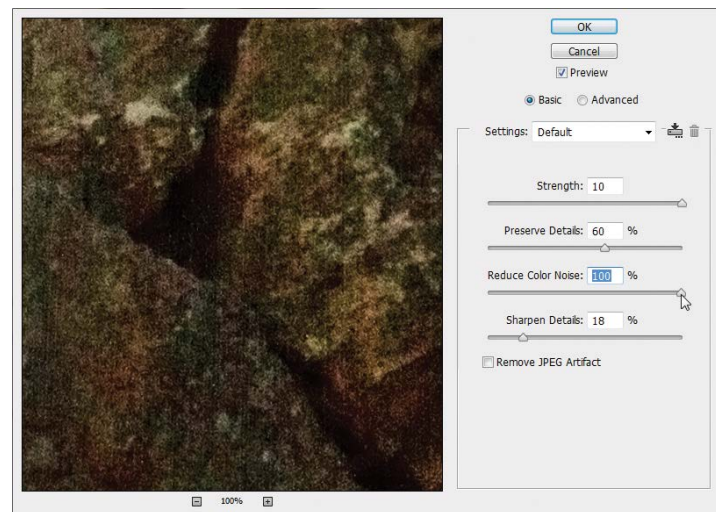
(A)



(B)

underexposed images. Noise is a term used for randomized bits of unwanted visual static. Noise occurs from taking pictures that have boosted the amplitude of the sensor's signal (results of a higher camera ISO), usually for low light situations (Chapter 5 discusses this in more detail).

There's not a whole lot to this filter, but the Reduce Noise filter does help with this noise challenge by leveling out some of the bits of contrast and static generated from sharpening a grainy image or getting rid of high camera ISO complications. Typically though, I use this filter for concentrating just on color noise (what I find to be the most important part to focus on), randomized bits of color in particular, as those are easy enough to get rid of without too many consequences such as blurring the layer (FIGURES 4.12A and B).



FIGURES 4.12A and B The Reduce Noise filter works especially well for terrible color noise generated from lightening an underexposed or high-ISO image; here you can see the color noise in the lightened shadows of the rocks (a) being reduced (b).

Blurs

Ever notice a full sense of depth created from an image using a shallow depth of field? Some parts of the image blur as they get closer or further away. The tendency to focus our attention in just the right areas and create a sense of depth or motion are particularly helpful abilities of the various blur filters. Ever try to simulate a longer exposure with a motion blur? Photoshop CC and CS6 come with some fantastic blurs for a wide range of uses, from simulating tilt-shift lenses to natural-looking lens blurs (**FIGURE 14.13**).

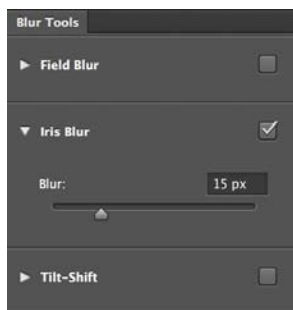


FIGURE 4.13 Three blurs living under one roof is a helpful feature for getting just the right blur to an image.

The Three Latest Blurs

The three newest blur filter additions, the Tilt-Shift Blur, Iris Blur, and Field Blur, are linked together within the same dialog window and offer a wide range of control and blurring effects. The most powerful and useful for my own workflow is the Radial Blur, but here's a little information about each:

WARNING All three new blurs are currently destructive edits. You cannot apply them to Smart Objects, so always make a copy of the layer you want to blur, just as a backup (Ctrl/Cmd+J).

- Tilt-Shift Blur provides a nice mirrored gradient transition of blurring, much like the shallow depth of field when shooting something small, such as a miniature model set. This can be a nice effect for those images with easy to see distances and without obstructions (**FIGURE 4.14**).
- Field Blur enables you to change the blur and sharpness. Very similar to the traditional Gaussian blur filter, Field blur allows you to set multiple blur pins each with their own amount of blur controlled independently. This is especially valuable for moments of variable blurring of a layer—such as an actual field blur simulation.

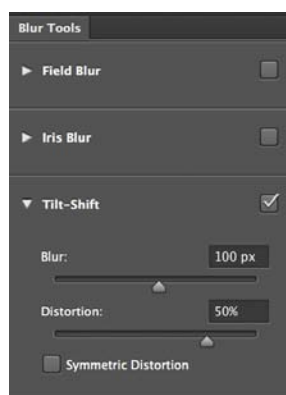


FIGURE 4.14 Tilt-Shift provides an interesting miniature look to an image making even the largest vistas feel more like a macro shot.

- Iris Blur is similar to the Field blur, but one-ups it with control and some added slick features. Rather than giving a general blur (like Field blur) and a location to apply it, this blur lets you shape it as an oval! You can set both the iris radius (oval size) and orientation while also indicating the area it begins to transition from sharp to blurry (**FIGURE 4.15**). When working with Iris blur you can also edit multiple features just within the preview area. For example, click and hold the default center focus pin to drag it to a new location, or you can add additional focus pins by clicking elsewhere in the image. Click the outer blur area ring to expand and

rotate the Iris radius where the full amount of the blurring pixel radius is applied in force (**FIGURE 4.16**). The four middle points help you adjust the inside ring that stays absent of blur (called the Sharp area).

TIP When using Iris Blur, Alt/Opt-drag the inner focus pins to move just one isolated point at a time (rather than the default linked set of all four). Sometimes it's best to have the sharpness area extended in one direction a little more than another, and rather than making another focus pin, you can simply move one of the inner sharpness points for this.

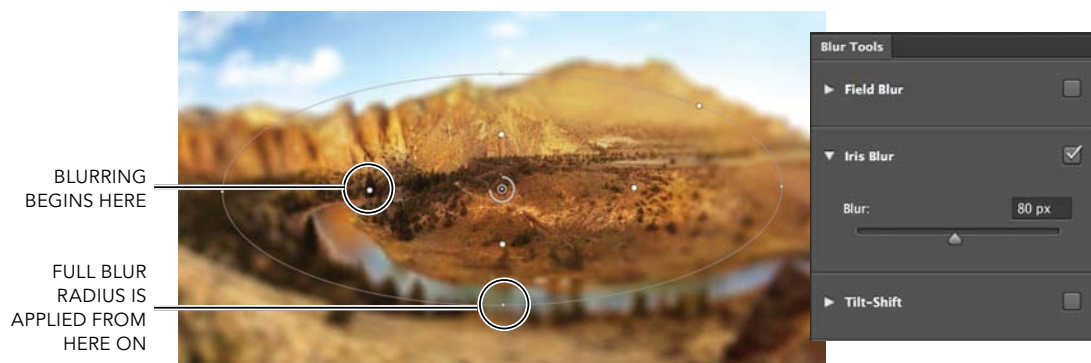


FIGURE 4.15 The Iris Blur filter lets you control where blur starts and how dramatic the transition is from being sharp to the full blur amount (set by the Radius slider).



FIGURE 4.16 Iris Blur is wonderfully versatile as you can control the location of the blur, the severity of the blur, and several other customized options, as well as having multiple blur locations all on one layer.



FIGURE 4.17 The Camera RAW editor is unparalleled as the newest Smart Filter; all the sliders and editing interface combined with the potential of working in Photoshop's layer environment—just brilliant.

Filter with Camera Raw Editor

The Camera RAW Editor enables you to make nondestructive adjustments on RAW images for everything from color temperature, lights and shadow, clarity, to specialized curves and other color control elements. Chapter 5 will highlight some of the key features of editing in RAW, but no discussion of useful filters would be complete without mentioning you can use the Adobe Camera Raw (ACR) Editor as a Smart Filter (**FIGURE 4.17**).

Conclusion

With these four adjustment layers and a handful of filters, you can do nearly all the major edits needed for seamless work—from matching any layer's look with another to synching lights, darks, and color. You can correct a multitude of discrepancies and even improve the overall look and feel of a composite with greater depth or motion. As you will see in later chapters, these adjustment layers and filters will help tremendously in just about any situation.

NOTE Even though the ACR interface is the same as that for editing RAW files, the filter is not a complete RAW Editor replacement. Using this filter may not have the same flexibility (such as when working with JPEG files), as the information in the files it will be working with is much more limited in general than in an unprocessed RAW file.

Index

A

- ACR (Adobe Camera RAW) Editor
 - editing images in, 83–84, 227
 - filter adjustments within, 71
 - icons for features, 88
 - illustrated, 84
 - reducing noise in images, 293
 - saving adjustment presets for, 88
 - slider adjustments for, 85–88
 - workflow tips for, 88–89
- actions, 102, 103–104
- Adaptive Wide Angle filter, 162–165
 - adjustment layers, 58–65. *See also* B&W adjustment layers; Curves adjustment layers
 - applying with mask, 44–45
 - Black & White, 62–63
 - clipping other layer to, 48
 - Color Balance, 64, 123–124
 - editing Smart Objects on, 204–206
 - filters vs., 65
 - fine-tuning lighting with, 129–132
 - group folder clipped to, 124–126
 - Hue/Saturation, 64–65, 126, 210
 - modifying color with, 60
 - pairing Curves with Hue/
Saturation, 125
 - used in *Rainbow's End*, 319, 320
 - using, 58–59
- Adobe Bridge
 - access in ACR window from, 83
 - actions vs. loading files with, 102
 - loading files from, 100, 102–104, 116
 - preparing composite document in, 110
 - rating and sorting images with, 107–110, 225–226
 - working with collections in, 106, 315
- Adobe Camera Raw Editor. *See* ACR Editor
- Adobe Photoshop. *See also* workflow; workspace
 - alternatives to Adaptive Wide Angle filter in, 162
 - clipping layer to group folder in, 125
 - creating documents in, 102, 110
 - loading photos as separate tabs, 100, 102–104, 116
 - master artists' favorite tools, 219, 245, 286, 308, 334, 336
 - mastering, xii
 - Smart Objects in versions of, 203
 - Smart Sharpen filter features in, 258
 - updating Camera RAW for, 84
 - workflow in Andres's work, 269–270
- aerial photography, 279–281
- Andres, Holly, 268–271
- animals, 93
- aperture, 79–80, 81–82
- artists. *See* master artists
- atmosphere. *See also* clouds
 - adding in *Nature Rules*, 188
 - condensation in air of *Rainbow's End*, 333

- creating in *Forest Construction*, 306
- haze, 265
- including rainbows in composite, 322–323

B

- B&W adjustment layers
 - adjusting image look with, 175
 - controlling grayscale images with, 62–63
 - fine-tuning lighting with, 131
 - Slider Modifier icon for, 63
- backgrounds
 - creating for composite images, 228
 - placing behind hair selections, 28–29
 - removing with blending modes, 138–139
 - selecting object by its, 232
 - suggested for model, 256
 - unlocking layers for, 251
 - viewing selections against, 27
 - working with composite, 114–116
 - Zev Hoover on, 245
- batch processing, 88, 227
- birds, 331–332
- blending modes, 49–54, 134–159
 - adding to smoke and hand layers, 149–150
 - adjusting rainbows with, 323
 - altering color with Hue, 324
 - changing for multiple layers, 280

- Color and Hue, 52
- Darken, 54
- enhancing *Fire Play* textures with, 152–153
- how to choose, 143
- Lighten, 53
- modifying image lighting and color with, 260–261
- Multiply, 53
- opacity of, 49–50
- Overlay, 50–51
- removing backgrounds with, 138–139
- Screen, 53
- testing effects of, 153
- texturing fur with, 259
- blurring
 - filters creating, 69–70
 - reducing, 67
 - Smart Objects nondestructively, 151
- Bridge. *See* Adobe Bridge
- bridge cameras, 75
- Brush tool
 - adjusting, 35–36
 - defining presets for, 36
 - masking images with, 121
 - Scatter option for, 35, 305
- brushes. *See also* Brush tool
 - adding sun-rays with, 332
 - best for painting organic material, 300, 301
 - choices for painting masks, 121, 233–234, 256, 276
 - creating glowing effect with, 213–214
 - custom, 36, 327–328
 - increasing/reducing size of Quick Selection, 25
 - opacity for painting condensation, 333
 - painting with textured, 35–36, 170
 - simulating clouds and mist, 304–305
 - tips for Clone Stamp, 237
- Bucket tool, 29

- buildings
 - adjusting perspective distortion for, 162–165
 - developing archive of, 91, 92
 - inserting in composite, 281–282
 - painting rock cottage, 324–327
- Burn tool, 34, 50–51, 240

C

Camera Raw Editor. *See* ACR Editor

cameras

- adjusting exposure for, 78
- balancing exposure, 81–82
- choosing for composite work, 76
- compact, 75
- DSLR, 75–76
- image stabilization for, 79
- intervalometers and filters, 83
- lenses for, 77–78
- point-and-shoot, 74–75
- sensors for, 75, 77–78
- setting up composite shots, 222, 224–225
- shutter speed for, 78–79
- tripods for, 82–83
- types of, 72, 74
- updating Camera RAW for, 84
- using intervalometers with, 83, 222, 225
- canvas size, 251–252
- clipping masks
 - adding as adjustment layer, 124–126
 - applying to folders, 206
 - group folder masks vs., 254–255
 - making isolated adjustments with, 234–236
 - using as layer, 48
- Clone Stamp tool. *See also* healing and cloning tools
 - features of, 31–32
 - fixing composites with, 127–128
 - keeping sample point consistent for, 128
 - removing fingers from props, 236–237

- clouds
 - adding volcano, 265–266
 - developing, 266
 - simulating mist and, 304–305
 - working with images of, 172–175
- collections, 106, 315
- color
 - adding to custom brushes, 328
 - adjusting *Nature Rules* lighting and, 181–183
 - adjustment layers for adjusting, 60
 - blending modes to adjust
 - mammoth, 261
 - changing mask, 46
 - controlling cloud, 175
 - De Pasquale's strategy for, 286
 - Johansson's use of, 308
 - masking selections with range of, 47
 - modifying in *Fire Play*, 154–155
 - neutralizing range of, 65
 - Nevado on color theory, 216
 - Overlay mode for adjusting, 50–51
 - Put Daddy Down, Please*
 - adjustments for, 236
 - resetting black/white defaults for, 51
 - toggling selections for, 51
 - touching up swan beak, 332
 - warming up composite's, 189
- Color Balance adjustment layer, 64, 123–124
- Color blending mode, 52, 211–212
- color coding layers, 42
- Color Range feature, 47
- Color Reset button, 51
- compact cameras, 75
- composite images. *See also* photo palette; *and specific composites*
 - adding depth to, 150–151
 - adjusting tonal values, 59–62
 - Andrée Wallin's, 334–337
 - assembling from different sources, 100
 - backgrounds for, 114–116
 - cloning content into, 127–128

- collaborating on, 244
 - composing background image, 228
 - controlling color with blending mode, 211–212
 - copying/pasting images in, 117–118, 230–231, 252–253
 - creating archive of, 89–93
 - editing on B&W adjustment layers, 62–63
 - Erik Johansson's, 308–311
 - expanding canvas size for, 251–252
 - finding texture sources for, 180
 - fine-tuning lighting and effects in, 129–132
 - Holly Andres's, 268–271
 - learning to create, 56
 - making believable, 114, 132
 - Mario Sánchez Nevado's, 216–219
 - Martín De Pasquale's, 284–287
 - matching shapes for, 207
 - mixing inspiring images in, 196, 198–199, 248
 - multi-source layering of, 98
 - naming, 108
 - placing props for, 225
 - planning, 220, 222
 - planning lighting for images, 94–96
 - prep work required for, 98
 - preparing document for, 110
 - resizing selected image for, 252–253
 - resource files and videos for, 100
 - reviewing eye-flow of, 126
 - selecting and masking
 - components of, 118–121
 - setting up document for new, 106–107
 - single-scene shooting of, 100
 - sketching scenes, 222–223
 - working in commercial production of, 287, 310, 337
 - Zev and Aliza Hoover's, 242–245
 - Constraint tool, 164
 - Content-Aware Fill tool, 22–23, 32, 205
 - Content-Aware Move tool, 24, 32–34
 - contrast, 27, 86
 - Control composite
 - adding eye to fish, 204–206
 - adjusting fire and water elements of, 206–208
 - compiling photo palette for, 200–201
 - converting images to Smart Objects, 201–202
 - cooling colors for, 210
 - glowing effect in, 213–214
 - hue/saturations adjustments in, 210
 - illustrated, 197
 - inspirational images for, 198–199
 - magical touches in, 213–215
 - masking fish in, 202–203
 - scaling fish image for, 203–204
 - source images for, 196
 - using Color blending mode for, 211–212
 - warping selections in, 208–209
 - copying
 - layers, 21, 22, 40
 - masks, 256
 - multiple instances, 206
 - and pasting images, 117–118, 230–231, 252–253, 320–321
 - shortcut for, 239
 - Crop tool, 29
 - Curves adjustment layers, 59–62
 - adding glare to global lighting with, 192–194
 - apply mask for, 44–45
 - clipping masks used with, 235
 - controlling cloud tones with, 173–174
 - fine-tuning lighting with, 129
 - Hue/Saturation layers with, 125
 - making lighting consistent with, 122–123
 - modifying *Fire Play* lighting, 156–157
 - refining *Nature Rules* lighting with, 185
 - shifting tonal values with, 59–60
 - texturing images with, 275
 - tips for, 60–62, 157
 - using histogram data for, 61
- ## D
- Darken blending mode, 54
 - De Pasquale, Martín, 284–287
 - decay
 - adding feel of to *Nature Rules*, 167–168, 184–186
 - elements used in *Forest Construction* for, 299
 - deleting
 - digital grease, 47, 169, 276, 320
 - layers, 43
 - unused layers, 14
 - depth
 - adding foreground and background for, 294–296
 - color adjustments for retaining, 211–212
 - including atmosphere for, 333
 - Nevado on creating, 216
 - planning image's, 316, 317
 - smoke for adding, 150–151
 - Zev Hoover on, 244–245
 - depth of field
 - blur and shallow, 69
 - controlling, 79
 - Zev Hoover on, 244–245
 - digital grease, 47, 169, 276, 320
 - digital single lens reflex (DSLR) cameras, 75–76
 - dimension in images, 277, 282–283
 - documents
 - creating Photoshop, 102, 110
 - setting up new composite image, 106–107
 - viewing side by side, 138
 - Dodge tool, 34, 50–51, 240
 - DSLR (digital single lens reflex) cameras, 75–76
 - dynamic linking, 205

E

edges. *See also* Refine Edge tool
 adding variety to, 301
 feathering, 27, 119, 232
 healing tool sampling near, 30, 31
 Refine Edge feature for, 26–27, 29, 119
 shifting, 27
 smoothing, 27, 119, 297
 softening, 255
 straightening, 164
 working on shape, 277
Edit menu, 6, 7, 9
editing. *See also* ACR Editor;
 nondestructive editing
 backgrounds more easily, 251
 deselecting selections after, 27
 destructive, 23, 33
 JPEG files in Camera RAW, 227
 Smart Object layers, 54–55
Erase Refinements tool, 296
Erase tool, 34
Essentials workspace, 5
exposure
 adjusting in Camera RAW, 86
 aperture and, 79–80
 balancing elements of, 81–82
 controlling ISO, 80–81
 shutter speed and, 78–79
 simulating longer, 69
 when setting up shots, 224–225
eye-flow of composition, 126
Eyedropper, 29, 155

F

f-stops, 79–80, 81–82
fast lenses, 78
feathering edges, 27, 119, 232
Field Blur filter, 69, 70
File menu, 6, 9
files. *See also* documents; images
 changing, 13
 collections of, 106
 JPEG, 10–11
 loading with Bridge, 102, 116

 organizing, 14
 PSB, 11, 12
 PSD, 11, 12
 RAW, 11–12
 saving, 14
 TIFF, 11, 12–13
fill
 matching to image, 278–279
 using Content-Aware, 22–23, 32, 205
Filter menu, 8, 9
filtering layers, 42, 51
filters, 65–71
 Adaptive Wide Angle, 162–165
 adjustment layers vs., 65
 blur, 69–70
 camera, 83
 Camera RAW Editor used as, 71
 noise reduction, 293–294
 nondestructive use of, 151
 Reduce Noise, 68
 Smart Sharpen, 65–67, 258, 293
 using on multiple layers, 151
 warming lighting with, 131, 132
fire. *See also* Fire Play composite;
 smoke
 adding to Control composite,
 206–207, 215
 photographing, 89, 137
 warping, 145–147, 208–209
 working with flames, 207
Fire Play composite, 134–159
 adding Puppet Warp to flames,
 145–147
 adjusting lighting of, 156–157
 blending smoke and hands,
 149–150
 blending textures, 152–153
 composite style for, 98
 creating new document for,
 106–107
 depth added to, 150–151
 dodge and burn in Overlay mode,
 158–159
 duplicating and varying flame
 images, 144–145

 masking portions of fire, 144
 placing hands in, 136–138
 playing with color in, 154–155
 positioning flames in, 141–149
 prep work for, 136
 preparing photo palette for,
 101–106
 removing backgrounds for,
 138–139
 shaping fire, 148–149
 sketching fire for, 139–140
flipping layer selections, 20
folders. *See* group folders
foregrounds, 294–296
Forest Construction composite,
 288–307
 adding store logo to, 303
 creating discolored texture for,
 302–303
 foreground and background for,
 294–296
 illustrated, 289
 masking complex selections in,
 296–298
 narrative for, 288
 painting vegetation in, 298–301
 photo palette for, 290–292
 photographing images for,
 290–291
 sharpening and noise reduction
 for, 292–293
 simulating cloud and mist in,
 304–305
Four Tears of Victory composite,
 57–62
fur, 257–260

G

getting started, 2–15
 optimizing workflow, 15
 organizing your workspace, 13–14
 selecting file formats, 10–13
 setting up your workspace, 4–8
glare, 192–194, 262

- global adjustments
 - adding lighting as, 192–194
 - including in group folder layer, 212
- Good Kitty* composite, 114–132
 - clipping adjustment layer to group folder, 124–126
 - cloning content into, 127–128
 - combining shots for, 114
 - composite style for, 98, 100
 - consistent lighting for, 122–123
 - filtering images for, 108
 - fine-tuning lighting and effects, 129–133
 - pasting pieces in place, 117–118
 - rating and sorting images for, 109–110
 - reviewing eye-flow for, 126
- Gradient Editor, 140
- Gradient tool, 323
- group folders
 - adding global effects to layers in, 212
 - applying clipping masks to, 206
 - building and organizing, 104–105, 111–112, 291–292
 - clipping adjustment layer to, 124–126
 - creating layer, 42–43
 - dragging mask to layer from, 256
 - masking, 254–256
 - organizing composite images from, 228–229
 - used for *The Hunt*, 251
 - within folders, 200
- Growth* composite, 272–283
 - assembling textures for, 274
 - developing tendons, 277–278
 - illustrated, 273
 - inserting buildings in, 281–282
 - lighting used for, 282–283
 - matching fill to images, 278–279
 - props inspiring, 272, 274
 - transforming aerial photos for, 279–281
 - workflow with textures in, 275–276
 - working on edges, 277

H

- hair. *See also* fur
 - selecting with Refine Radius tool, 28–29
 - shooting model for source images, 263
 - working with, 177–178
- halos
 - painting out, 178
 - preventing selection, 166, 232
 - removing, 27, 65–67
- Hand tool, 34
- haze, 265
- healing and cloning tools, 30–34
 - Clone Stamp tool, 31–32, 127–128, 236–237
 - Content-Aware Move tool, 32–34
 - Healing tool, 30–31
 - Spot Healing tool, 30
 - uses for, 30
- Help menu, 8, 9
- hiding layers, 230
- highlights
 - Camera Raw adjustments for, 86
 - Rainbow's End* waterwheel, 330
- histogram data, 61
- Hoover, Zev and Aliza, 242–245
- hue
 - adjusting with Hue blending mode, 52, 324
 - separating lights/darks from, 125
- Hue/Saturation adjustment layers, 64–65, 126, 210
- Hunt, The* composite, 246–267
 - adding fur to mammoth, 257–260
 - adjusting temperature of, 266–267
 - developing look of caveman, 263–264
 - fine-tuning mammoth in, 262
 - illustrated, 247
 - inspirational photos in, 248
 - lighting and color adjustments for, 260–261
 - masking group folder, 254–256
 - organizing group folders for, 251

- painting volcano for, 265–266
- resizing images for, 252–253
- sketching alternatives for, 249

I

- Image menu, 7, 9
- images. *See also* composite images; photo palette
 - adding texture to, 275–277
 - assembling composite, 98, 100, 317–319
 - batch processing, 88, 227
 - collections of, 106, 315
 - converting to Smart Objects, 201–202
 - copying/pasting, 117–118, 230–231, 252–253
 - creating archive for, 89–93
 - De Pasquale's use of multiple, 287
 - file formats for, 10–13
 - filtering, 108
 - finding inspirational, 196, 198–199, 248
 - lightening center of, 45
 - rating and filtering, 107–110
 - removing halo glow around, 27, 65–67, 166, 178, 232
 - shooting smoke and fire, 137
 - straightening edges of, 164
- imagination masking, 318
- inspiration
 - Andres's image composition and, 268
 - props as source of, 272, 274
 - taking photos for future, 74
- intervalometers, 83, 222, 225
- Iris Blur filter, 69, 70
- ISO
 - avoiding noise with low, 294
 - balancing shutter speed and aperture with, 81–82
 - compensating when boosting shadows, 86
 - controlling, 80–81

J

Johansson, Erik, 308–311
JPEG files
 about, 10–11
 editing in Camera RAW, 227
 filtering out of composite folder, 108
 filtering RAW from, 226

K

keyboard shortcuts, xii, 9, 239
Krump, Jayesunn, 94, 95, 96, 175

L

landscape images, 92
Lasso tool, 24
Layer menu, 7, 9
layer styles, 55, 139–140, 213–215
layers, 38–55. *See also* adjustment layers
 about, 38
 adding glow and magic to, 213–215
 adding texture and grit with, 180–181
 adjusting opacity of, 142, 155, 169, 240, 253
 applying blending modes to, 49–54, 280
 applying Smart Sharpen filter to, 258
 checking active, 22
 clipping masks and, 48
 converting to Smart Objects, 54–55
 copying, 21, 22, 40, 239
 creating color continuity with, 189
 creating, deleting, or locking, 43
 dragging mask from group folder to, 256
 duplicating waterwheel, 330
 filtering, 42, 151
 flipping selection in, 20
 grouping in folders, 42–43

 hiding, 120, 230
 layer styles for, 55
 linking, 43
 loading files into, 102
 masking, 43–48
 matching image perspective, 20–21
 merging multiple, 22
 moving locked, 18
 naming and color coding, 41–42
 Nature Rules color and lighting, 181–183
 nondestructive editing on, 38, 40
 number in composites, 219
 organizing, 14, 41–43, 107, 228–229
 rasterizing, 202
 sampling all for Content-Aware Move, 33, 34
 selecting for moving, 19
 selecting masks, 44, 46
 soloing, 141–142
 unlocking background, 251
 viewing order of group folders in, 111–112
 workflow for creating, 116
lenses, 77–80
Lighten blending mode, 53, 143
lighting
 adding dimensional effect with, 282–283
 adjustment layers for, 129–132
 clipping adjustment layer to group folder, 124–126
 Color Balance adjustments for, 123–124
 Curves adjustments for consistent, 122–123
 De Pasquale's advice on, 284
 Fire Play, 156–157
 glare layers for global, 192–194
 Johansson's use of, 308
 matching in scene, 318–319
 Nature Rules color and, 181–183
 planning composite, 94–96
 Put Daddy Down, Please, 239–240
 types of, 95–96

linking layers, 43
littlefolk, 242
locked layers, 18, 43

M

Magic Wand tool, 25–26, 185–186
Magnetic Lasso tool, 24, 118, 119, 232
Magnifying tool, 34
map, 279–281
Marquee tool, 22–23, 102, 230
masking. *See also* clipping masks;
 Curves adjustment layers
 choosing brush when creating, 121, 276
 complex selections, 296–298
 components of composite images, 120–121, 233–234
 copying, 256
 deleting digital grease when, 47, 169, 276, 320
 displaying area of, 169
 dragging mask from group folder to layer, 256
 fish in *Control*, 202–203
 flames, 143–144, 207
 group folders, 254–256
 hidden features, 46–47
 images before inserting in composite, 168–172
 imagination, 318
 layers, 43–48
 painting around mask edge, 255
 selections, 120
 sharpening selectively, 172
 Smart Objects, 292
 textured images to create form, 275
 unneeded texture, 153
 using adjustment layer, 58–59
master artists
 Andrée Wallin, 334–337
 Erik Johansson, 308–311
 Holly Andres, 268–271
 Mario Sánchez Nevado, 216–219
 Martín De Pasquale, 284–287
 Zev and Aliza Hoover, 242–245

- menus, 4–9
- merging multiple layers, 22
- models
 - adding texture to image of, 180–181
 - Andres on directing, 271
 - backgrounds for shooting, 256
 - photographing for archive, 90–91
 - placing in composite image, 178–179
 - posing as own, 250
 - shooting for *Nature Rules*, 175–176
 - working with toddler, 91, 121
- motion blur reduction, 67
- Move tool
 - adding texture using, 275
 - developing waterwheel with, 330
 - transform controls for, 18–21
 - when to move images with, 102
- Multiply blending mode, 53, 143

N

- naming
 - composite images, 108
 - layers, 41–42
 - new brush presets, 36
- Nature Rules* composite, 160–194
 - adding decaying look to, 167–168, 184–186
 - adding texture to model's image, 180–181
 - adjusting perspective distortion, 162–165
 - clouds for, 172–175
 - color and lighting adjustments for subject, 181–183
 - composite style for, 98, 100
 - continuity of color in, 189
 - dust and haze in, 188
 - illustrated, 161
 - inserting masked image into, 168–170
 - masking and refining edges of image, 165–167
 - moving mountain into, 170–172

- organizing source images for, 111–112
- photographing model for, 175–176
- placing model in meadow, 178–179
- planning lighting for, 94
- prep work for, 160
- shadows in, 187, 190–191
- smashing windows for, 185–186
- using studio shot in, 176–178
- Nevado, Mario Sánchez, 216–219
- noise reduction, 68, 293–294
- nondestructive editing
 - Overlay blending mode for, 50–51, 158–159
 - Sample All Layers option for, 33, 34
 - Smart Filters and, 66, 163
 - Smart Object layers for, 54–55, 163, 201–202
 - using layers, 38, 40

O

- On the Edge* composite, 223
- opacity
 - adjusting for dodge and burn painting, 51
 - adjusting layer, 155, 169, 240
 - brush setting for painting, 333
 - lowering to view multiple layers, 142, 253
 - setting blending mode, 49–50
- options bar, 4
- organizing
 - files, 14
 - group folders within folders, 200
 - importance in workflow, 113
 - Johansson's tips on, 308
 - layers, 14, 41–43, 107
 - layers and group folders, 111–112, 228–229
 - photo palette, 104–105
 - your workspace, 13–14
- Outer Glow layer style, 139–140, 213–215
- Overlay blending mode
 - adding grunge with, 302–303

- filtering color with, 50–51
- nondestructive editing with, 50–51, 158–159
- simulating warmth of sunlight, 182
- versatility of, 240
- when to use, 143

P

- painting
 - adjusting opacity for dodge and burn, 51
 - around mask edges, 255
 - best brushes for organic material, 300, 301
 - broken windows, 186
 - choosing brushes for mask, 233–234, 256
 - condensation in air, 333
 - correcting overextended, 170
 - fine details using zoom, 264
 - Fire Play* layers, 154–155
 - lighting effects, 182
 - mask on straight lines, 167
 - on masks, 44
 - opacity settings for dodge and burn, 51
 - out halos, 178
 - store logo, 303
 - textured brushes for, 35–36, 170
 - thatch with custom brush, 328
 - vegetation, 298–301
 - volcano, 265–266
- panel menus, 5
- panels, 4–5, 8, 14
- pasting
 - copied images, 117–118, 230–231, 252–253
 - only pieces of images, 320–321
- people. *See* models
- perspective
 - adjusting distorted, 162–165
 - customizing sun-rays', 332
 - getting right for image, 91, 92, 316–317
 - matching layer to fit, 20–21

- photo palette
 - assembling texture photos in, 274
 - compiling for *Control*, 200–201
 - creating image archive for, 89–93
 - Fire Play*, 100–101
 - Forest Construction*, 290–292
 - fur, 257
 - loading elements into, 101–104
 - organizing, 104–105
 - Rainbow's End*, 314, 315
 - selecting images from, 229–230
- photography. *See also* images
 - collaboration in, 244
 - role in compositing, 72
 - shooting photos of models, 90–91, 121, 175–176, 250
 - smoke and fire, 90–91
 - source images for *Rainbow's End*, 314, 315
 - taking *Forest Construction* images, 290–291
- Photoshop. *See* Adobe Photoshop
- planning. *See* prep work
- point-and-shoot cameras, 74–75
- POV (point of view), 315, 321
- prep work. *See also* organizing; photo palette
 - Andres on, 268, 271
 - creating new document, 102, 110
 - De Pasquale's process in, 284
 - Fire Play* composite, 136
 - Johansson's ideas on, 310
 - Nature Rules*, 160
 - Nevado's planning process, 219
 - organizing images with tabs, 111–112
 - planning image lighting, 94–96
 - rating and filtering images, 107–110
 - required for composite images, 98
 - setting up document for images, 106–107
 - sketching scenes, 222–223
 - Wallin on, 337
- presets
 - defining Brush tool, 36

- recording actions, 102
- saving Camera RAW adjustment, 88
- props
 - inspiring images, 272, 274
 - placing, 225
 - removing fingers from, 236–237
- PSB files, 11, 12
- PSD files, 11, 12
- Puppet Warp tool, 145–147
- Put Daddy Down, Please* composite
 - adding and painting mask for, 233–234
 - adjusting overhead shadow in, 238–239
 - clipping masks for, 234–236
 - copying/pasting images in, 230–231
 - creating background for, 228
 - illustrated, 221
 - lighting and effect adjustments for, 239–240
 - organizing images for, 228–229
 - preparing for, 220, 222
 - prop placement in, 225
 - refining selections in, 231–232
 - removing unwanted fingers from props, 236–237
 - selecting images from palette, 229–230
 - setting up shot for, 224–225
 - sketching scenes for, 222–223

Q

- Quick Mask mode, 297
- Quick Selection tool, 24–25, 118, 119, 203, 232, 295

R

- Rainbow's End* composite, 312–333
 - adding rock cottage, 324–326
 - adding trees, 323–324
 - birds in, 331–332
 - fabricating waterwheel for, 329–330

- filling in scene, 317–319
- flowing river images in, 321
- polishing effects of, 332–333
- rainbow in, 322–323
- scale and perspective for, 316–317
- sketching ideas for, 312, 314–315
- thatch roof for rock cottage, 327–328
- waterfalls in, 319–321
- rasterizing layers, 202
- RAW files. *See also* ACR Editor
 - editing image in, 227
 - filtering JPEGs from, 226
 - selecting, 11–12
 - shooting with DSLR cameras, 76
- recording new actions, 103–104
- Reduce Noise filter, 68, 293–294
- Refine Edge pop-up menu, 26–27, 29
- Refine Edge tool
 - feathering with, 166
 - smoothing edges with, 119, 297
 - tips for using, 232
 - using Refine Radius tool with, 171
- Refine Radius tool
 - painting selection edges with, 296
 - selecting complex hair with, 28–29, 178
 - using with Refine Edge tool, 171
- reflections on lake, 331
- resetting workspace, 5
- resizing images, 252–253
- resource files and videos, 100
- rock cottage image, 324–328
- rotating
 - anchor points precisely, 165
 - images for new perspective, 317
 - selections, 19

S

- sampling
 - choosing locations for healing tool, 30, 31, 32, 128
 - Content-Aware Fill, 23
 - Eyedropper color, 29
 - layers for Content-Aware Move, 33, 34

- saturation
 - adjusting with Hue/Saturation layers, 64–65, 210
 - increasing RAW image, 87
 - separating lights/darks from, 125
 - saving
 - ACR adjustment presets, 88
 - files, 14
 - scaling
 - De Pasquale on, 286
 - fire images, 207
 - image on Smart Object layer, 203–204
 - Move tool for, 19
 - sharpened image pieces, 276
 - source photos to fit project, 316–317
 - when resizing, 252
 - Scatter option (Brush panel), 35, 305
 - Screen blending mode, 53, 143, 208
 - Select menu, 7, 9
 - selections
 - choosing items in composite for, 118–119
 - deselecting after editing, 27
 - inverting, 232
 - masking, 120, 296–298
 - preventing halos around, 166, 232
 - refining, 26–29, 231–232
 - selecting *Nature Rules* windows, 185–186
 - smoothing edges of, 297
 - tips for masking, 46–47
 - trying different method for, 119
 - using Marquee tool Content-Aware fill option, 22–23
 - warping, 20, 21, 145–147, 208–209
 - sensors, 75, 77–78
 - Serene Danger* composite
 - adjusting sky and mountain colors, 25–26
 - illustrated, 17
 - removing rocks from water, 22–25
 - selecting hair with Refine Radius, 28–29
 - shadows
 - adding to *The Hunt*, 260–261
 - adjusting overhead, 238–239
 - Camera Raw adjustments for, 86
 - Nature Rules* use of, 187, 190–191
 - using in *Rainbow's End* waterwheel, 330
 - verisimilitude of, 120, 187
 - sharpening
 - Forest Construction* base image, 292–293
 - masks selectively, 172
 - textured images, 276
 - using Smart Sharpen filter, 65–67, 258, 293
 - shifting selection edge, 27
 - Show Transform Controls check box, 18, 209
 - shutter speed, 81–82
 - sketching
 - alternative ideas with, 249
 - fire, 139–140
 - ideas for *Rainbow's End*, 312, 314–315
 - Put Daddy Down, Please* scenes, 222–223
 - skies, 92–93. *See also* clouds
 - skin tone, 263
 - Smart Filters
 - nondestructive editing using, 66, 163
 - Smart Sharpen filter, 65–67, 258, 293
 - Smart Object layers
 - Blur tools incompatible with, 69–70
 - converting images to, 201–202
 - nondestructive editing on, 54–55, 163, 201
 - scaling images on, 203–204
 - using filters on, 65–66, 151
 - warnings about re-converting, 292
 - smoke. *See also* *Fire Play* composite
 - adding image depth with, 150–151
 - blending with hand layers, 149–150
 - creating archive of, 89
 - shooting, 137
 - smoothing edges, 27, 119, 297
 - Smudge tool, 29
 - soloing layers, 141–142
 - sorting images, 107–110, 225–226
 - source images. *See also* photo palette
 - accessing book's videos and, 100
 - assembling different, 100
 - finding texture, 180
 - mixing inspiring, 196, 198–199, 248
 - photographing for *Rainbow's End*, 314, 315
 - shooting hair, 263
 - used in *Control*, 196
 - Spatter brush, 332
 - spear, 264
 - straight lines
 - creating spear from, 264
 - masking light pole, 297–298
 - painting mask on, 167
 - stretching selections, 20
 - sunlight
 - rays of, 192–193, 332
 - simulating, 182
- ## T
- tabs
 - closing when finished, 230
 - loading photos as separate, 100, 102–104
 - organizing images with, 111–112
 - taking breaks, 183
 - temperature
 - adjusting for RAW images, 85
 - cooling fiery colors, 210
 - simulating warmth of sunlight, 182
 - warming lighting with filters, 131, 132
 - warming up composite color, 189
 - texture. *See also* fire; water
 - adding decaying look, 184–186
 - artful use of, 181, 272, 275–276, 283
 - assembling source images for, 180, 274
 - blending in *Fire Play* composite, 152–153

- discolored *Forest Construction*, 302–303
- masking unneeded, 153
- painting with textured brushes, 35–36, 170
- warping fire and water images, 208–209
- 3D menu, 8
- TIFF files, 11, 12–13
- Tilt-Shift Blur filter, 69
- tooggling
 - color selections, 51
 - mask colors, 170, 234
 - panel visibility, 8
- tonal values, 59–62
- toolbar, 4
- tools, 16–37. *See also* brushes; filters; *and specific tools*
 - about Photoshop, 16, 37
 - Blur, 69–70
 - Brush, 35–36
 - Bucket, 29
 - Clone Stamp, 31–32, 127–128, 236–237
 - Content-Aware Fill, 22–23, 32, 205
 - Content-Aware Move, 24, 32–34
 - Crop, 29
 - Dodge and Burn, 34, 50–51, 158–159, 240
 - Erase, 34
 - Erase Refinements, 296
 - Eyedropper, 29, 155
 - Hand, 34
 - Healing, 30–31
 - Lasso, 24
 - Magic Wand, 25–26, 185–186
 - Magnetic Lasso, 24, 118, 119, 232
 - Magnifying, 34
 - Marquee, 22–23, 102, 230
 - Move, 18–21, 102, 275, 330
 - Quick Selection, 24–25, 118, 119, 203, 232, 295
 - Refine Radius, 28–29, 171, 178, 296
 - selecting, 4
 - Smudge, 29
 - Spot Healing, 30

- suggested, 18
- Warp, 208–209
- Transform controls, 18–21
- trees, 92, 93, 323–324
- tripod, 82–83, 290
- tutorials, xi
- Type menu, 7

U

- unlocking background layers, 251

V

- verisimilitude
 - creating images with, 114, 284, 326
 - shadows with, 120, 187
- vibrance, 87
- View menu, 8, 9
- visibility
 - checking layer masks with, 46
 - turning off, 120, 230, 320
- volcano, 265–266

W

- Wallin, Andrée, 334–337
- Warp tool, 208–209
- warping selections, 20, 21, 145–147, 208–209
- water
 - adding to *Control* composite, 206, 207–208, 215
 - compensating for motion blur in, 65–67
 - creating archive of images, 90
 - reflections in lakes, 321–322
 - shaping waterfalls, 319–321
 - using as fill, 279
 - using as texture, 153
 - warping, 208–209
 - working with flowing river images, 321
- waterwheel, 329–330
- White Balance tool, 85
- Window menu, 8, 9

- workflow. *See also* group folders; prep work; *and specific composites*
 - ACR, 88–89
 - Andres on Photoshop, 269–270
 - clipping adjustment layer to group folder, 125
 - creating image layers, 116
 - Johansson's tips on, 308
 - Nevado's planning process, 219
 - optimizing your, 15
 - organizing, 113
 - preparing document in Bridge, 110
 - taking breaks, 183
 - with textures in *Growth*, 275–276
 - using two screens for, 101
 - working with photo palette, 200
 - Zev Hoover's, 245
- working as composite artist, 287, 310, 337
- workspace
 - keeping clutter free, 230
 - saving, 13
 - setting up, 4–8

Z

- zoom feature, 166, 264, 277