Helpdesk

This month, we solve photographic problems using some of Photoshop's expert options and techniques BY **ADAM SMITH**

COLOUR CONUNDRUM

I'm having a few problems with my colour photography and wondered whether you could help. I'm putting together a portfolio of scenic photography, which is dependent on colour, however in some instances, especially when taken indoors, there is a muddy and dull cast. Can this be fixed?

Thomas Nell, County Durham

The problem you're experiencing is known as colour casting. This is where exaggerated or unwanted colour is embedded in your image, perhaps due to interfering light sources, such as fluorescent lights, or an incorrect white balance setting on the camera.

Photoshop CS provides simple tool functions to combat this problem. Open the desired image for correction, then select Image>Adjustment Layers>Auto Color. Next select Layer>New Adjustment Layer, choosing either Levels or Curves and clicking the Option button. Here you can select the Find Dark & Light option under your Algorithms in the Auto Color Correction Options dialog box.

Now select the Snap Neutral Midtones option and open the Color Picker for the Midtones. Once you've done so, be mindful that all colour reproduction is dependent on six colours broken into three opposite

pairings: Red and Cyan, Magenta and Green, Blue and Yellow. You can create the appropriate cast by exaggerating the opposing colour in an image. Once chosen, start adjusting the amount of shadow and highlights that are clipped and then alter your Input/Output layers for best effects.
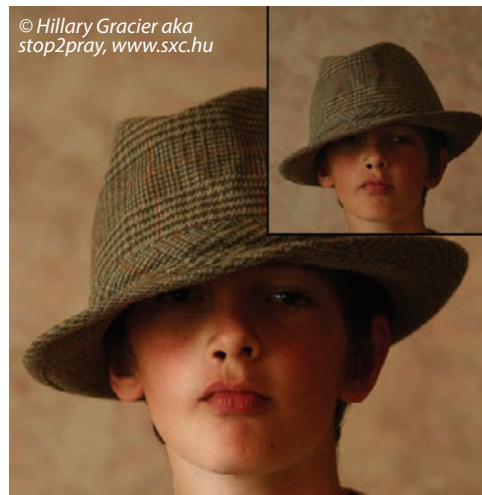
THAT'S A NICE ACCENT

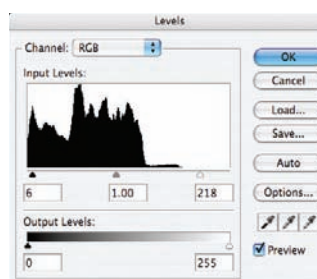I have recently started exploring the potential of fashion and model photography and have completed a series of facial shots. Unfortunately, my lighting wasn't sufficient and the facial highlights aren't that great and a little flat in shadow. I'm sure you can think of a neat Photoshop trick to solve my problem?
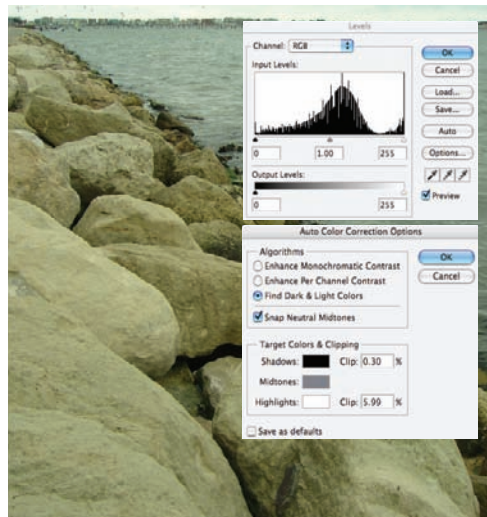
Joan Fazackerley, Cardiff

There is a subtle and simple way, as always with Photoshop, to help resolve your photographic dilemma Joan. First you must select the lighter areas of the model's features. You can do this by using the Magic Wand or Color Range command, using the Marquee Selection tools to clean up areas. Next select Filter>Distort>Diffuse Glow. Once in the dialog box, drop the Graininess value to 0 and increase the Glow and Clear amounts for best effects. Once you are

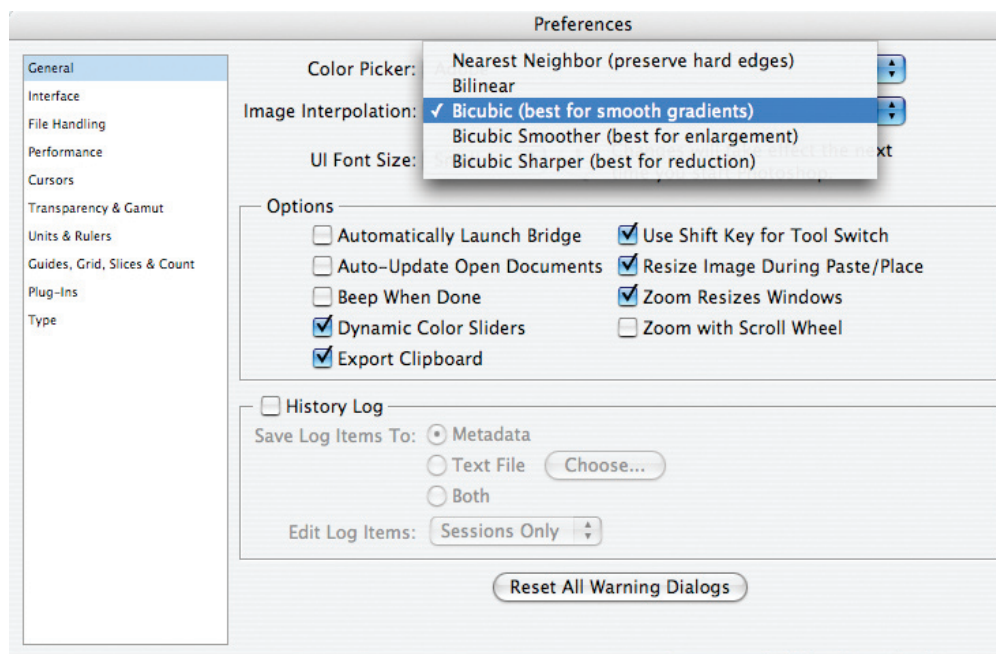*© Hillary Gracier aka stop2pray, www.sxc.hu*

DIFFUSE GLOW: *The Diffuse Glow filter uses background colour to produce the effect. So, the lighter the tone the better the contrast*

ALTER EFFECTS: *You can alter effects using preferred blending modes and opacities. Experimentation is key*

CAST YOUR MIND BACK: *For those working on earlier versions of Photoshop you can get the same effects selecting Enhance>Adjust Colors>Remove Color Cast*

WHERE TO FIND: *Interpolation settings can be applied by selecting from Photoshop>Preferences>General (Mac) or Edit>Preferences>General (PC)*

satisfied with your filter application, deactivate your selection and then try applying a Levels or Curves Adjustment layer to exaggerate all effects. If the edges of your effect are too harsh then before applying Diffuse Glow, choose Select>Modify>Feather at a 20-pixel Radius to soften.

DAMAGE LIMITATION

I like to create a lot of heightened exposure in my photo-manipulation and traditional works, and the adjustment layers such as Levels and Curves are a real must, offering great effects. However, they don't always resolve the finer details in my model's features. I've used the Burn and Dodge tools to good effect, but I'm fed up with having to retrace many steps when all doesn't turn out so well. Is there a more controlled way to do it?
Stephen Phillips, Burn Bridge, Harrogate

There is a way Stephen that will offer you maximum control. This is a function that is in plain sight for most users, but is a mystery to others. Once you have opened your image and got to the point where you want controlled application, hold Alt and click the 'Create a new layer' icon at the foot of the Layers palette.

In the New Layer dialog box, set your Mode to Overlay and activate the Fill with Overlay-neutral color (50% Gray) option before pressing OK. Place the newly created layer above all others.

This layer works like Dodge and Burn using your brushes, black to add shadow, white to highlight. Select a soft brush, set to 10% Opacity for best results, but you can always increase/decrease Opacity to alter the effect.

BLOWN UP

I am having myself a bit of a problem, which I hope you can help me with. Please, please, please can you tell me how to resolve my issue! I'm trying to rescale some of my preferred photographs so that I can sell them? However, I have noticed that although they are a good dpi ratio, my images still seem to slightly degrade. Any ideas how to stop this?
Irina Demidov

Well Irina, it sounds like there's a straightforward way for you to stop this slight interference and that is through understanding 'interpolation'. Photoshop itself provides five methods of interpolation to achieve such effects, which is set up in your Preferences. The Interpolation settings can be applied by selecting from Photoshop>Preferences>General (Mac) or Edit>Preferences>General (PC). For best results with contemporary digital imagery and professional photography, only three of the five options in the Interpolation drop-down really apply, all belonging to the Bicubic set of values.

First, there is Bicubic, which takes pixel data from all the surrounding pixels, including the diagonal axis, to calculate new pixel values. Next, Bicubic Smoother works on the same premise, but is geared towards increasing sizes substantially. Finally, there is Bicubic Sharper, which is geared to the dramatic decrease in size of imagery, perhaps suitable for web presentation.

Make sure that your Photoshop Preferences are set to the right Interpolation setting and you should find that your photos are less degraded.
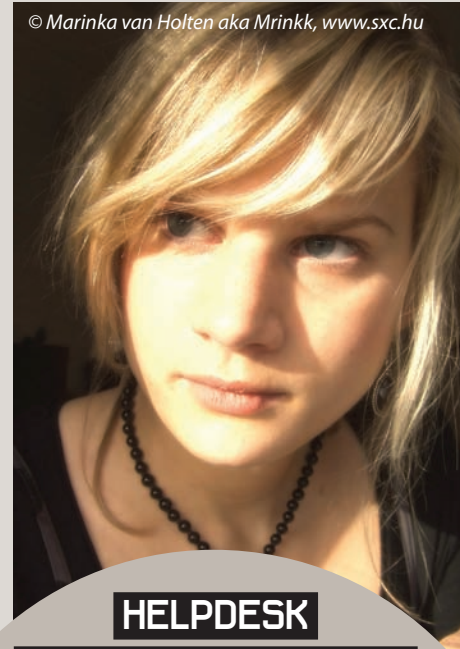
GOING SOFT

In the past, **Advanced Photoshop** has provided some problem solvers for photographers, from High Pass sharpening to infrared effects in the Helpdesk so I thought I'd add one more. My problem is simple: I'm looking for a non-destructive way to create a soft focus in my image. I've tried the Blur filters like many others, but find it not exactly helpful for getting a professional-looking effect. I've played with filter effects and layer masks, but it's time consuming when I have deadlines to reach. Any ideas or will I just have to be more motivated?
Tanya Reid, Hampshire

Well Tanya, an artist's life can be a busy one that's for sure, so we don't mind easing your burden. There is, in fact, a practical and straightforward way to achieve a soft-focus effect. It's funny you should mention the High Pass function, as it provides this effect as well as sharpening. Simply open your image and duplicate it, select Filter>Other>High Pass. Apply a Radius of 10 and then Cmd/Ctrl+I to invert the High Pass layer. All that's left to do is set a Soft Light blending mode. You can drop Opacity to vary the effect to suit your needs.

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Remember to specify whether you're using
a PC or Mac and the version number of
your edition of Photoshop.