How to create a neon effect in Adobe Photoshop

In this this simple how-to, graphic artist Erica Larson demonstrates how she lights up an image by adding a neon effect in Adobe Photoshop.
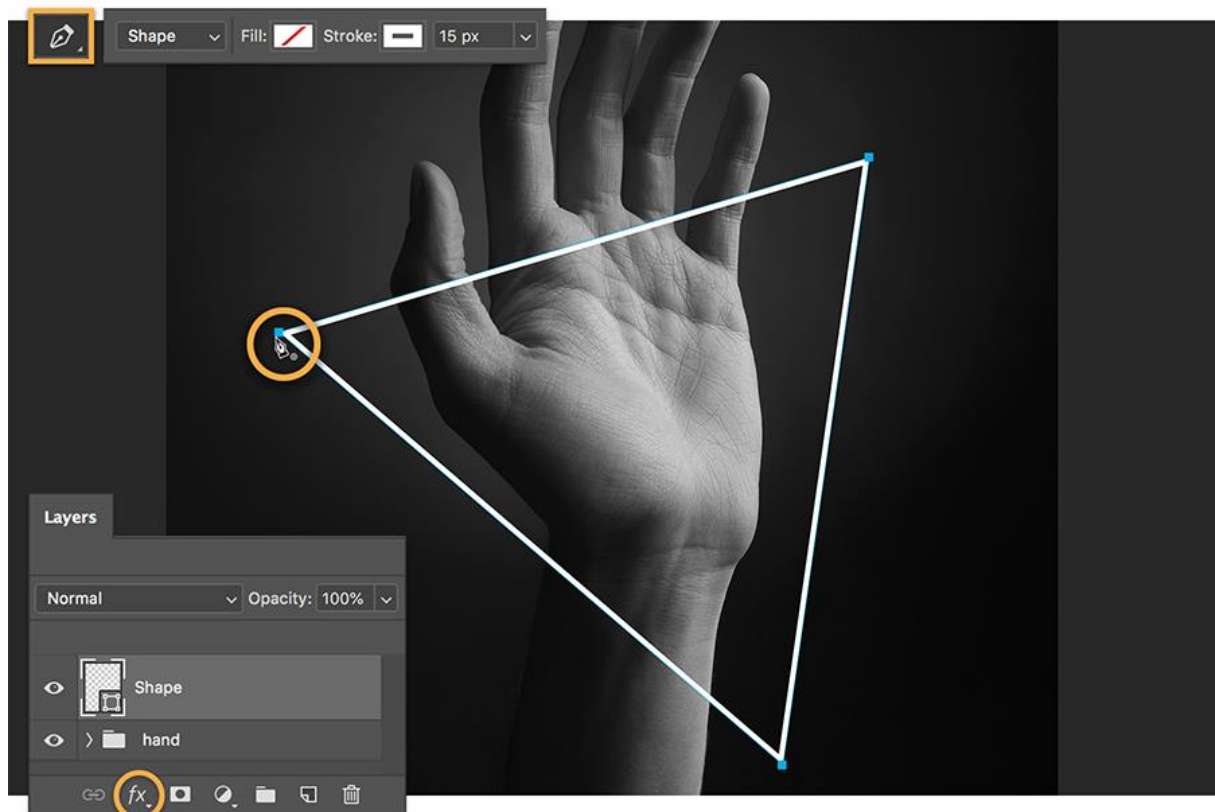
Graphic artist Erica Larson dreams up inspired designs every day as an associate creative director on the Adobe Studio team. In other words, she makes stuff that makes others want to make stuff.

Graphic artist Erica Larson dreams up inspired designs every day as an associate creative director on the Adobe Studio team. In other words, she makes stuff that makes others want to make stuff.
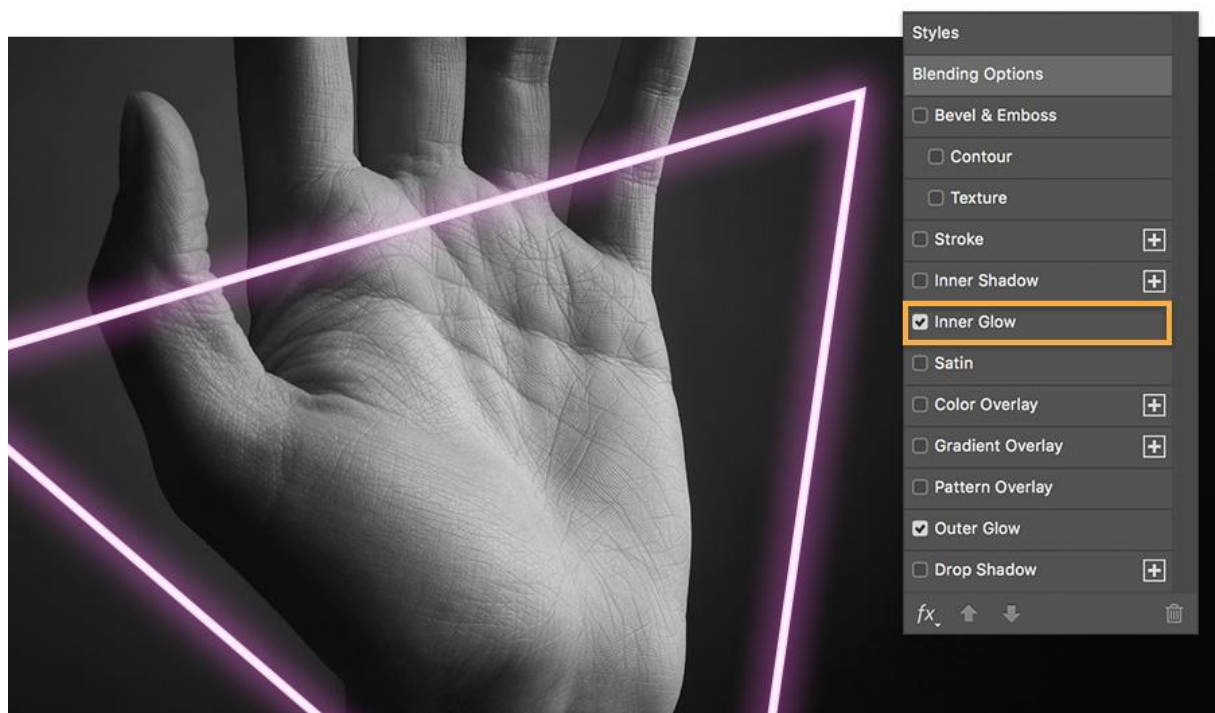

1 Draw a shape

Using the Pen tool, Larson clicked three points to draw a triangle around the hand. You can draw any shape on your image and, with the new Shape layer selected, click on the Add Layer Style icon from the Layers panel and choose Outer Glow.
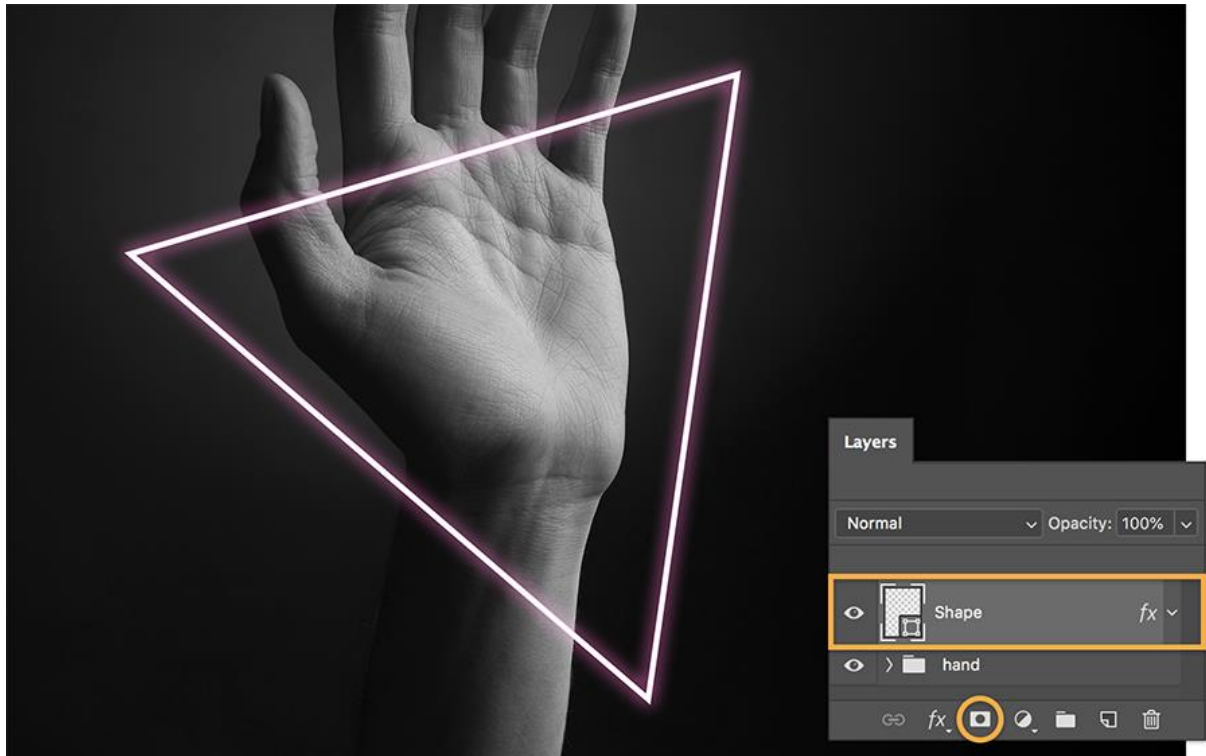
② Create the glow

Experiment with different colors and settings for the Outer Glow. Larson settled on a vivid magenta. Then she set an Inner Glow, changed the Blend Mode to Multiply, and applied the same magenta color.
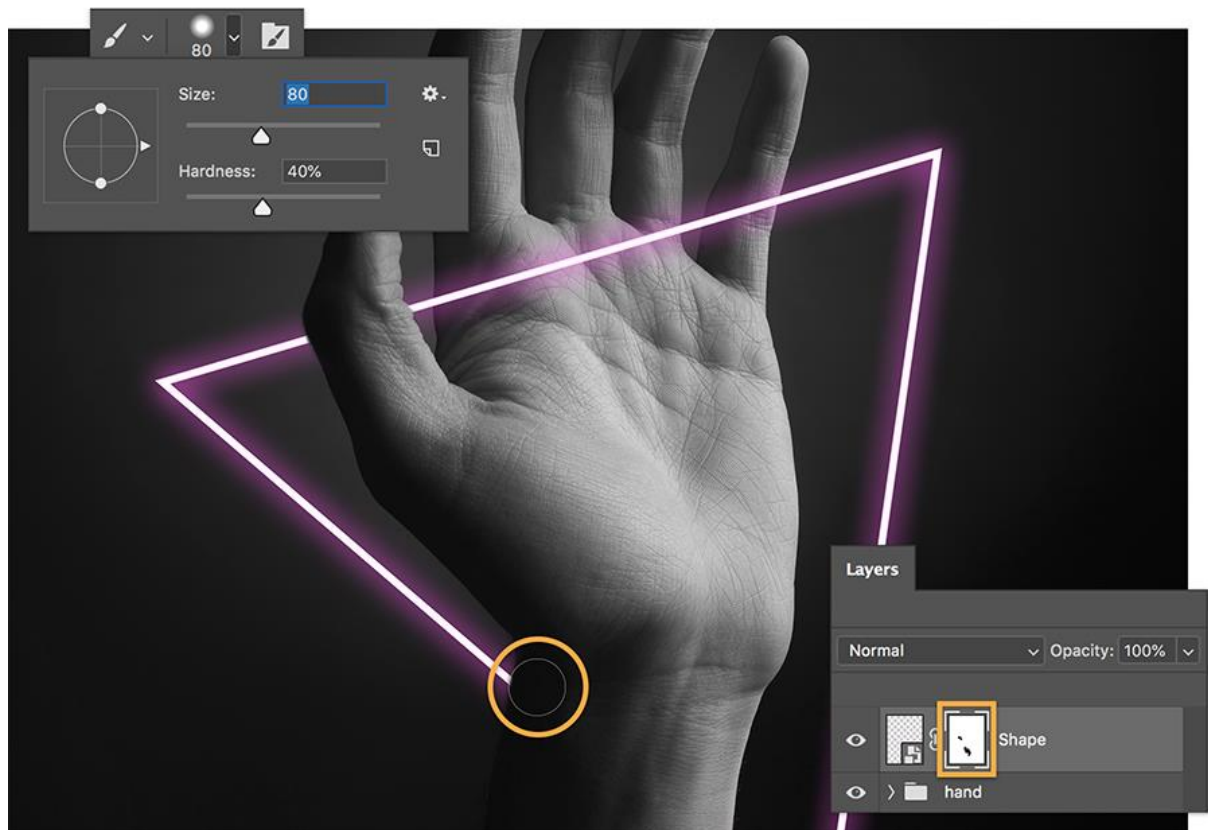
③ Convert and mask

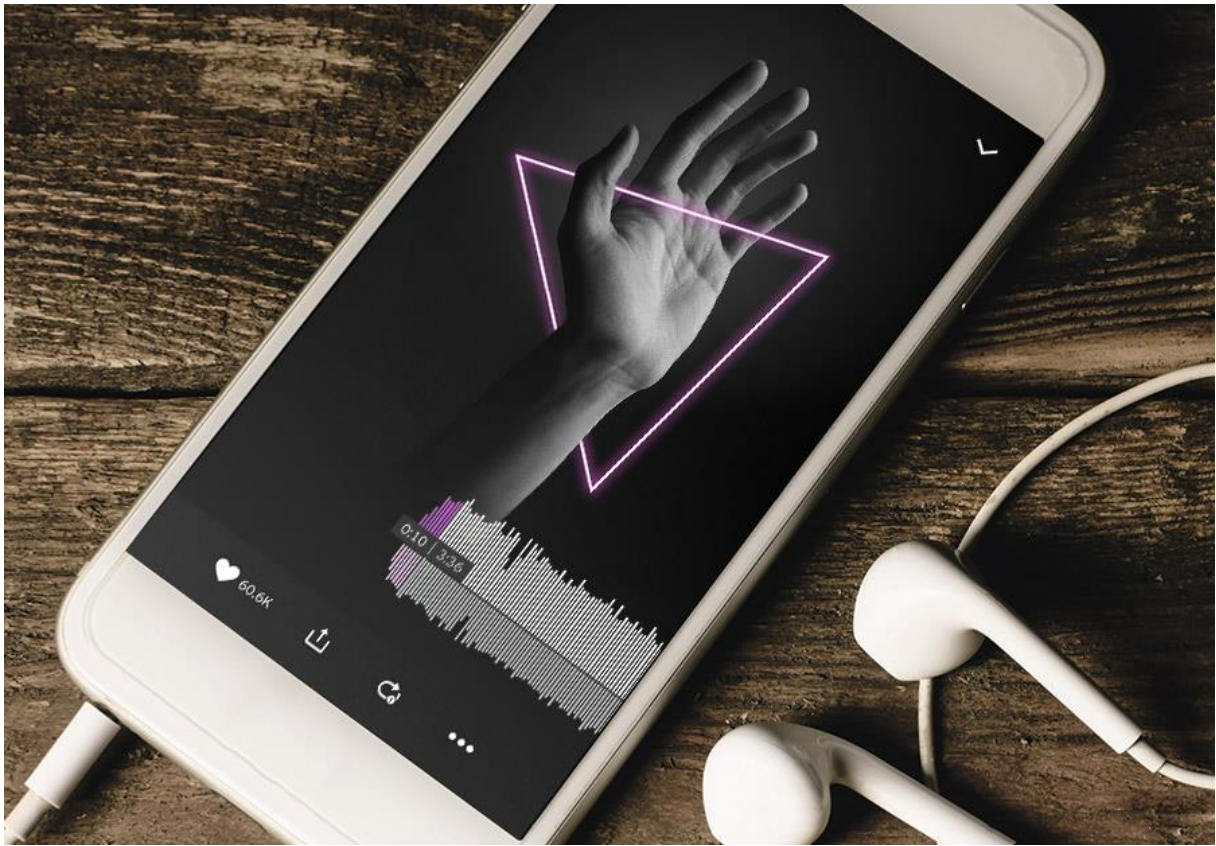Larson right-clicked on the Shape layer and chose Convert To Smart Object. Then she added a mask to the Shape layer.

④ Hide and reveal

Larson wanted to hide the triangle just behind the wrist. To hide parts of your neon shape, set the Brush tool to black, select the mask (the white icon on the layer), and brush to remove those sections. To reverse the effect, simply change the brush color to white and paint on the mask to reveal detail again.

Shine bright

From computer screens to movie marquees, neon design is everywhere—now it's time for you to design your own and shine bright.

Note: Project files included with this tutorial are for practice purposes only.