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- Expert reviews and inspiring interviews!
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12 pages of Elements guides

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Welcome

One of Photoshop's central features is the Brush tool. This wildly useful tool can help you with pretty much any project. Whether you're creating a painter-like portrait from scratch or need to use the brush to touch up a photo project, learning how to make the most of the Brush tool can be immensely useful.

In addition, you'll find your usual great variety of inspirational tutorials, including a surreal city of books, a mesmerising ice-cave landscape, and a digital illustration made with the help of Google SketchUp alongside Photoshop. Also, we have our usual great collection of product reviews, interviews with artists, and stunning galleries to draw inspiration from. We hope you enjoy the issue!

Erlingur Einarsson **Editor**
erlingur.einarsson@futurenet.com

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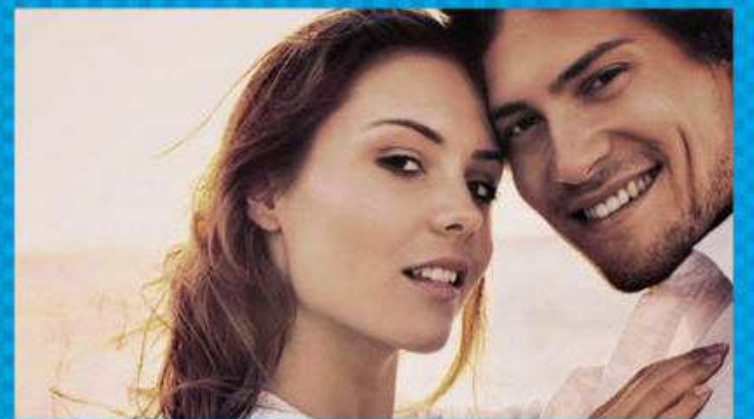
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DRAW ANYTHING WITH
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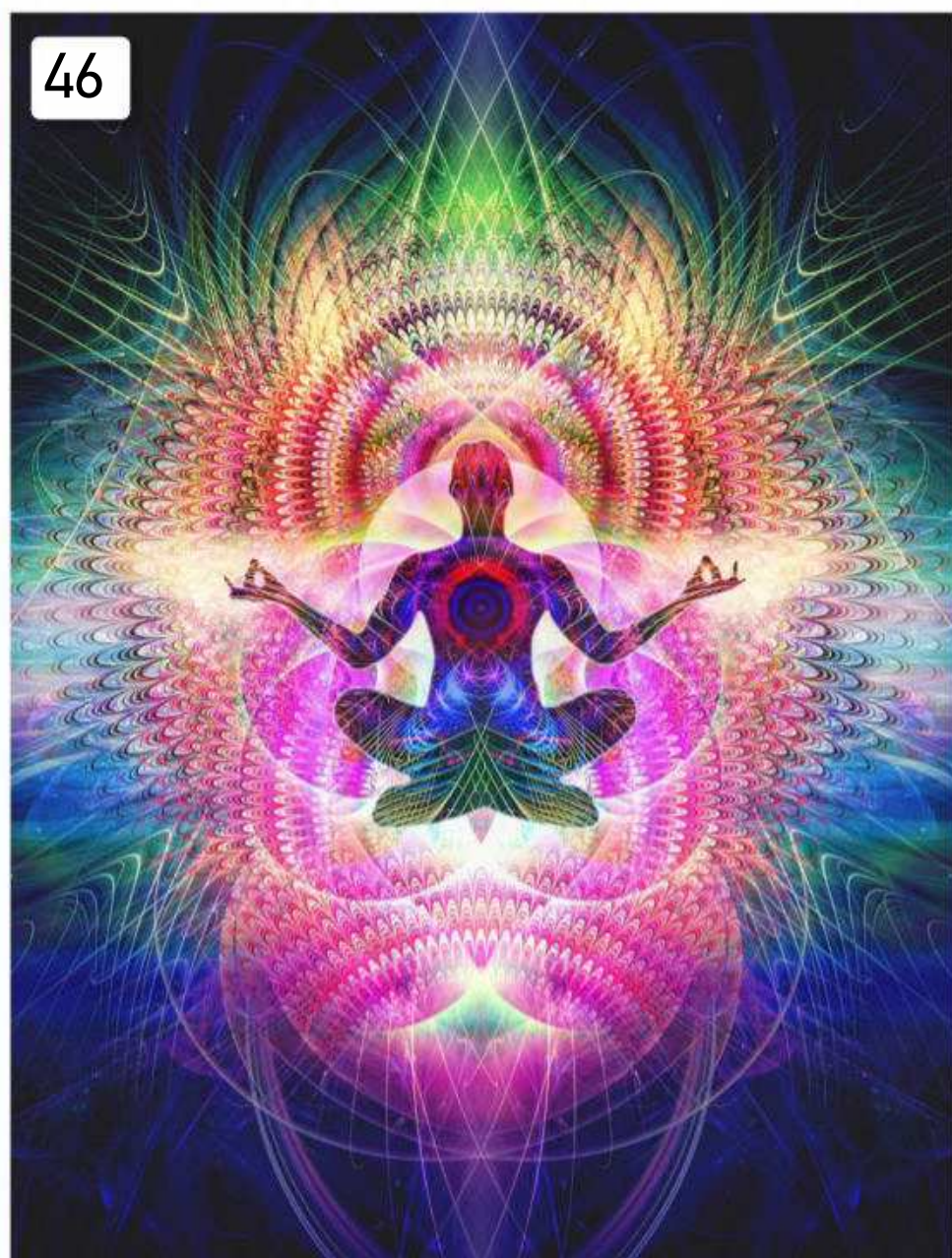
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Elements creative

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Control contrast and tamper with tone, using these actions

So many brushes
Splatter and spatter your work with this bumper pack of
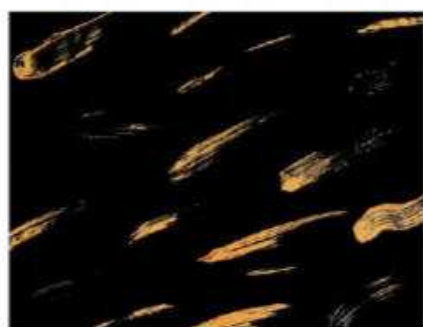
Filament in
These quirky textures can be handy in a range of projects

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- 610 Paint brushes
- 500 Pen and pencil scribbles
- 15 Filament textures
- 5 HDR Pro actions
= A total of 1130 premium assets plus hundreds of tutorial files
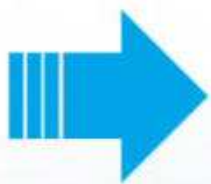
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READERS' CHALLENGE

We challenged you...

In Issue 168, we challenged you to get creative with the set theme of Adventure. You were allowed to create whatever you wanted, so long as it incorporated the theme somehow.

Marc Dhaeyer
Jumping from God's Window
This is an image that uses layers, masks and a lot of blending. Adjustments were key in tying everything together to make it feel surreal, yet rooted in nature.

Readers' Challenge WINNER

Honourable mentions See some honourable mentions from this issue's challenge at **facebook.com/photoshopcreative**

TRENDING IMAGES

Check out some of the most popular artwork that's been rocking the internet over the last few weeks, and take inspiration from what's currently trending

There's nothing more inspiring than surfing the internet and seeing what other artists are creating, and we encourage you to do so. Here are some of our favourite pictures that caught our attention recently, from some of the world's most exciting artists and designers.

Jon Juarez
harriorrihar.myportfolio.com

During a trip to Iceland, I walked through some landscapes that seemed to be drawn, so I photographed them, but the images did not do them justice. Now that I have drawn them, I have a more faithful memory of that fictional reality.

The colours here are really striking, and we love how Rafael framed a scene within a circle; it's an idea that works in any medium. With 525,000 views online too, we're clearly not the only ones who love Rafael's work.

This image feels wonderfully atmospheric, incredibly dream-like and the colour palette is just perfect. Behance has featured Jon's work in the past, and we love his illustration style.

Rafael Varona
www.rafael-varona.com

This illustration was created in Photoshop CC following 7Up's colour palette with different brushes, some of them made by myself. The background is a stone wall texture, which I altered with a Gradient Map.

Diego has been featured by Photoshop online, and that's in part thanks to his meticulous editing skills. This is a fine example, with all of these images combining wonderfully for a brilliant final composition.

Diego Salas
www.diegosalas.net

This image was made using one product photo, and more than 30 different stock images; I adjusted the tones and lighting of each one so that they integrated together. Some elements were digitally illustrated. Finally, the Adjustment Layers finish gave the composition its climate.
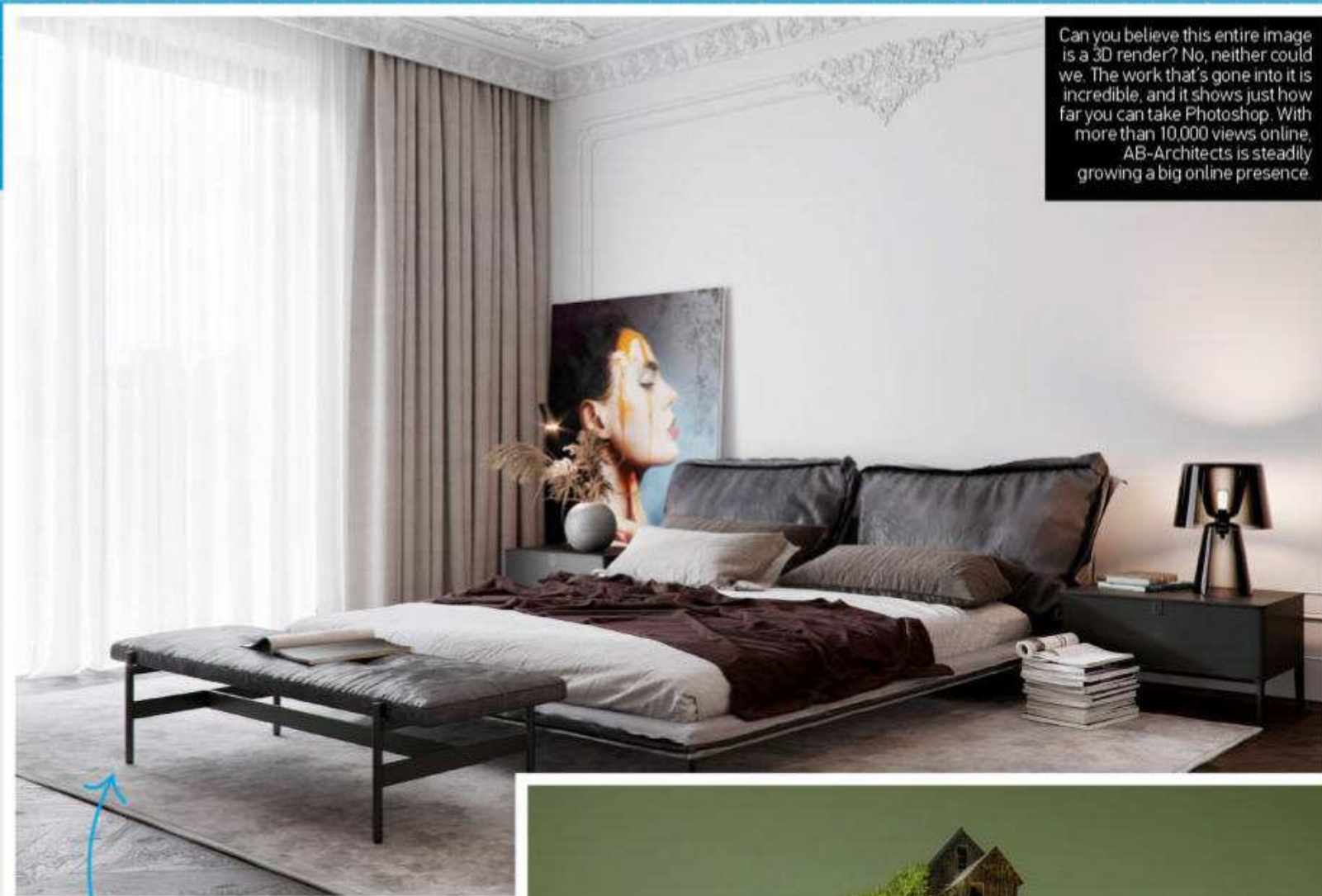
AB-Architects
ab-architects.ru
When we build renders, we always try to work in grey without bright highlights and dark shadows, to make in Photoshop quality, post-production, with WireColour masks. In Photoshop we can very flexibly manage all of this.

Alison Koller
www.behance.net/AlisonKoller
Raft Park was created to transmit the adrenaline of the rapids. This mix of images allowed me to develop a good composition, with adjustments and tweaks, that tells an adventure story with my good friends.

Alex Maltsev
baker.team
I like experimenting with different shaders in my 3D projects, but raw renders always need retouching for clean view. And this time I used my Wacom Intuos and standard brushes in Photoshop for some corrections and light accent adjustments.

READERS' IMAGES

Welcome to an inspirational round-up of great Photoshop artwork **created by none other than your fellow readers**

Sylvia van der Velden
Image of the issue
This work was made with texture layers and layer masks. I changed the blend modes and added some curves and lighting effects. For the model I used only dark and midtone colours and made some layers for these.

Bob Parsi
I focused on the lion's face and masked out the rest. Then I used gradients and brushes to colourise the face and outer areas. At the final stage I used various adjustment layers to make the colours more vibrant.

Lakshmikanta Patra
This is a self-portrait that I created in Photoshop. I used many solid colour layers, some adjustment layers and replicated my body parts with the Pen tool. It was kept simple for a vector style.

Caroline Julia Moore

I created this illustrated sci-fi image using a photograph that I took and digitally painted over. I made the circular shapes using blur filters and selectively added an accented edges filter.

Trish Dixon

I started with a simple black and white silhouette. I used Bevel and Emboss to give it a 3D appearance and also added a 3px white stroke. I painted the eye shadow and lips on a separate layer set to Color then added a Gradient adjustment layer above the Color layer.

anything is possible

Val Burtenshaw

I cut a copy of the parrot out from the background and used 3D tools on it. I resized the 3D layer to the size of the parrot in the background and brightened it, then I used a mask to reveal the eye underneath.

Learn to draw with the BRUSH TOOL

WATER FEATURES
Use a lower opacity blue on a new layer to create a water effect.

DEPTH OF FIELD
Use the Gaussian Blur filter to create a depth of field in your image.

From starting sketches to finishing flourishes, get to grips with how to use the Brush to draw

So you have Photoshop, you've downloaded some brushes, and you've checked out some tutorials on how to create digital artwork. But what if you're not very good at drawing? Well, we're here to help!

Drawing is one of the simplest hobbies you can practise: all you need is a pencil and some paper. But some of us don't have the natural artistic talent of being able to put down on a page what we visualise in our minds. Getting better at drawing is first and foremost a matter of practise – as with most skills – but to help

you start off on the right foot, we asked our favourite digital artists for their top drawing tips.

Over the next few pages, we're going to be looking at some simple ways you can to improve your Photoshop drawing abilities. From sketching animals or embellishing portraits, to adding light and shade to your images and getting the best out of different brushes. Think of this as your crash course to become a better artist. Even if you're a pretty good artist already, you're bound to pick up a few handy tips along the way.

13
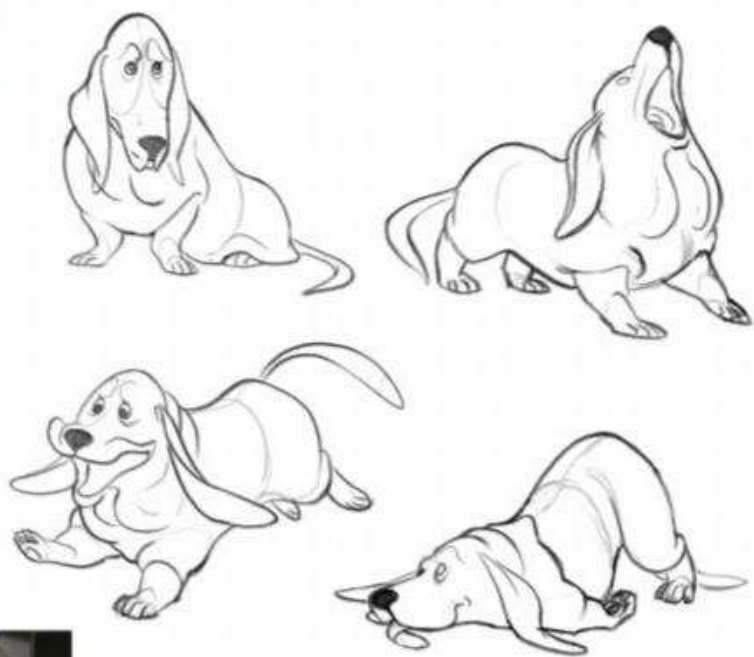
Drawing animals

Artist: Natalie Murrow

When sketching animals I try to capture their emotions through their body language. Looking at reference helps, but I also try to imagine interesting shapes and push the stylisation. I start with simple line art to get the general gestures down, then I move on to colour, while trying to maintain the movement of the original sketch.

Studying the shape of animals can really help when creating imaginative caricatures like this. One simple way to practise is to watch a video of an animal on YouTube, pause it at a random moment, and try and sketch the exact outline of it – no matter how it looks – so you can get a feel for its shape in different positions.

From doing this you can start to exaggerate an animal's features, such as making the eyes much bigger if you're looking to create a cute character. Draw your animal as a stick figure to begin with to position the limbs. Then on a new layer start fleshing it out with bigger brushes, adding to it with colour and texture.
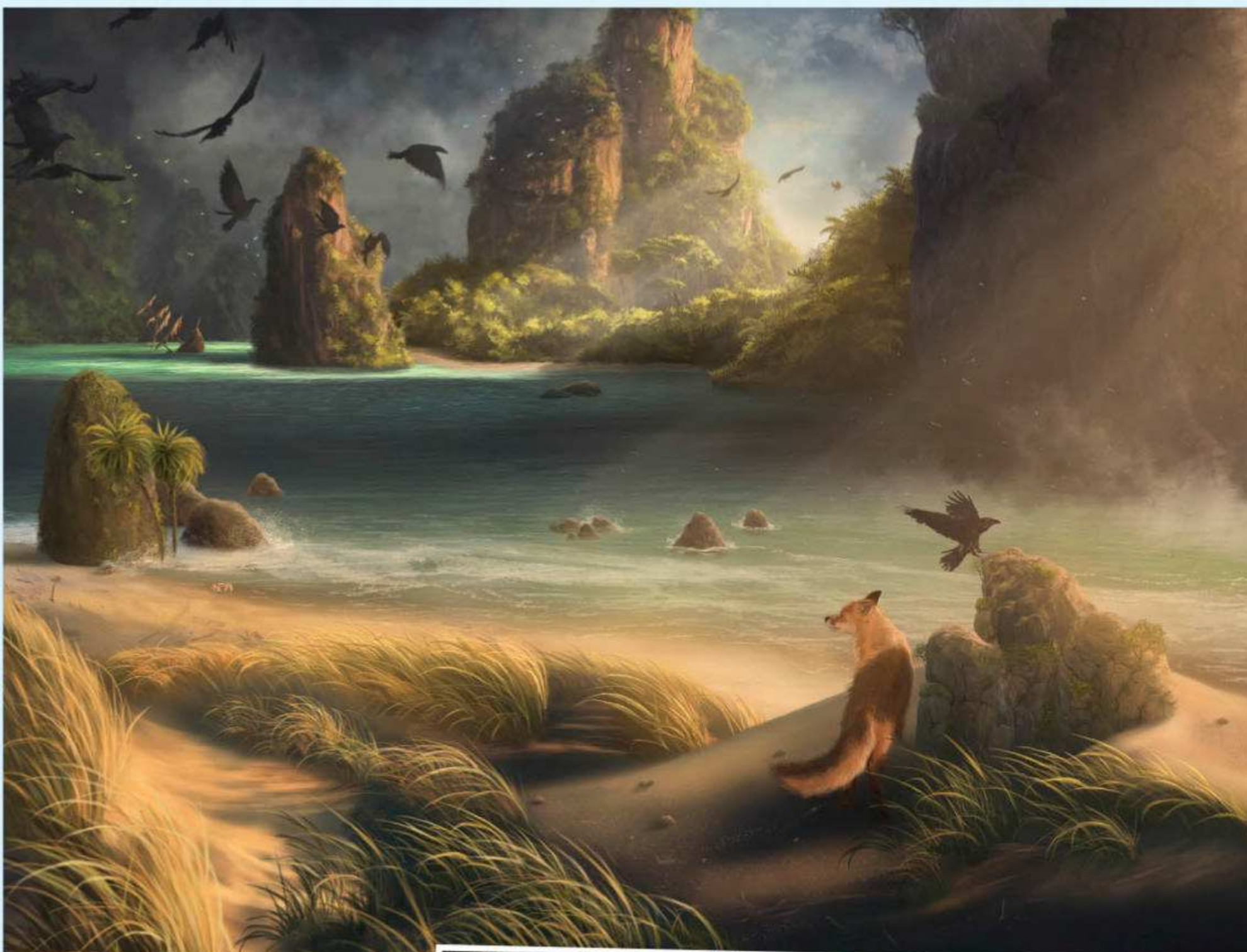
Drawing places

Artist: Marie Beschorner

When creating the forest scene, I blocked in base colours with a painterly brush. With a leaf-shaped custom brush I painted on top and adjusted the settings for Transfer, Shape Dynamics and Scattering. I also experimented with Texture, Dual Brush and Color Dynamics. I used a painterly brush to work out shadows, highlights and details in the end.

For the lakeside scene (created for the mindfulness app Sunny) I used a painterly custom brush for blocking in the base colours and to define the water by using broader strokes for waves in the foreground. Using thinner strokes, I added details such as the more distant waves, the foam at the shore, water splashes and any reflective highlights.

When you're drawing scenes like this, start by creating a rough outline in black and then add blocks of colour for where you'd like to paint. By doing this, you're creating the basic shapes to build upon, and from here you can start adding leaves to your trees for example, or ocean waves. This is where downloading leaf brushes can be useful, as they help you add to the scene before you build more on the image. Start off with bigger brushes for blocking in colour before moving on to much smaller brushes for adding the detail in your image. Finally, adding a character into the image – such as an animal – will help to give your picture some focus.

15

How to draw bodies

Artist: Rebekka Hearl

Understanding the basics of human anatomy is vital for any budding artist, so get studying! You can speed things up by breaking the body down into shapes on your sketch layer: ovals for heads, boxes for the chest and stomach, and so on. The 'lightning technique' is a great way to draw arms and legs quickly. All this means is that a leg, for example, can be represented as three lines: an outside curve on the thigh, inside curve on the knee, and outside curve on the calf. All that the 'lightning bolt' does is connect the three curves.

TIP
When you're drawing people, make sure the legs are the same length as the body, from the crotch to the top of the head.

How to draw hands

On your sketch layer, break the hand down into simpler shapes: a square for the palm and rectangles for the fingers. Draw a basic sketch over your guidelines and finalise the hand on another layer. Include details like skin wrinkles and nails to make your drawing more convincing.

16

Colour your work with blend modes

Artist: Mark White

Create in monochrome

01 Some artists find it easier to draw a character first in black and white before injecting the colour into it. Use reference photos to build up the light and shade in your subject and use custom brushes to get a real paint effect.
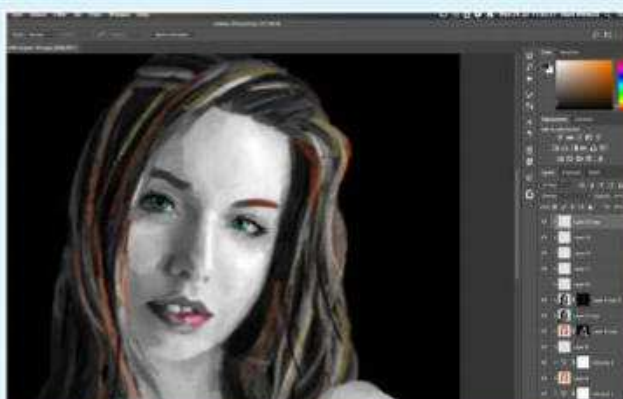
Overlay layers

02 Create a new layer and set to Overlay. Use different colours on this layer to give your picture some saturation across the monochrome base you've built. Use a strict colour palette to keep your image cohesive.
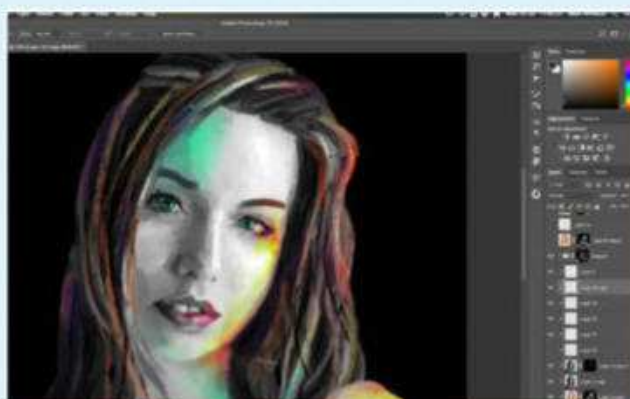
Bring in more colour

03 Using the Color blend mode will help you to colour your picture even more, and if you intersperse Normal layers in between with brushstrokes here and there, you can start to build up a textured portrait.
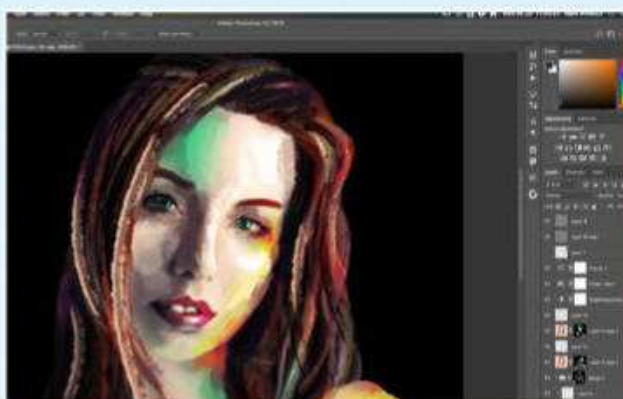
Build up the image

04 Keep layering more and more brushes to create a bigger, brighter image with a range of different textures and strokes all merged into the portrait. Use adjustments such as Curves to get all the colours to harmonise.

Go further with brushes

Artists: Kittozutto

TIP 1 HARD ERASE
While the whole illustration is painted using Soft Brush, areas such as eyelids and nostrils are being more clearly defined than others by hard erasing or hard masking, which helps to create a sharp contrast.

TIP 2 SOFT MASKING
Further contrast can be added around the nostril areas by soft masking the nose shadings to create a slight highlight on the nostril edges against the darker shades.

TIP 3 CREATE TEXTURES
The soft textures on the forehead can be created using a slightly blurred noise layer with Softlight blending mode, using a Soft Brush to unveil the textures through masking.

Advanced brushing tips

Artist: Geneva Benton

It's important to keep checking colours to keep them vivid when blending. Try mixing in a saturated colour when shading and blending. One trick for keeping the lighting in check is drawing in a quick sun or note in the direction of the light source and blocking in the shading in the painting early.
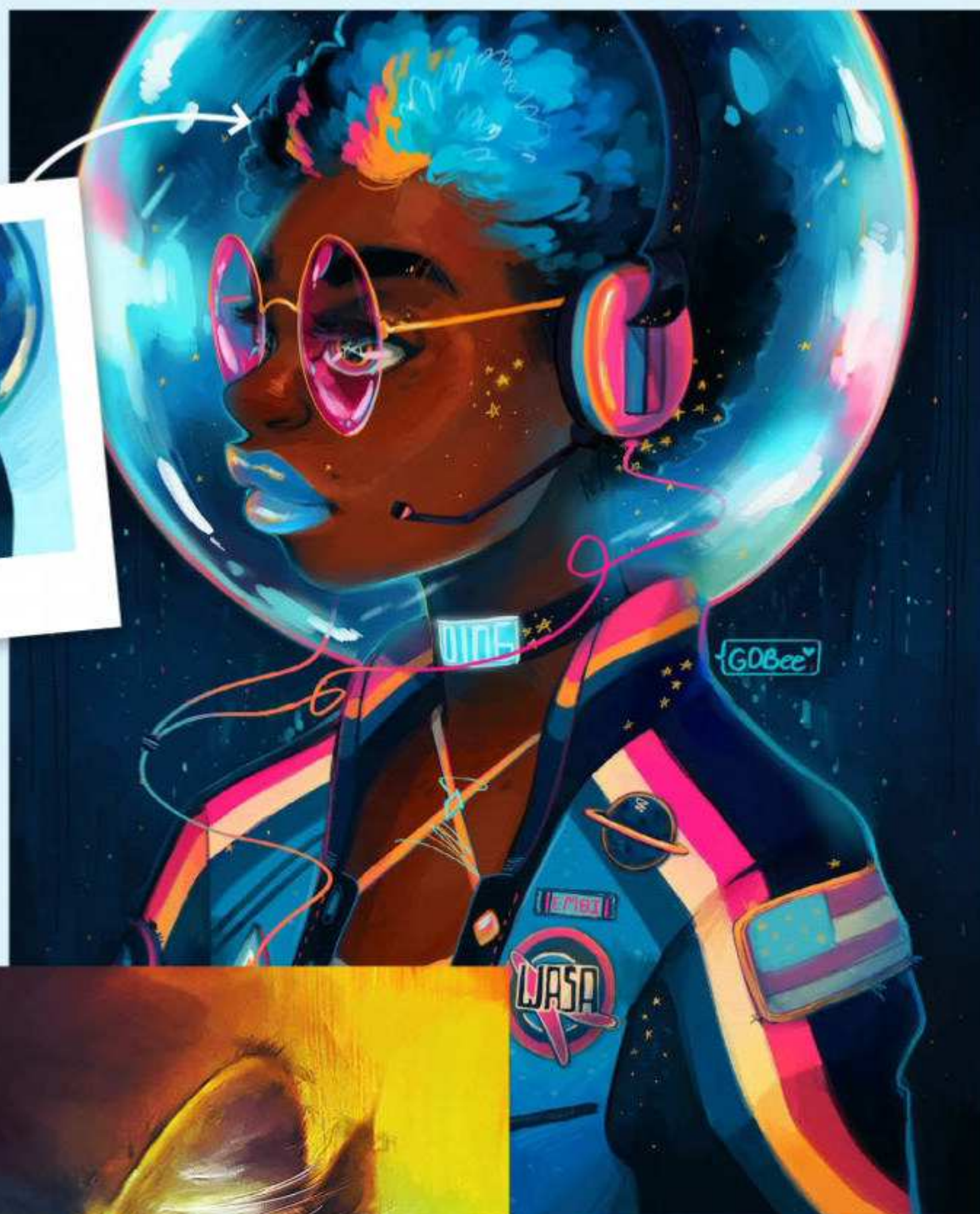
CREATE THE BASE
Add a new layer, and use a watercolour wash brush to start creating the background: go to Brush Settings and check the Texture option for a more realistic finish. Use a watercolour Mixer brush to blend colours.

FINAL FLICKS
Create a new layer, select a soft round brush of 3px. In Brush Settings, go to Shape Dynamics and change Control to Pen Pressure. Create fur flicks with to finish off.

BRUSH SETTINGS
You can create amazing artwork using Photoshop's default brushes. This piece uses Round Curve Low Bristle Percent, and Chalk 36px. Go to Brush Settings, select Scattering, and set Controls to Fade for a more realistic effect.

ACHIEVING THE FUR EFFECT
Now we're going to blur the brushstrokes to create a fur effect. After applying the main colours for the cat, create a new layer, then click on Smudge tool, and choose a watercolour brush. Reduce the Strength of the effect to 16% and check Sample All Layers.

Optimise your Brush Settings

Artist: Amro Ashry

For me, success always comes from how I use the available tools provided by Photoshop. In Brush Settings, you can create a masterpiece without needing to download any additional brushes.
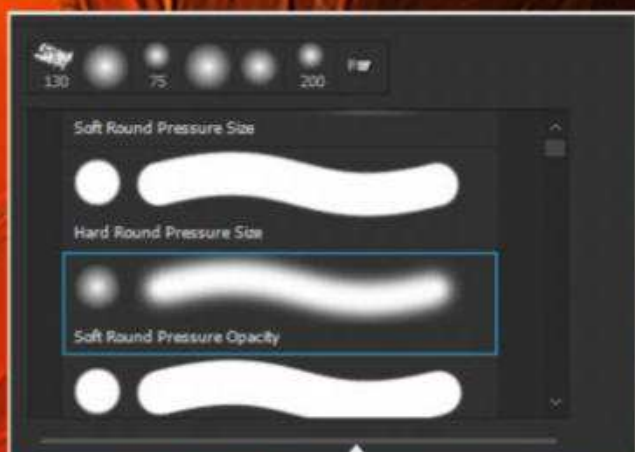
Softer skin

01 Use a soft mixer brush to blend the colours of the skin. Set as Wet: 5%, Load: 5%, Mix: 10% and Flow: 35%. If you are using a graphics tablet, from Brush Settings, go to Scattering, set Control to Pen Pressure and set Count to 3.
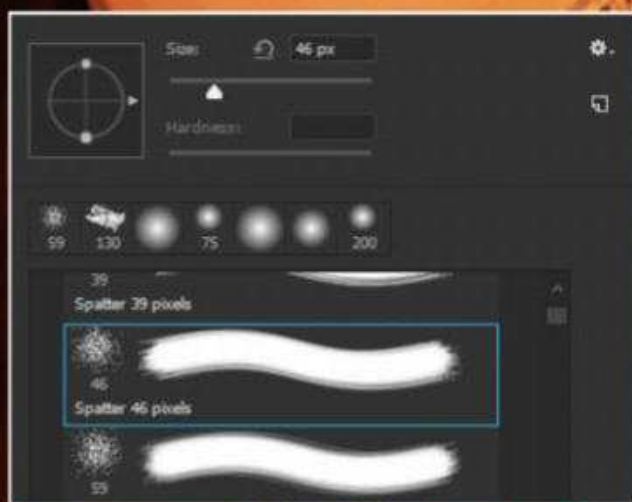
Highlighting

02 Create a new layer, set the Blend Mode to Color Dodge and change the Opacity to 15%. Now use a spatter brush to add highlights by clicking and releasing either with your mouse or a tablet.

Working on the hair

03 Use a flatter brush for hair. Go to Brush Settings, and to Brush Tip Shape to control the shape, thickness, length and the angle of the fine lines of the hair. After that, select Scattering, then set Count to 6 or more and increase the scatter.

Essentials

Works with

PS **CC** ◈
CS   CC   Elements

What you'll learn

▲ To create renaissance-style digital paintings using brushes and guides

Time taken
2 hours

Expert

Mark White

I love using custom brushes in my work, and I enjoy creating my own. The beauty of Photoshop is that almost everything is customisable, so when it comes to creating digital artwork that feels unique, it's great that you can find just the right brush to manage it.

As Techniques Editor on *Photoshop Creative*, I've learned all kinds of quick tips to help with even the most impressive-looking pictures.

Create classic oil paintings

Evoke the Renaissance in your digital artwork with a classic style, using brushes and adjustments

I t's incredible what you can create on a computer these days. We should know too: we spend most our days trying to push the boundaries of that. But sometimes, there's nothing more satisfying than evoking the past.

We live in an age when everything around us is inspired by something that's already been, whether that's in music, fashion or art. We're constantly inspired by things that have influenced us, and that's the thinking behind many classic-looking digital paintings. In this tutorial, we're going to look at how to create something that has that sense of

depth to it in terms of age and style, as we explore how to take on oil paintings.

From using the golden ratio to playing with textures, this can be a fun and fulfilling project to get stuck into, and there are endless possibilities for what you create with oil-style brushes. We've gone for a portrait in this case, but why not try out the skills you learn in this tutorial with a landscape or an animal?

Let's not look forward at the future of art, but instead hark back to times gone by, and dive straight into a classical painting project.
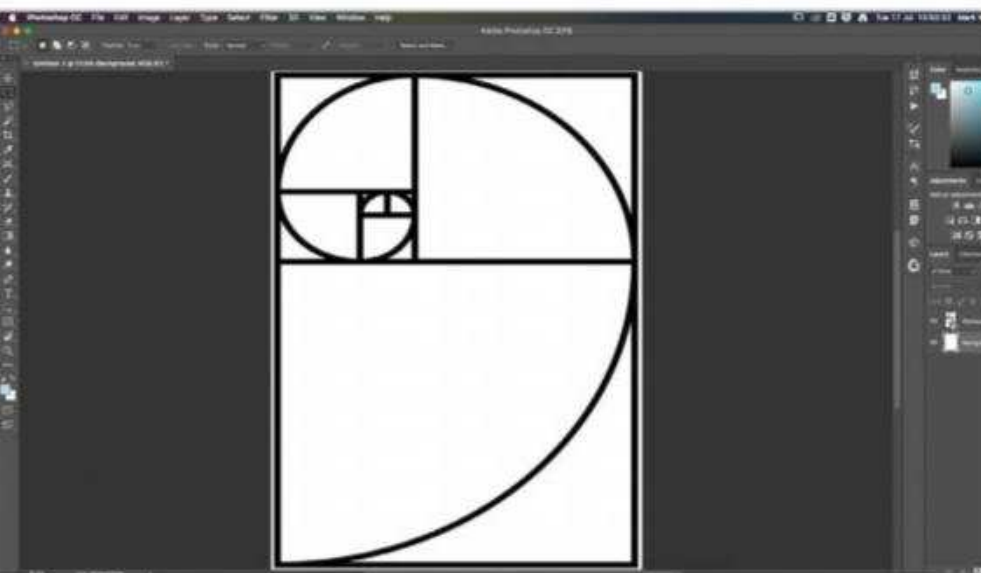
Use the golden ratio

01 The golden ratio is a set of proportions that were used typically in Renaissance paintings by the likes of Leonardo da Vinci. We're going to use them here for this painting to give it a classic feel; drop the ratio file into Photoshop to begin.

Retouch your start image

02 We're going to start off with a stock photo and paint over it, but you can choose to create a painting from reference photos. Use Liquify (Filter> Liquify) as well as the Spot Healing Brush, the Clone Stamp and whatever other tools you use to retouch the original image.
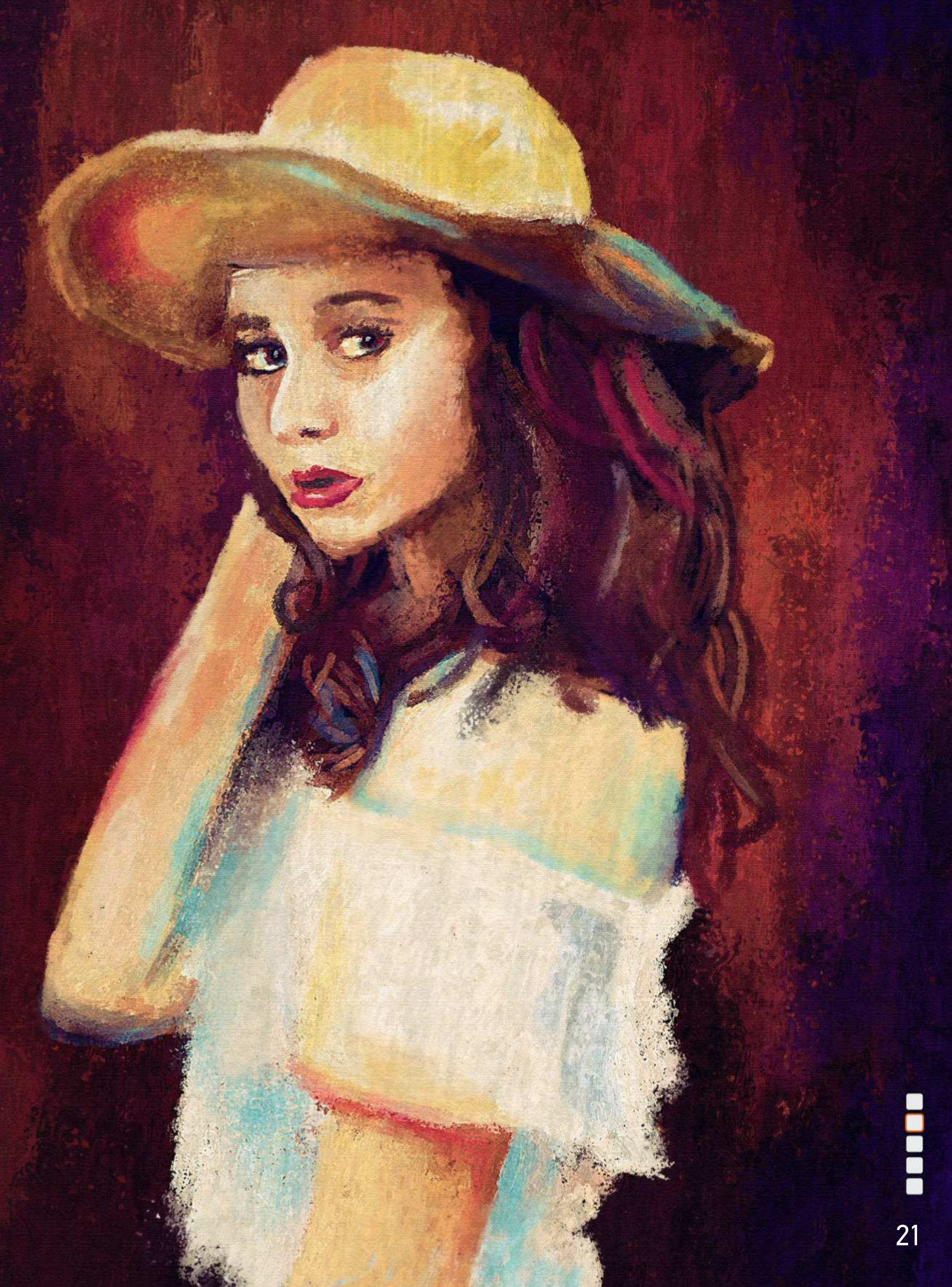
Align the subject

03 Drop the start image into your project below the golden ratio template. Now align your start photo so that it looks aesthetically pleasing against the golden ratio, using Transform (Cmd/Ctrl+T). Hide the golden ratio template when you're done.

Boost the colours

04 Next we're going to enhance the photo a little further; use Curves, Photo Filter, Gradient Maps and whatever other adjustments you like to boost your start photo ready to paint on. We're going with warmth and brightness for ours.

Set a colour palette

05 Grab a big, hard brush and quickly add a basic colour palette to follow when you're brushing. We went for a deep purple (#0f001e), brown (#4c1018), pink (#f52749), blue (#71c7e3) and yellow (#71c7e3). This is a guide layer that we'll periodically hide whenever we need to.

Start painting

06 Grab your custom oil brush. We used the Gypsum Slate GrutBrush, which is only $1 to download (bit.ly/2O0kNBZ), and we've included ten sample GrutBrushes on the FileSilo for you to try. Reduce the size of this brush to 25px and start painting the facial details onto a new layer.
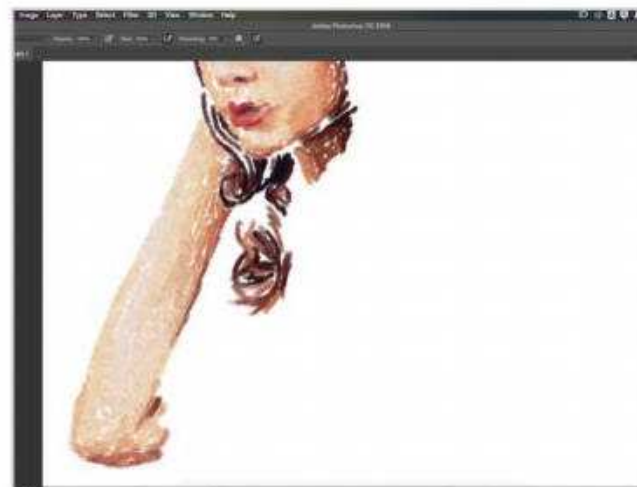
Continue with bigger strokes

07 As you're brushing on your new layer, you'll notice the image starting to take shape. Increase the size of the brush and start building up the image a little more. Hide the start image layer and fill in all the gaps between the strokes.
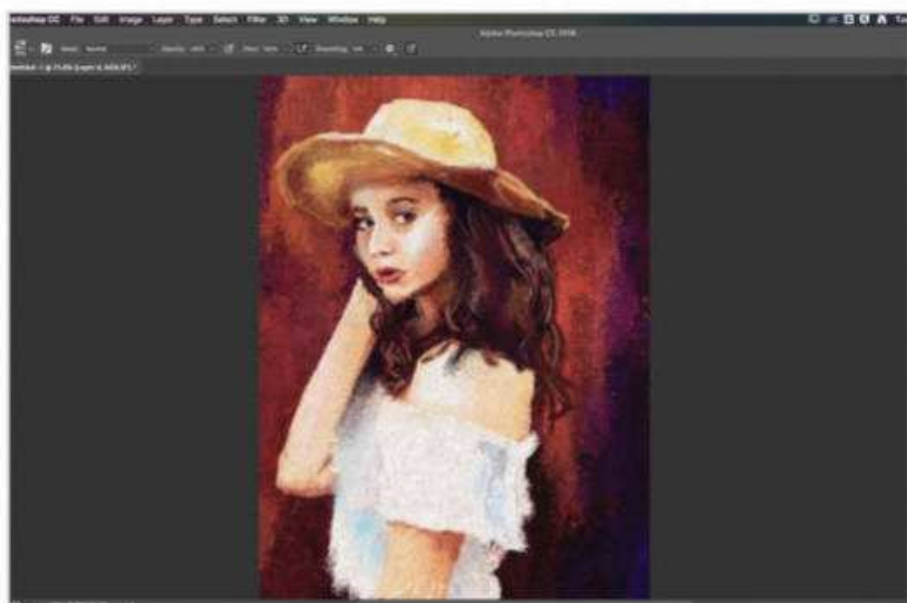
Build up your image

08 Keep on building up the image with bigger and smaller strokes until you've traced over the entire photo. Create new layers to add levels of detail and layers of thick colour behind the subject. Blend in the colours by Alt/Opt-clicking on the shades between two colours.
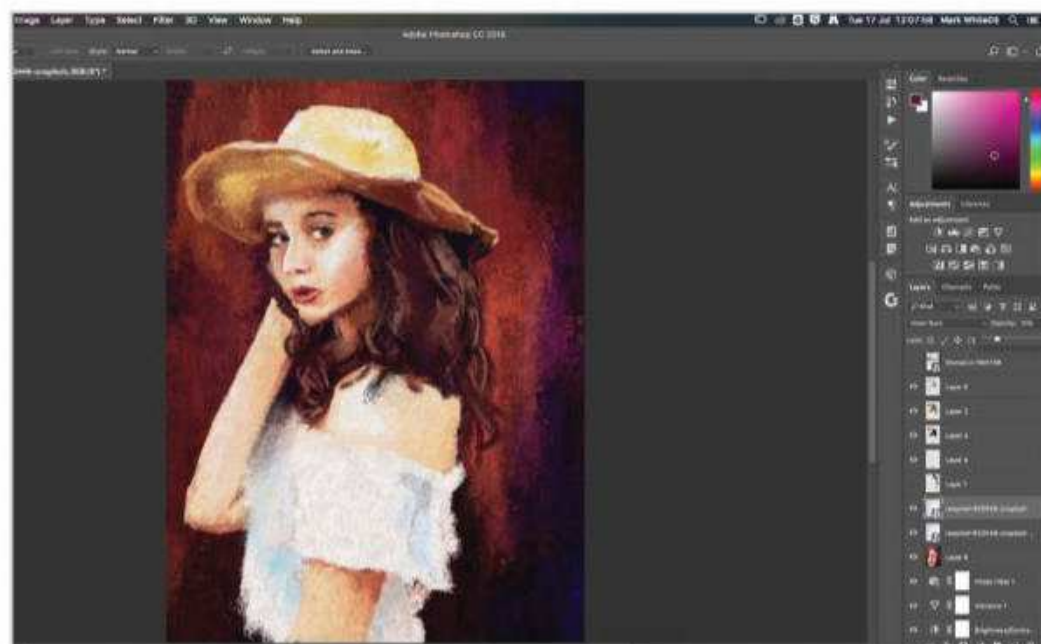
Insert a texture

09 We've supplied an oil paint texture with the resources in this tutorial. Drag it into the image and set it to Multiply, then use Transform to position it over the entire picture. This will add an extra degree of realism to the piece and bring your brushstrokes alive.
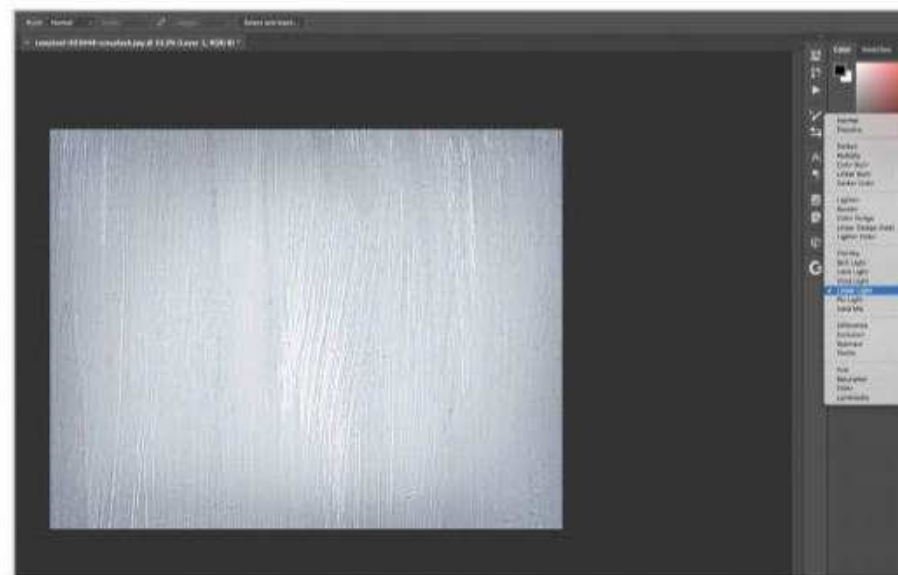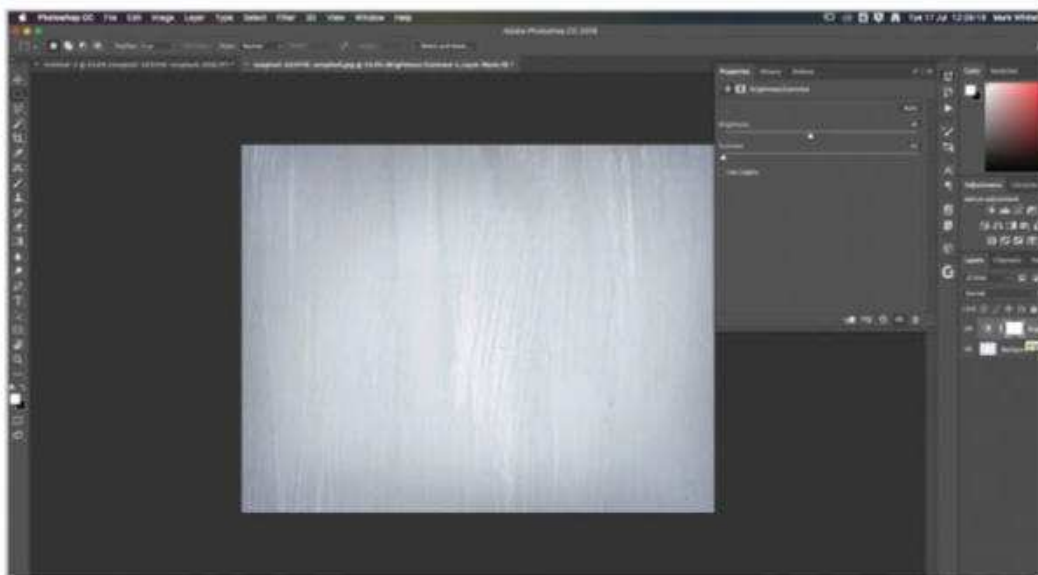
Edit the texture at source

10 Double click on the texture's layer thumbnail to edit the Smart Object itself. Reduce the Contrast to -50 and the Brightness to -16 to make the texture blend a little more into our final image. You have to save a Smart Object to apply its changes.

Sharpen the texture

11 Duplicate the background image and go to Filter> Other> High Pass. Set to 4px and click OK. Set this layer to Linear Light, and you will have sharpened the lines of the texture sufficiently for it to be prominent in the final project.

Bring in colder tones

12 Below the oil paint texture that we've added, we're going to add some more paint strokes. Use the supplied cold gradient on the FileSilo to create a gradient map, and with your brush, touch on a new layer above it, selecting colours from that gradient map.
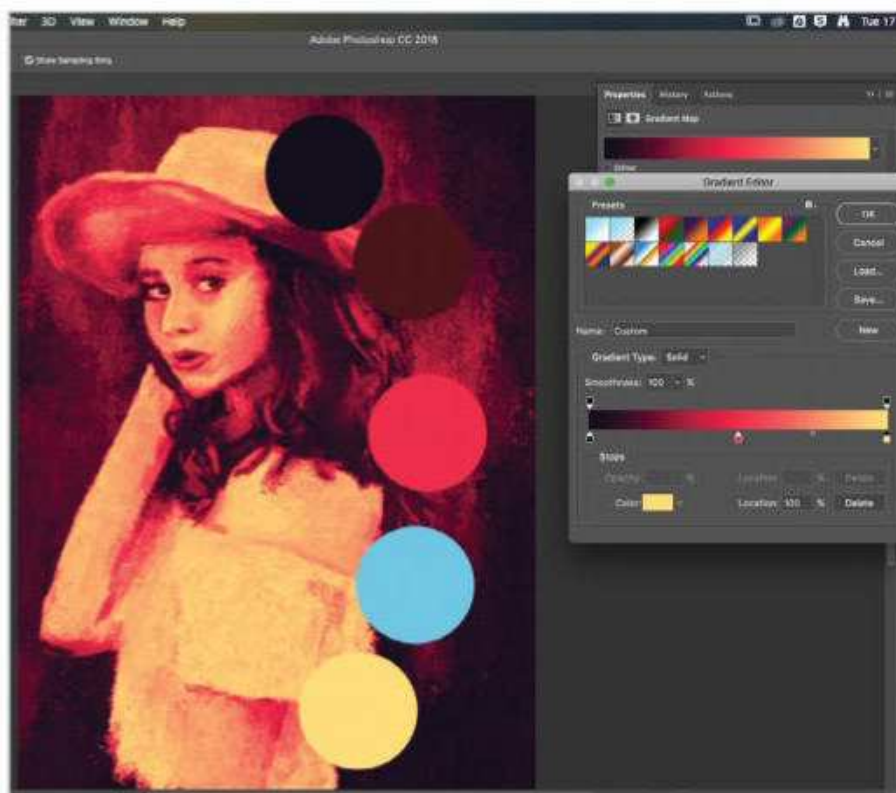
Warm up the image

13 Hide your cold gradient map. Now use the warm gradient on a gradient map to do the same thing. Both gradients are taken from the colours we used to create a palette at the start of this project, to keep the image looking cohesive as a whole.
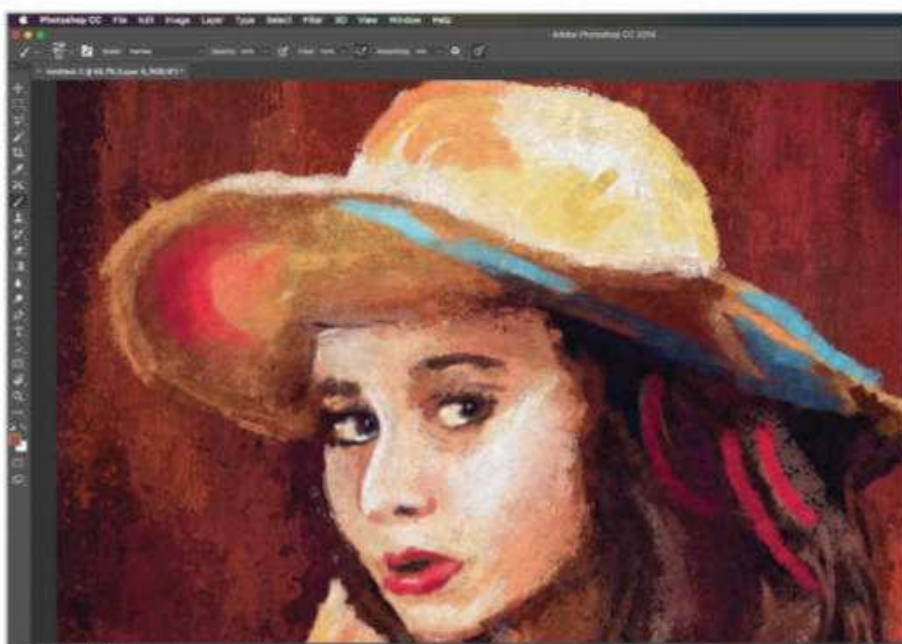
Blend in your strokes

14 Hide the warm gradient map and you'll see all of those strokes that you made by Alt/Opt-clicking on the image and drawing. Use a 50% opaque brush to blend all of these colours into your existing painting.

Add more contrast

15 While you're using a low opacity brush, take the opportunity to touch darker and lighter tones around the eyes, in shadows and over the hair to give this image a little more contrast and to really make it pop.
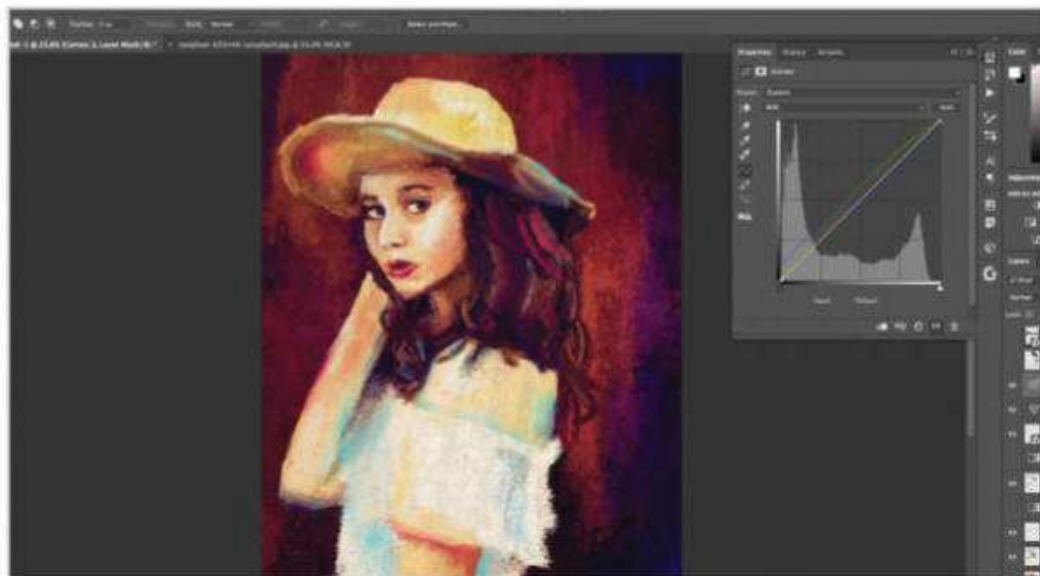
Adjust with Curves

16 Use another Curves adjustment – like the one in the screenshot – to boost each of the channels a little more. This is a good way to manage the red and the blue in the image after you've applied your warm and cold strokes to the painting.

Focus on certain areas

17 Create a stamp layer by hitting Cmd/Ctrl+Alt/Opt+Shift+E and go to Filter> Other> High Pass again. Choose 3px and hit OK. Set to Overlay, hit Mask and then Invert (Cmd/Ctrl+I). Mask in the sharpness over the face and other details.

Make some noise

18 Now let's create some noise to add a little extra texture to the rest of the painting. Create a new layer, go to Filter> Add Noise and choose Monochromatic, 400%. Hit OK and then Cmd/Ctrl+click the high pass layer's mask to select that mask. Hit Mask and Invert (Cmd/Ctrl+I).

Go over the details

19 Zoom in further on your image and use a smaller brush to enhance the details of the piece. Focus on the eyes, improve the contrast around certain areas and just make sure that it looks good up close, as well as from a distance.

Brighten and darken

20 Create a new layer and set to Soft Light, 30% Opacity. With a big, soft brush, touch over anything you want to draw attention to (like the face) in white and anything you don't (like the background) in black to give more focus in the right places.
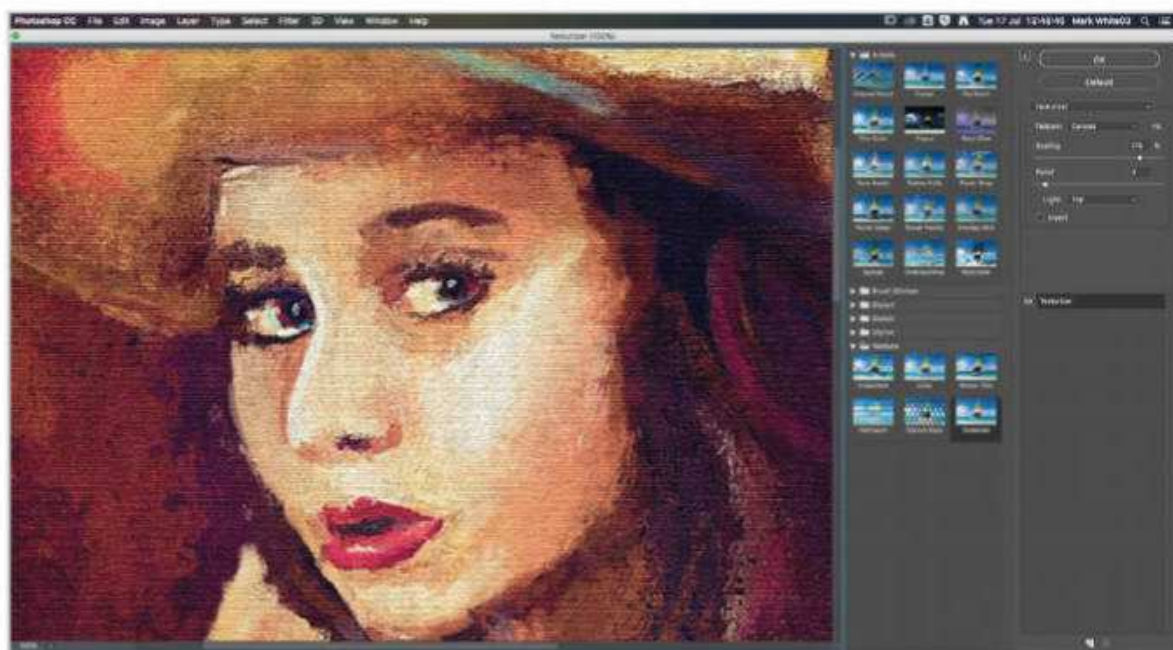
Filter in a canvas

21 Create another stamp layer and go to Filter> Filter Gallery, before looking for the Texturizer option in the Texture folder. Use a Scaling of 175% and a Relief of 4 to create a realistic canvas texture for your work, and hit OK. Dial back the Opacity to make the effect a little more subtle.
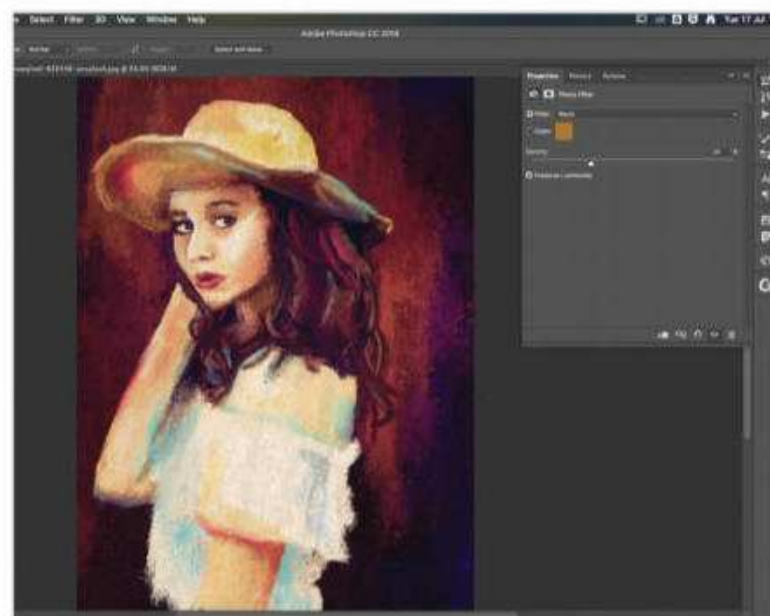
Age your painting

22 Finally, for that classic painted feel, we're going to add a sepia filter over the picture as a whole. Up the Density slider to increase the sepia, but be aware that it will dull the brightness of some of your colours as a result.

NIGHTMONGER

- H A R R O W I N G   F O R C E -

Expert

Andre Villanueva

As I spend most weekdays (and some weekends) a sleep-deprived zombie, I like to be well stocked on two things: caffeine and blood-pumping music. The music emanating from my trusty Bose is usually of the metal persuasion. I spent part of my early adulthood performing in local bands. I especially loved preparing promotional materials. I'm now an art director in Alabama, playing with Photoshop while nursing perpetually ringing ears.

Layer an atmospheric metal design

Utilise a spectrum of features and tools both popular and unsung to forge a wicked metal music design

Essentials

Works with

Ps		
CS	CC	Elements

What you'll learn
How to layer a design with masks, blend modes and adjustments.

Time taken
3 hours

M usic is an art form oftentimes accompanied by another important type of art: visuals. These can greatly enhance the fan's appreciation of the music.

Take CD packaging. The artwork emblazoned on the cover is typically a manifestation of the album's theme or a rendering of a key subject in a featured song. The lyrics and liner notes can be accompanied by art and textures that are complementary to these themes and subjects.

To form cohesive branding, the visuals are repurposed for posters, promo kits, stage design and digital experiences. Thus, this associated artwork can be very important to the overall music experience.

Here, you will tap into a variety of Photoshop features and tools in order to create an atmospheric skull-scape for promoting a fictional metal band's latest album. Masks and blend modes, the compositing all-stars, unsurprisingly figure prominently in the steps. You will also utilise some things you may not use every day. These include Blend If, a Gradient Map with the Steel Bar preset and the groovy Blacklight Poster Color Lookup.

While the tutorial is geared for CC, non-CC users who want in on the action can check the boxout for some tips and alternatives for their version.

Let's rock!

Create shape

01 Open start.psd. Go to View> New Guide and create a vertical guide at 50% to aid you with centering elements in the design. Select the Custom Shape tool. From the Custom Shape picker, pick Hexagon Frame under the Shapes category. Drag out a shape.
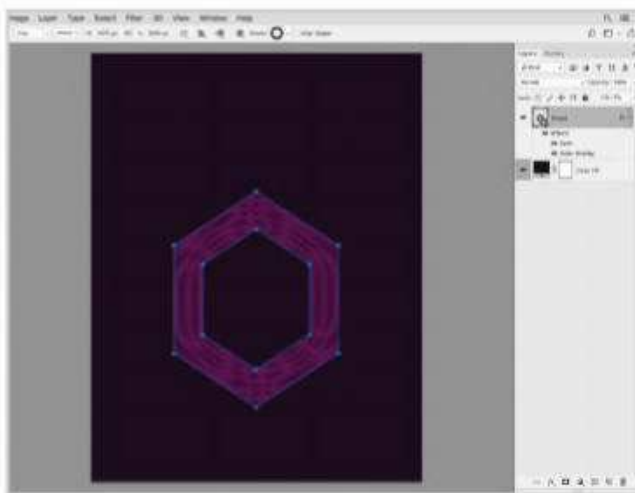
Apply Water Reflection preset

02 Toggle guide visibility with Cmd/Ctrl+;. In the Styles palette (Window> Styles), pick the Water Reflection preset under Image Effects. Double-click the Color Overlay style under the layer. Change the Color Overlay's colour to #a5178e. Click OK. Drop the layer's fill (above layers) to 0%.

Duplicate shape

03 Press Cmd/Ctrl+J to duplicate the shape. Press Cmd/Ctrl+T for Free Transform. Shift-click and drag within the transform box to move up some. Holding Option/Alt, drag a side handle outward, and drag the top or bottom handle slightly inward. Commit the transform (Return/Enter).
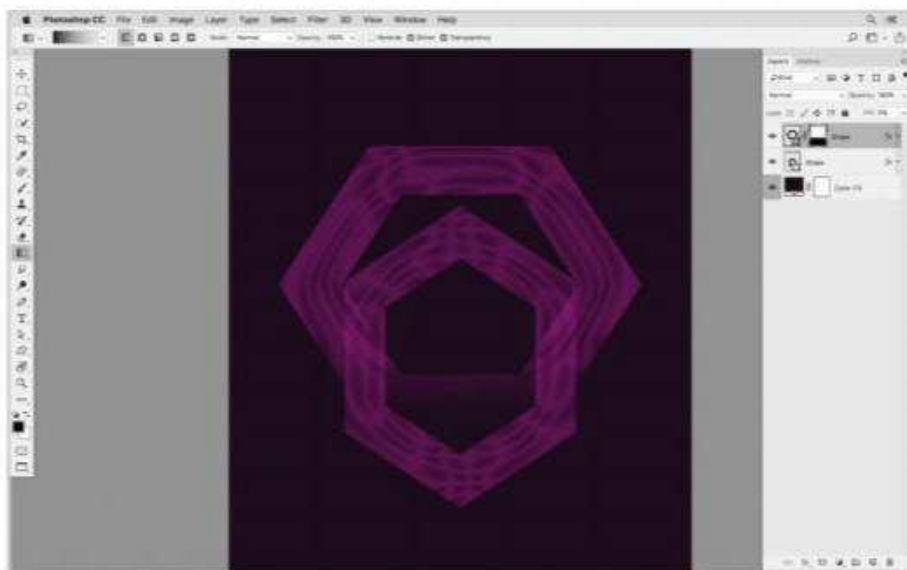
Fade with layer mask

04 Click the layer palette's Add layer mask button. Set the foreground colour to black. Using the Gradient tool (Foreground to Transparent preset, Linear style, 100% opacity), click and drag upward a short distance to fade the bottom edge of the shape.
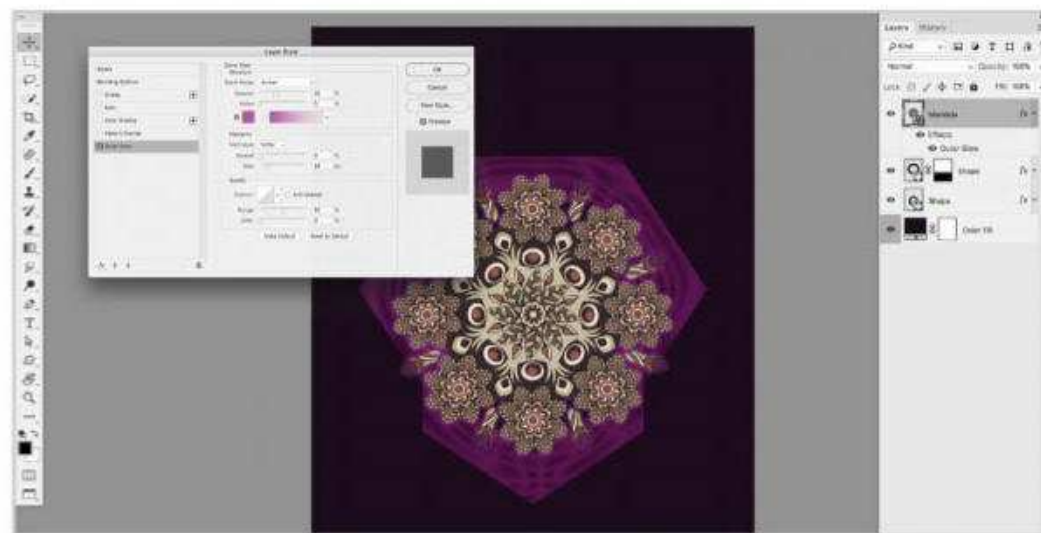
Add mandala

05 Go to File> Place Embedded, grab mandala.png. Scale and position before committing the place (Return/Enter). Click the Layers palette's fx button, and choose Outer Glow. Set the glow colour to #df39e9, then click OK. The mandala decor doesn't exactly scream 'metal', so let's make it more fitting…
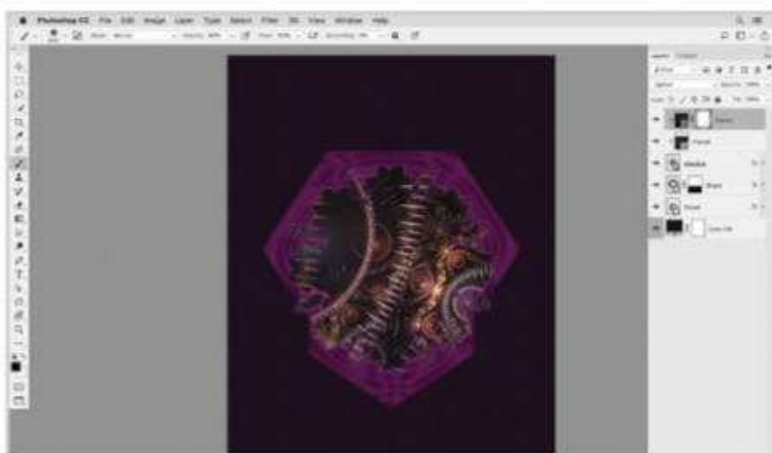
Embed wicked detail

06 Go to File> Place Embedded, and grab fractal.jpg. Change the blend mode to Darker Color, scale/position above mandala before committing. Option/Alt+click between the top two layers to clip. Place fractal.jpg again. Set to Lighten blend mode, scale/position/commit and clip. Add layer masks if needed, paint black (20-60% brush opacity) to reduce.

Add skeleton and duplicate

07 Keep going with the sinister proceedings. Go to File> Place Embedded, and grab 'skeleton.png'. Drop the layer's opacity to 70%, rotate counterclockwise a bit, then scale and position to one side of the central shape mass before committing to the place. Press Cmd/Ctrl+J to duplicate the skeleton.
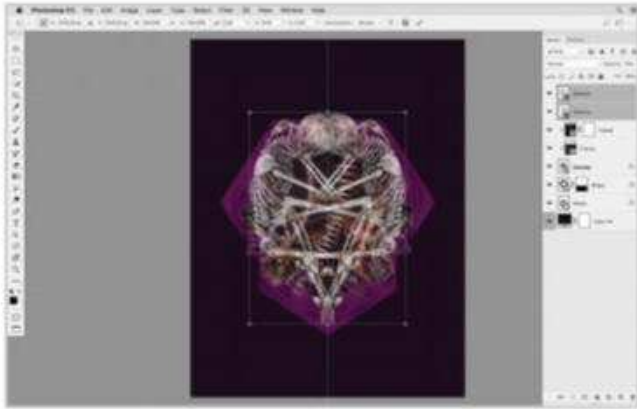
Flip and centre

08 Toggle guide visibility (Cmd/Ctrl+;). Free Transform (Cmd/Ctrl+T), right-click on-canvas and choose Flip Horizontal. Holding Shift, click and drag the transform box over to the left before committing to the transform. Shift-click the first skeleton layer, then Free Transform. Using the transform box's centre point, align to your guide. Commit.

Duplicate the skeleton pair

09 With both skeleton layers still selected, press Cmd/Ctrl+J to jump a new pair of skeletons into the layer stack. Change the opacity to 100% to affect both while selected. Free Transform and scale down by holding Option/Alt+Shift and drag a corner handle inward. Commit when done. Toggle guide visibility (Cmd/Ctrl+;), as it's needed from here on out.
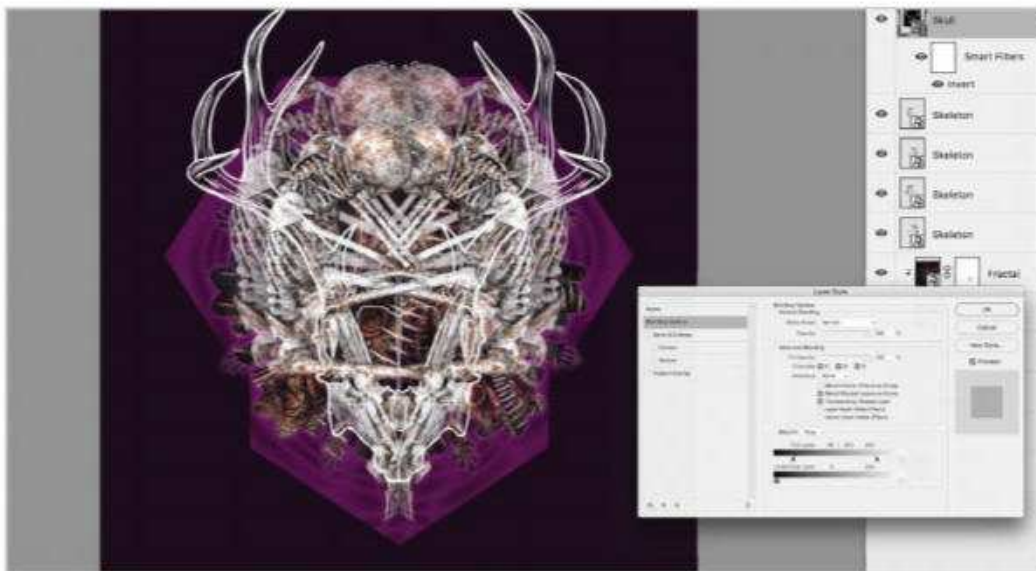
Engage Blend If slider

10 Place 'skull.jpg'. Scale and position before committing. Press Cmd/Ctrl+I to invert. Double-click on an empty space in the layer to bring up the layer's blending options. Drag the dark slider under This Layer inward. Option/Alt-click and drag to split the slider and make the edit more gradual. Click OK.
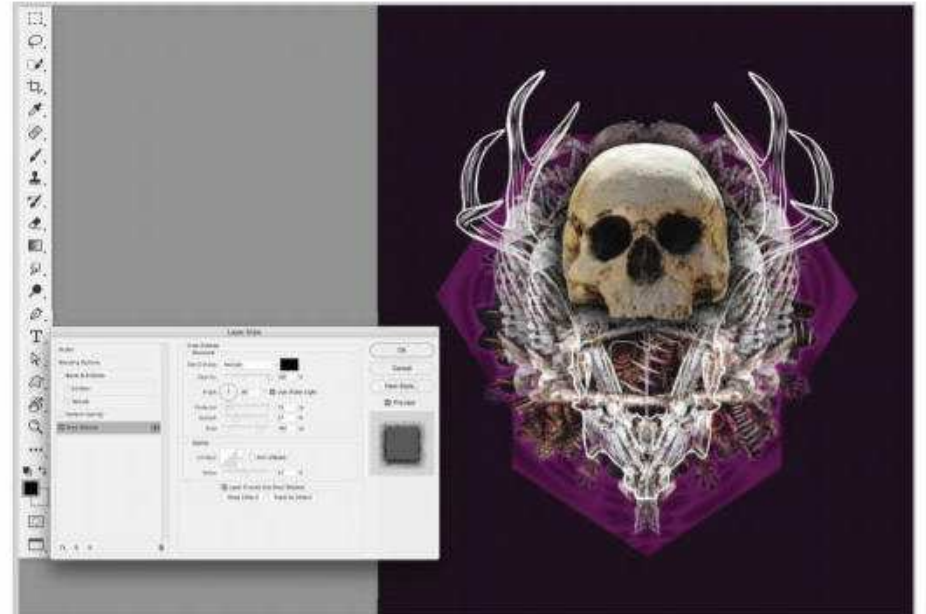
Add main skull

11 Place 'skull.png'. Scale and position before committing. Add a drop shadow at 100% opacity. Increase Spread to 27%, Size to 193px and Noise to 47%. Feel free to experiment with these. Click OK when satisfied.
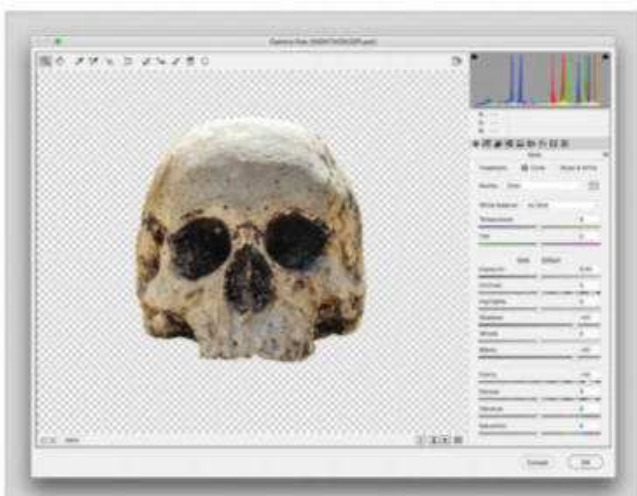
Unearth and boost detail

12 Dig up detail from the shadows with Camera Raw Filter. Go to Filter> Camera Raw Filter. Boost Shadows and Blacks to +60, Clarity to +80. Under Detail, increase Sharpening> Amount (try 80). Click OK when done.

Clip fractal

13 Place fractal.jpg. Set the blend mode to Soft Light, drop opacity to 60%. Scale and position to cover the skull before committing. Clip to the skull layer. If you need to tone down in areas, add a layer mask button and paint black (20-60% brush opacity) to reduce.
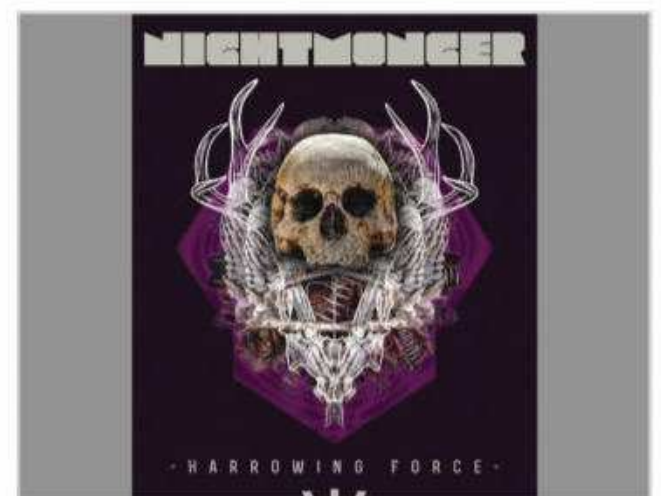
Add text

14 Now, add some text for the band's name and album title. Try out various fonts and play with the settings in the character and paragraph palettes. Here, the Mod and Rex Bold fonts from **fontfabric.com** and the colour #bebcb4 are employed.
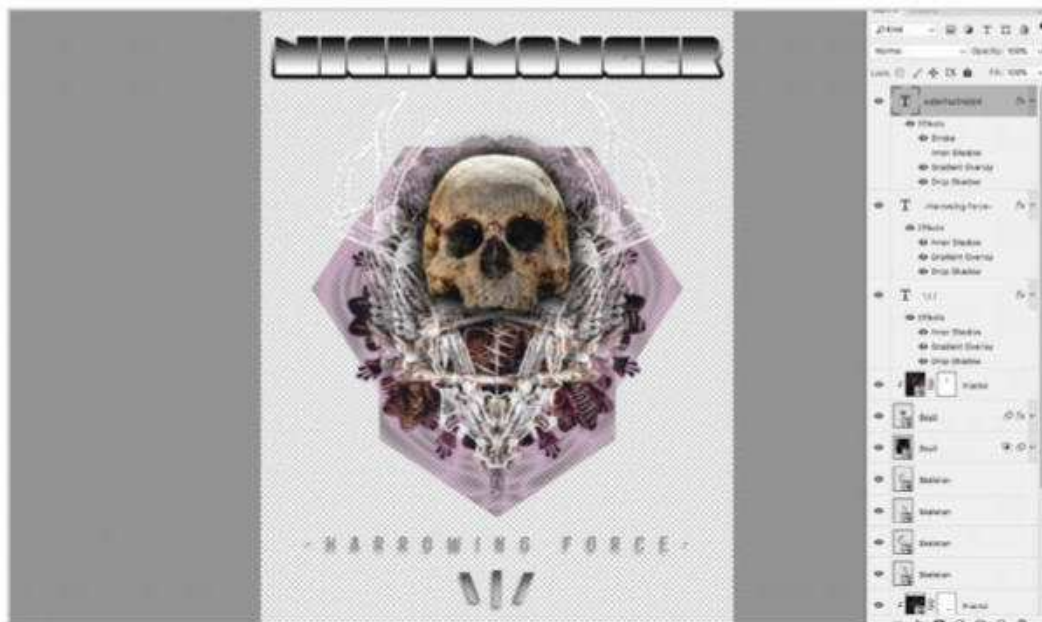
Amp up the text

15 Apply layer styles or utilise presets from the styles palette to amp up the text. Here, the Round Recessed and Sphere presets under Buttons are used. Customise settings for the presets' styles if you like. When done, click the bottom layer's eye icon to hide, then save the PSD.

Start main document

16 Open main.psd, and place fractal.jpg. Scale and position to blanket the canvas before committing the place. Add a layer mask, and paint black (30-70% opacity) to reduce some detail in the periphery and centre.

Build up forbidding backdrop

17 Place more instances of fractal.jpg to layer up the menacing detail. Lower the opacity of these layers (try 60-80%). Add layer masks and paint black (30-100% brush opacity) to melt edges and hide or fade areas.

Tone down with colour

18 Click the Create new fill or adjustment layer button in the layers palette, choose Solid Color. Pick black, and click OK. Drop Opacity to 30%. Click the mask, and press Cmd/Ctrl+I to invert. Paint back with white (20-40% brush Opacity) to shade some overly bright areas.

Blend in skulls

19 Place skulls.jpg. Set the blend mode to Exclusion and drop Opacity to 50%, then scale and position before committing. Add a layer mask and paint black (40-100% brush opacity) to fade edges and reduce in areas.

Expert tip

Stay non-destructive

When working with imagery that may be moved around on various screens and surfaces, keep things as non-destructive as possible. Resist rasterising smart objects and filters to save disk space. When using the Shape tools, ensure you set to Shape in the options bar to produce shape layers versus pixel-based objects that won't resize without degradation. Just as you created a separate design within a design, work in small PSDs that can be placed into assorted PSDs as smart objects.

Blend grunge texture

20 Place wall.jpg. Set the blend mode to Soft Light and drop the opacity to 30-60%, then scale and position to blanket the canvas before committing. Add a layer mask and paint black (40-70% brush opacity) to reduce in areas.

Overlay colour

21 Click the Create new fill or adjustment layer button in the layers palette, and choose Solid Color. Pick #9719aa. Click OK. Set the blend mode to Overlay. Click the mask, paint black (20-80% brush Opacity) to reduce in areas. Don't go overboard, as we'll tone down further in the next step.

Refine with Gradient Map

22 Click the Create new fill or adjustment layer button in the layers palette, and choose Gradient Map. Pick the Steel Bar gradient preset under Metals (yeah!), and drop the opacity to 60%. Paint black (20-30% brush opacity) in mask to reduce a bit in areas.

Use Blacklight Poster lookup

24 Click the Create new fill or adjustment layer button in the layers palette, choose Color Lookup. Pick the Blacklight Poster lookup preset under Abstract. Drop the opacity to 13%. Click the mask, and paint black (20-60% brush opacity) to reduce a bit in areas.
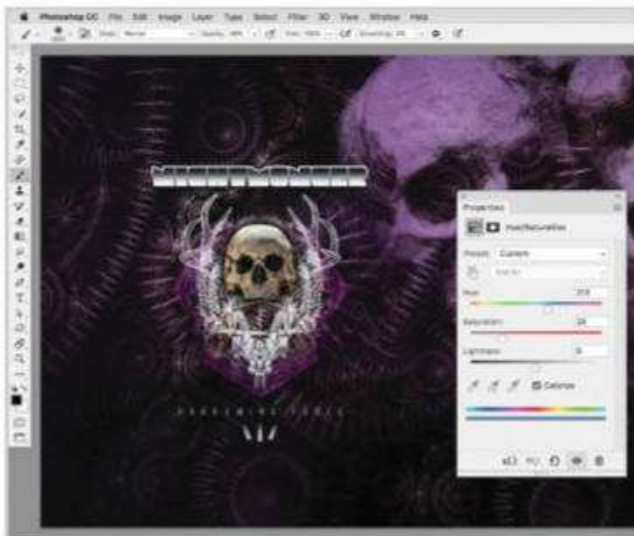
Adjust colour

26 Click the Create new fill or adjustment layer button in the layers palette, choose Hue/Saturation. Drop opacity to 60%. Tick Colorize, then set Hue to 213 (adjust if you like). Paint black (40-80% brush opacity) in the mask to reduce in areas.

Place design

23 It's now time for your design work from earlier to storm the stage. Go to File> Place Linked, and grab the PSD you worked on at the onset. Scale and position before committing. Because it's a linked asset, if you edit and save the original PSD the changes will be reflected here.

Intensify lookup

25 Add another Color Lookup adjustment with the Blacklight Poster lookup preset. Set the Opacity to 30% for a bit stronger effect. Click the mask, invert it. Paint white (30-70% brush opacity) to boost the focal point and key regions.

Finalise

27 Take some time to clean up detail and masks in both PSDs. Blend more colour and add additional adjustment layers at the top of the main PSD to make any final overall tweaks and nail the desired look. Save when done.

Expert edit

Use linked assets

Place linked

01 To bring in something as a linked asset, go to File> Place Linked, or hold Option/Alt as you drag something directly into an open PSD.

Update linked asset

02 If you have both the original asset and containing PSD open, you can make a change in the asset document and it'll update (upon save) in the main PSD.

Watch for alert

03 If you make adjustments to the linked asset and the main PSD isn't open anymore, you'll be prompted via a yellow alert icon on the layer when you open the PSD.

Update, relink or embed

04 To update the asset, right-click on the layer, choose Update Modified Content. To relink to another file, choose Relink to File. To embed the placed asset, choose Embed Linked.

The artist

Ana Cruz

I'm a professional digital artist from Portugal, Europe. I enjoy dark, gothic and dramatic aesthetics of art and I'm completely self-taught at Photoshop. I have a degree in Graphic Design and I currently work as a professional and independent digital artist under the name of Ana Cruz Arts. You can check out more of my artwork by visiting my website, **www.anacruz-arts.com**.

Deliverance

How Ana Cruz combined darkness and beauty for a stunning fantasy composition

Since a young age, I've always had a special taste for the dark, gothic and dramatic aesthetics of art," says Ana Cruz, a Portuguese designer and artist. "My biggest inspirations are secret realms and my passion for themes such as death, macabre beauty and deeply romantic emotions."

Ana is an artist drawn to the darkness in art, but for this picture, Ana chose to mix darkness with a light of light, bright colours and natural effects such as foliage. The finished result is something that feels very much rooted in this fantasy genre, but it has a mysterious undertone to it. "In my personal art, I always aim to achieve a mixture of dark fantasy and dramatic romance, occasionally with a surreal twist," Ana says. "I always aim to portray the beauty of darkness, in order to make it

appealing and alluring. I want my art to capture the deepest secrets of human souls and dream worlds, always with a dramatic story behind every scene. A story that someone can always relate to."

For this particular image, Ana combined traditional photomanipulation techniques with digital painting effects to build a fantasy piece. Adjustments and brushing were key in bringing a good contrast to the piece. "Using a new layer with the Overlay blend mode, I painted some black tones near the rock and some light tones on her edges. I also painted some extra highlights on her edges to increase the backlight effect," Ana says. "I used Brightness/Contrast, Hue/Saturation, Color Balance and Levels to work on the tone, contrast and shadows and highlights of the piece."

Building the background

01 I started with my background, blurred it Gaussian Blur, added some foliage and applied Gaussian Blur again, but this time with less intensity. Then I added rocks on both sides and adjusted highlights and shadows using Levels. I used the Lasso tool to select specific areas for both shadows and highlights.

Adding the subject

02 I added the model. I used a mask to hide body parts that were supposed to be in the rock and I used adjustments to work on her tone, contrast and highlights. I digitally painted her hair in several layers and added the horse before doing the same thing.

Working up the picture

03 I digitally painted the horse's hair and added the horn. I added a red eye to the horse and inserted a lot more foliage to the picture. I finished the image off with a blue-toned gradient texture set to a Soft Light blend mode to break the excess of yellow and green tones.
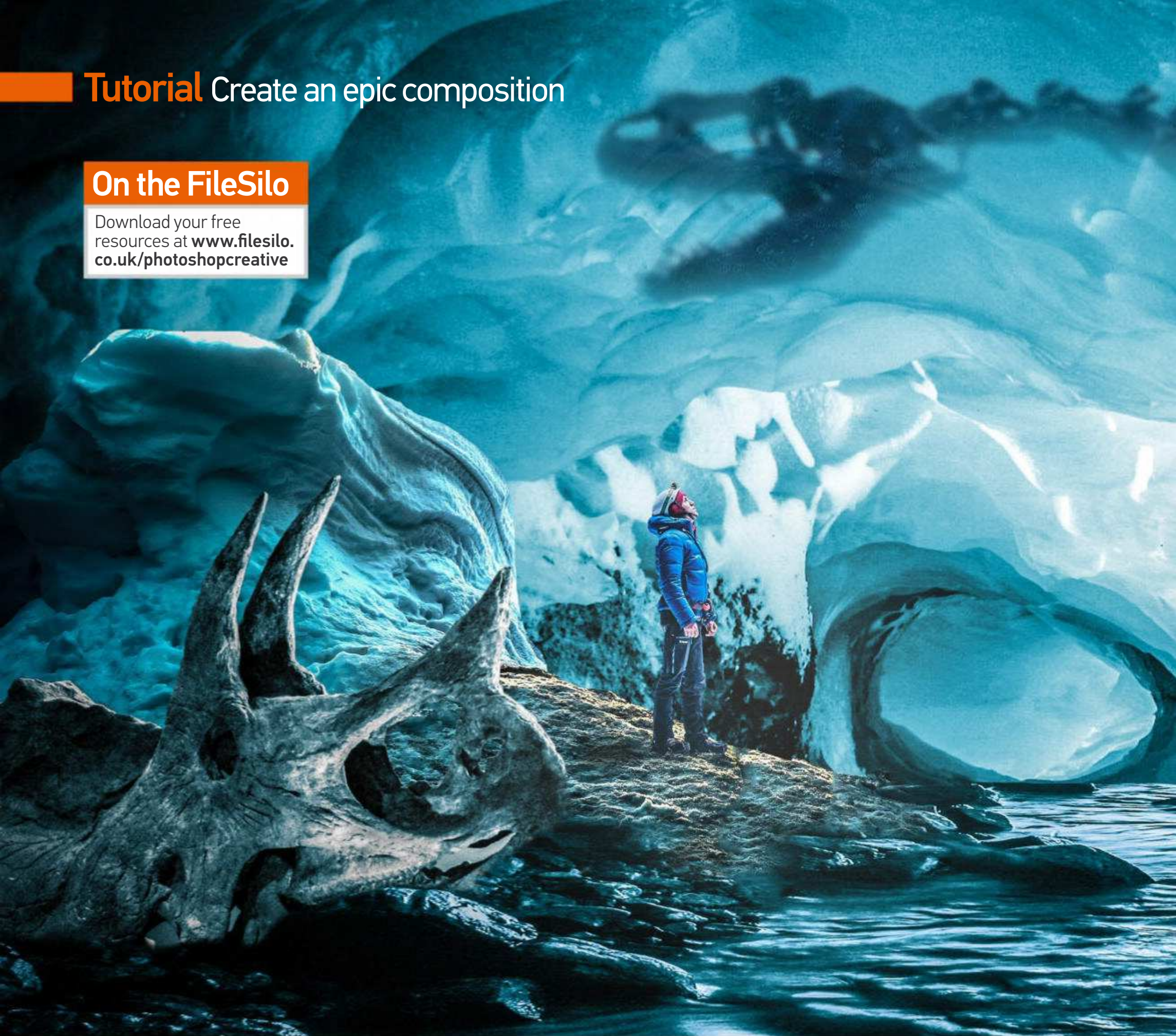
Create an epic ice-cave composition

Master the Photoshop layers and discover new techniques to create amazing effects

If you think layers are made to pile an image on top of each other, it is time to think again. Layers are the most basic and yet a powerful feature in Photoshop. Without them it would be difficult to achieve anything in Photoshop. In this tutorial, you'll master layers on every level. You'll learn how to blend images and to control the level of transparency of a layer using Layer Masks, plus how to make tonal corrections and other adjustments utilising Adjustment Layers.

Finally, you will learn how to create fantastic effects using Layer Styles. As you can see, layers are more complex than you think. When you understand how layers works, the results are nothing less than an epic composition like the one you are about to create. Other techniques covered in this tutorial are Smart Objects, the Puppet Warp to quickly alter the shape of an image, and the Camera Raw Filter. So, roll up your sleeves and start creating now.

Expert

Daniel Sinoca

Layers give me the ability to create almost anything in Photoshop. At first sight, the layers look simple, but they are sophisticated tools and features I like to apply them to help when creating my artworks. I started to get involved in the digital world over 15 years ago and have been working as a freelance artist ever since, creating all kinds of multimedia projects and tutorial guides.
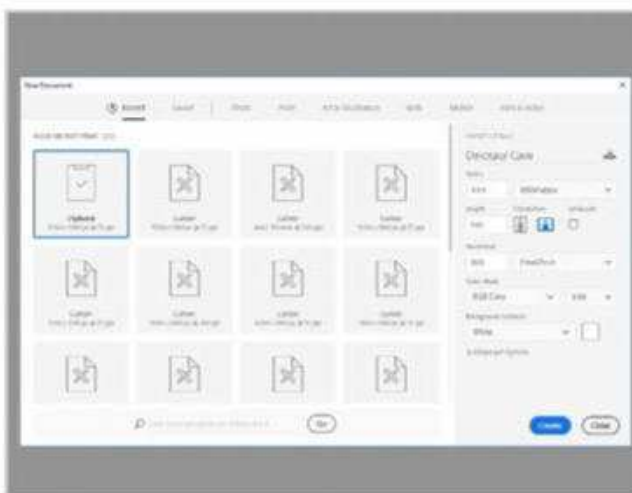
Create a new document

01 Open up a new document. Go to File> New or press Cmd/Ctrl+N. Name your project 'Dinosaur Cave'. Set the Width to 444mm, Height to 190mm, Resolution: 300ppi and click OK.
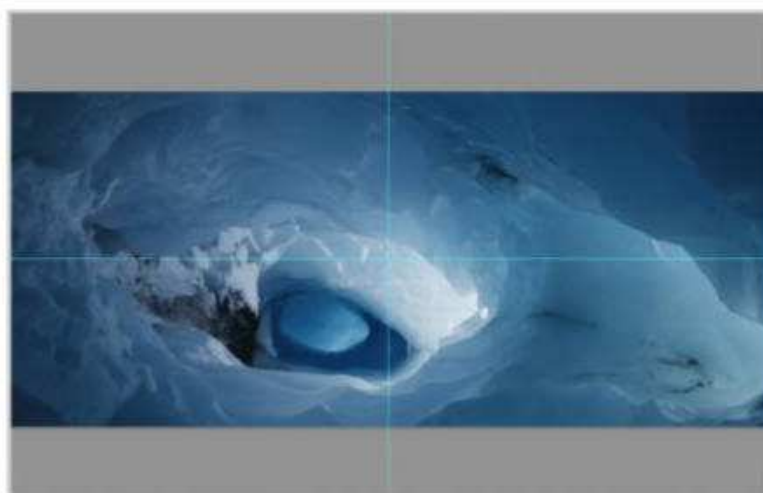
Create the cave

02 Go to File> Place Embedded 'pxhere_634725_ cave,jpg'. In Options, rotate the image 90°. Set the Horizontal/Vertical scale to 187% and position the cave entrance below the middle of the canvas and then press Return/Enter.

Expert tip

Displace filter

The Displacement Map is the perfect technique to warp textures around objects. It uses a grayscale map of the same image you are working on to distort the objects. The displacement superimposes an image onto another, and moves the light pixels up and to the left and the dark pixels down and right creating an illusion of depth.

You can control the number of pixels by tweaking the Horizontal/Vertical Scales and defining the area on the Displace panel.
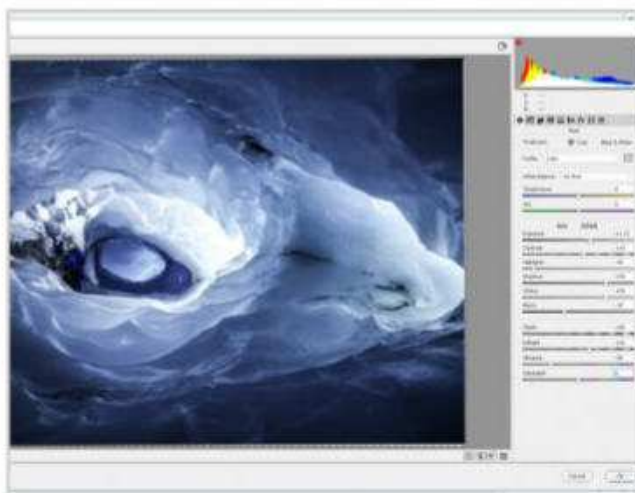
Make adjustments

03 Go to Filter> Camera Raw Filter. Set the Exposure to 1.10, Contrast: 10, Highlights: -80, Shadows: 50, Whites: 25, Blacks: -25, Clarity: 85, Dehaze: 20, Vibrance: -50. Now, open the Tone Curve panel and set Highlights to -50, Lights: 50, Dark -30 and click OK.
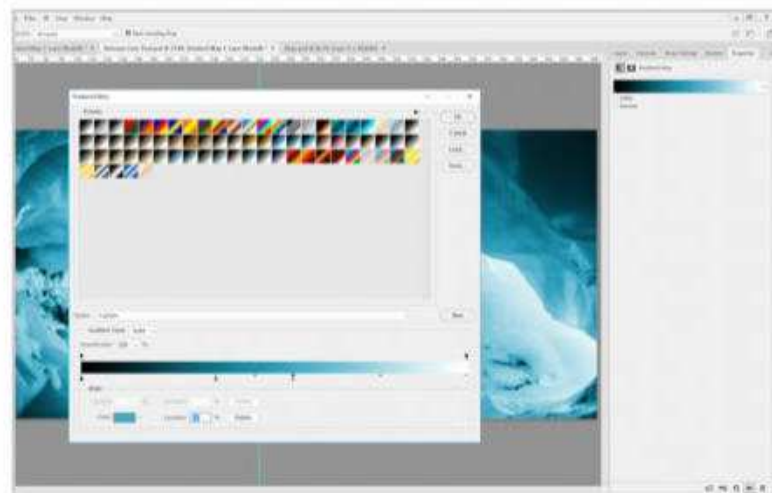
Apply a Gradient Map

04 Press D to set the default Foreground/ Background colours. Go to Layer> New Adjustment Layer> Gradient Map and click OK. Open the Gradient Editor. Keep the black and white colours as they are, and then add two new gradients. Enter colour #11758d, Location: 35% and colour #47aac6, Location: 55% , then click OK.
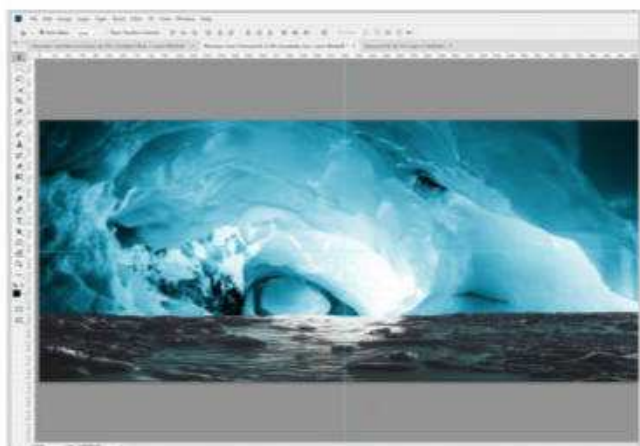
Place the river

05 Go to File> Place Embedded 'unsplash_river.jpg'. Stretch to fit on canvas and press Return/Enter. Grab the Rectangular Marque tool (M) and select the river. Now add a Layer Mask, go to Layer> Layer Mask> Reveal Selection. Press Cmd/ Ctrl+T and shrink the image to reveal the cave entrance.
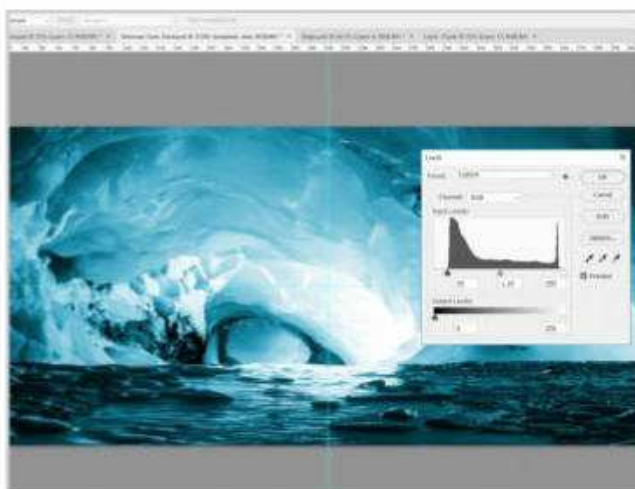
Adjust the tones

06 Let's apply the same Gradient Map we created on step 4. In the Layers panel click on the Gradient Map, then hold Opt/Alt and drag above the river layer. Then, press Cmd/Ctrl+Opt/Alt+G to clip the layers. Open the Levels (Cmd/Ctrl+L). Set the Inputs to 25, 1.15, 255 and click OK.
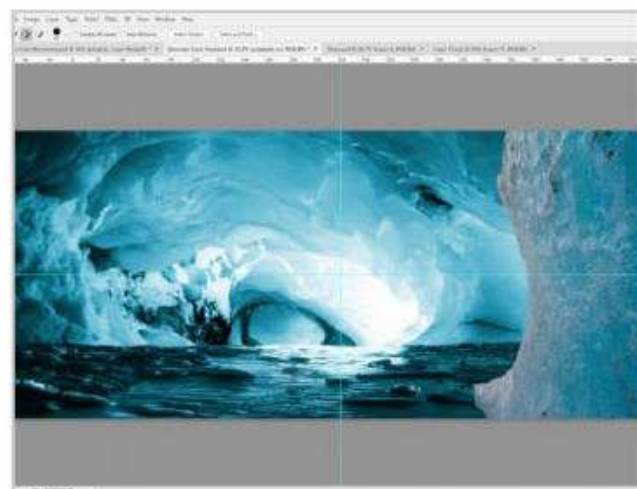
Bring more images

07 Place the image 'unsplash_ice.jpg.' In Options, set the Horizontal/ Vertical Scale to 150%, move the image to the right side of the canvas and press Return/ Enter. Grab the Quick Selection tool (W). Select the ice wall and add a Layer Mask. Now, go to Layer> Rasterize> Smart Object.
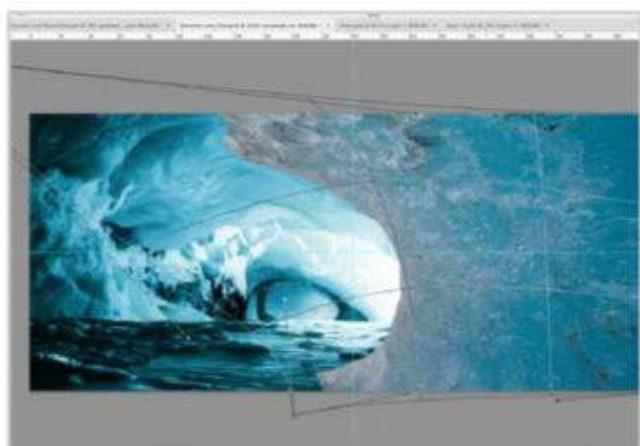
Warp Mode

08 Press Cmd/Ctrl+T and stretch the image to the middle of the canvas. In Options, switch to Warp Mode. Drag the corner handles to curve the image following the cave shape. Grab the Brush tool (B) and paint on the mask to blend the hard edges and to reveal the river.
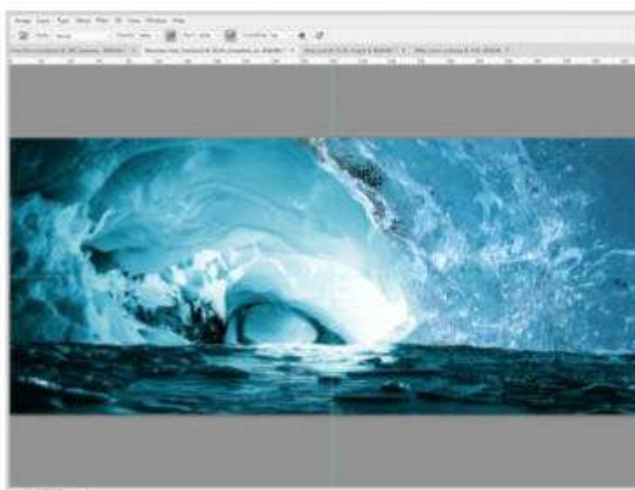
Camera Raw

09 Go to Filter> Camera Raw Filter. In the Basic panel, set the Whites to 75, Clarity: 65 and Saturation: -25. Now, open the Detail panel, and set the Luminance to 90 and then click OK. Press Cmd/Ctrl+L and set the Inputs to 0, 0.75, 195 and click OK.
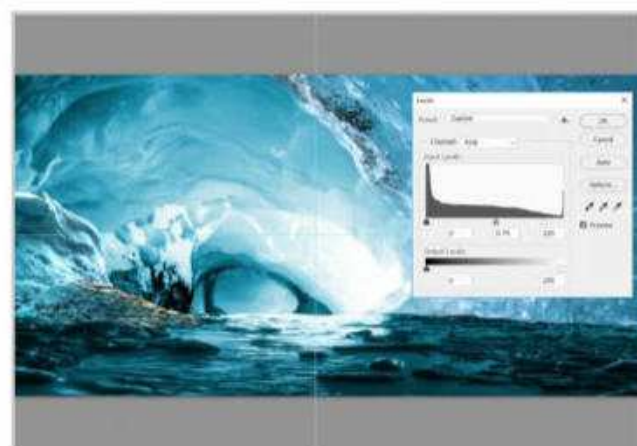
Complete the cave

10 Place the image 'wiki_snow_rock. jpg.' Adjust the Levels to 0, 0.75, 220. Grab the Lasso Tool. Select the rock formation and then add a Layer Mask. Move it to the left. Grab the Brush tool (B) and paint on the mask to blend the image with the rocks from the river.

Create a Displacement Map

11 First, it is very important to save your project (Cmd/Ctrl+S). Now, follow the sidesteppers to learn how to create and save a displacement map. We're going to use this effect on step 15.

Puppet warp

13 Go to Edit> Puppet Warp. Add several control pins along the body and drag to create a different pose. Now, add a Layer Mask (Layer> Layer Mask> Reveal All). Change the blend mode to Multiply and set the Opacity to 85%.

Place the dinosaur

12 Go to File> Place Embedded 'fo_dinosaur.jpg'. Now, Rasterize the layer. Grab the Magic Eraser Tool (E) and click on the white area to erase the background. Press Cmd/Ctrl+T and resize the dinosaur. Convert the layer into a Smart Object again. Go to Layer> Smart Objects> Convert to Smart Object.
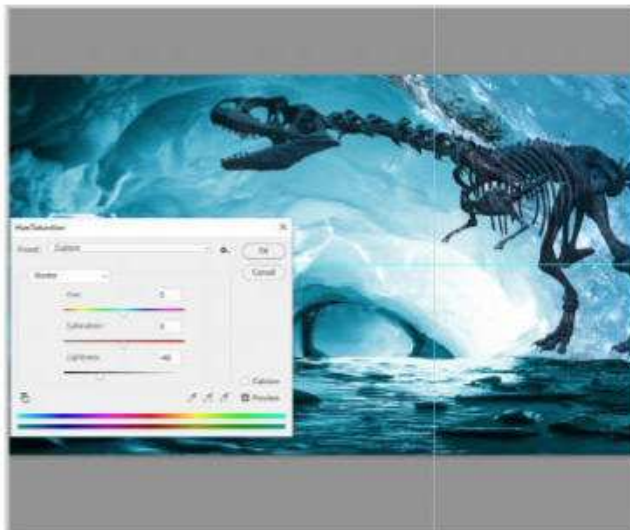
Make adjustments

14 Use the adjustments to make the dinosaur darker. Open the Hue/ Saturation adjustment (Cmd/Ctrl+U). Set the Lightness to -45 and click OK. Now, open the Levels (Cmd/Ctrl+L). Set the Inputs to 0, 0.60, 160 and click OK.

Create distortions

15 Go to Filter> Distort> Wave. Set Number of Generators to 5, Wavelength: 1 – 100, Amplitude: 1-20, Scale: 25%-25% and click OK. Now, go to Filter> Distort> Displace. Set Horizontal/Vertical Scale to 20 and 10, check Stretch to Fit and Repeat Edge Pixels. Click on 'displacement_map.psd' and press Open.

Expert edit

Displacement map

Merge the layers

01 Select all the Layers. Merge them (Cmd/Ctrl+E). Ctrl/Right-click on the layer thumbnail and choose Duplicate Layer. Set Destination/Document: New and name it 'Displacement map'.

Desaturate the image

02 First, grab the Rectangular Marquee Tool and select the entire image, and go to Image> Crop. Now, create a greyscale image. Press Shift+Cmd/ Ctrl+U to desaturate it.

Adjust the contrast

03 Press Cmd/Ctrl+L to open the Levels. Set the Inputs to 20, 0.40, 240 and click OK. Go to Filter> Sharpen> Unsharp Mask. Set Amount: 250%, Radius: 6px and click OK.

Save as PSD

04 Use Camera Raw filter to fine-tune the contrast to the image. Press Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+A to tweak the settings. You must save your documents as a PSD file. Press Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+S.
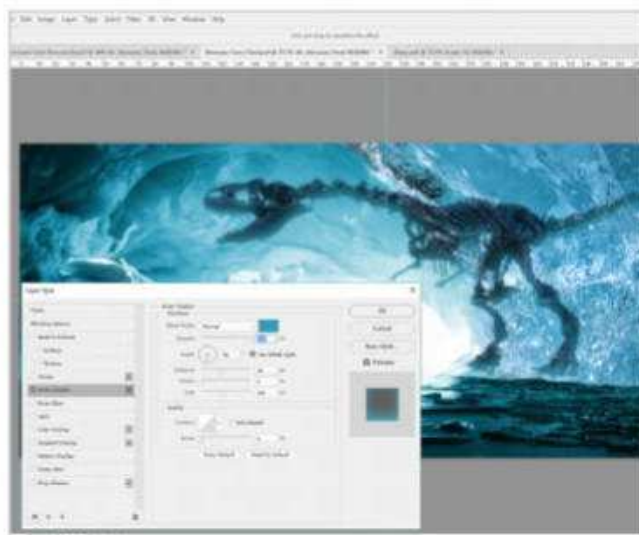
Layer Styles

16 Go to Layer> Layer Style> Inner Shadow. Set the colour to #319dbb, Opacity 100%, Angle -90°, Distance: 40 pixels, Choke: 0, Size: 100 pixels and click OK. Finally, go to Filter> Blur> Gaussian Blur and set Radius to 6px.
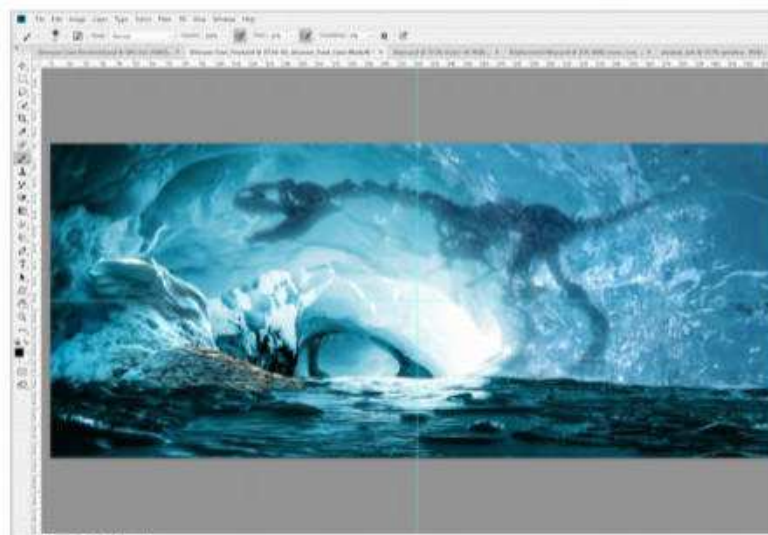
Place a new texture

17 Place the image 'pix_2360369_texture.jpg'. Resize to fit the dinosaur length. Now, clip the layers, press Cmd/Ctrl+Opt/Alt+G. Reduce the opacity for the layer to 50%. Grab a soft Brush with a low opacity and start painting on the dinosaur mask, to partially hide the legs, arms, and parts of the body.

Bring more bones

18 Place the image 'fo_dinosaur2.jpg. Use your favorite selection tool to select and mask the image. Desaturate and make adjustments using the Camera Raw Filter. Now, add the gradient map. Place the image 'fo_bones.png and repeat these steps.

Place the explores

19 Place the image 'unsplash_601212_ explorer.jpg'. Grab the Quick Selection tool (W) and select the image. In Options, click on the Select & Mask button. Tweak the settings to enhance the selection and to create a mask.

More adjustments

20 Use the Camera Raw Filter (Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+A) or the Levels (Cmd/Ctrl+L) to adjust the tones and colours. Place the remaining explorers' images. Select, mask and make adjustments as needed. Then, press Cmd/Ctrl+T and resize each image proportionally.

Fine tune the image

21 Make sure the top layer is active, then press Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+Opt/ Alt+E to create a merged copy of the layer. Go Layer> Smart Objects> Convert to Smart Object. Press Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+A to open the Camera Raw Filter. Set Contrast to -15, Highlights: -70, Shadows: -30, Whites: 30, Clarity: 25, Dehaze: 5 and Vibrance 10.

Vignette effect

22 First, let's adjust the luminance. With the Camera Raw dialog box open, click on the HSL Adjustments panel. Open the Luminance tab and set Aquas to 30 and Blues: -25. Now, open the Lens Correction panel and set the Vignette amount to -100, then click OK.

GET STARTED WITH THE WORLD'S BEST IMAGE-EDITING SOFTWARE

Learn how to improve your photos and create incredible artwork with essential Photoshop tools and techniques, from making basic edits and corrections to adjusting colour, using brushes and compositing works of art

Essentials

Works with

Elements   CS   CC

What you'll learn
To oust eye reflections, alter hues and merge using masks and blend modes

Time taken
One hour

Expert

Sarah Cousens

With so many amazing images on the NASA website, it was tricky choosing which to use! I imagine that I will be incorporating some more of their photos into my artwork in the future. I am a designer, illustrator and author and have been using Photoshop to create material for books, magazines and games ever since co-founding the design and illustration company, CoolSurface Ltd, over ten years ago.

Galaxy in an eye

Create an epic swirling galaxy within an eye using layer masks, blend modes, filters and adjustments

They say the eyes are the window to the soul, but in this tutorial they become windows into the deep recesses of space. Thanks to amazing technological advances with telescopes, humans can now see farther than ever before and capture stunning images of galaxies, nebulae and all the wonders that the universe has to offer.

Luckily, NASA shares many of their truly awe-inspiring images and videos with the world, offering them free to download from their image and video library at **www.images.nasa.gov**.

Using masks, blend modes and adjustment layers, you can use some of these amazing images to replace a normal iris with a star-filled galaxy, swirling toward the pupil. With a wide array of images to choose from, you could also opt for a more cloud-like galaxy, or a sparser arrangement of stars. Once the layer masks are in place, it's possible to add any star system you like. And if you aren't a fan of purple, the colour scheme is easy to alter too; by simply applying different Hue adjustments you can create a galaxy of any colour.

Whichever image you choose, make sure the galaxy is the focus of attention by using adjustment layers to create plenty of contrast between the stars and a dark backdrop.
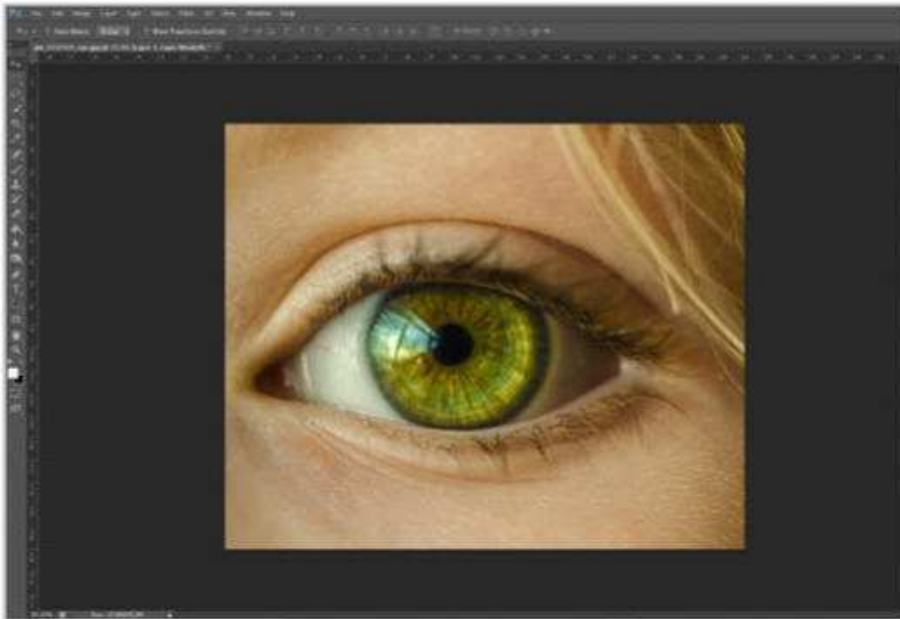
Open and duplicate
01 Open the start image (pix_1132531_eye.jpg). Duplicate the background layer (Ctrl/Cmd+J), and add a layer mask to the copy. Click the eyeball icon next to the original background layer in the layers palette to hide it.

Mask the iris
02 Select the Brush tool and choose the Soft Round brush, but increase its hardness to around 20%. Use it with black at a size of 100px on the copy layer mask to obscure the iris and pupil of the eye.
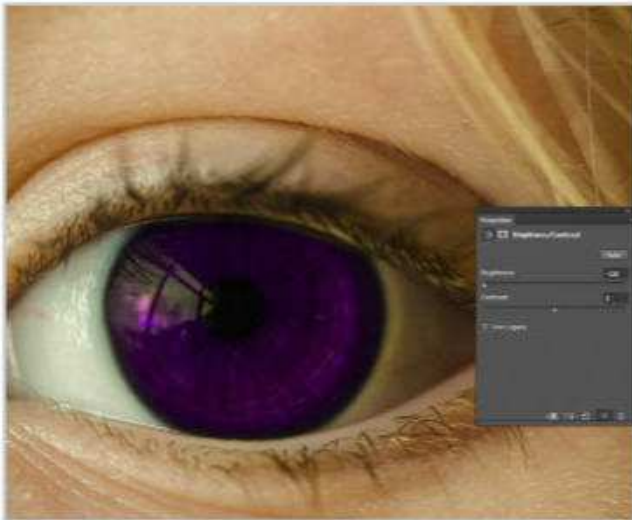
Adjust the Hue
03 Make the Background layer visible again (click the eyeball icon) and add a Hue/Saturation Adjustment layer directly above that layer and set the Hue to -129. Next add a Brightness/Contrast Adjustment layer and set the Brightness to -150.
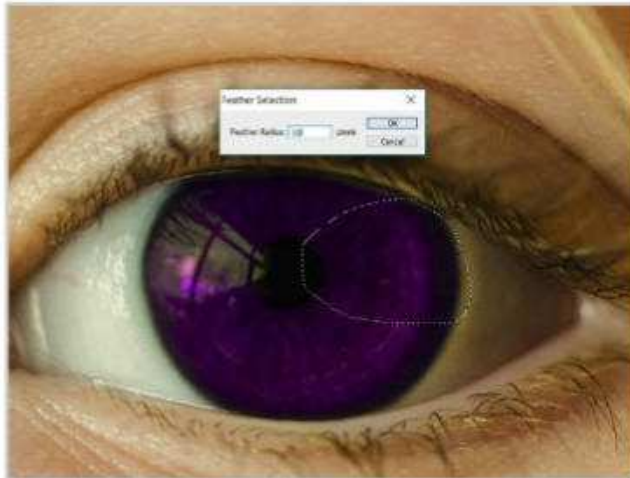
Duplicate a patch
04 To remove the window reflection in the eye, first use the Lasso Tool to select a section directly opposite to the right of the pupil. Go to Select> Modify> Feather, enter a feather radius of 10px and click ok. Press Ctrl/Cmd+J to copy this selection onto a new layer.
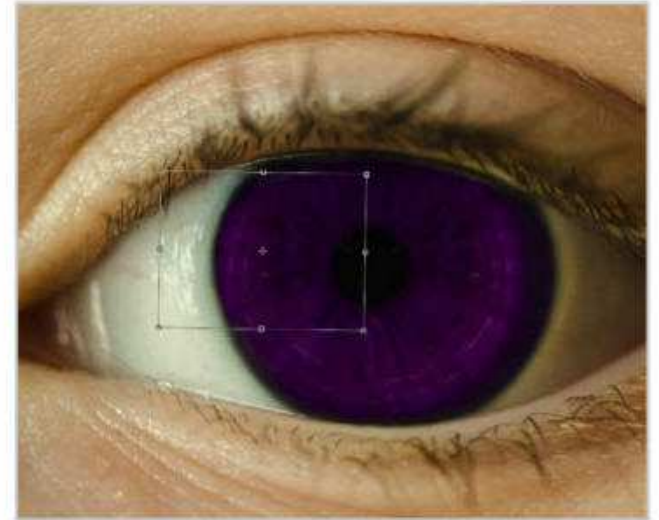
Cover the glare
05 Press Ctrl/Cmd+T, right click within the bounding box and select Flip Horizontal. Now position the piece of iris and pupil carefully over the window reflection, resizing and rotating where necessary. Once it is positioned hit enter to apply.
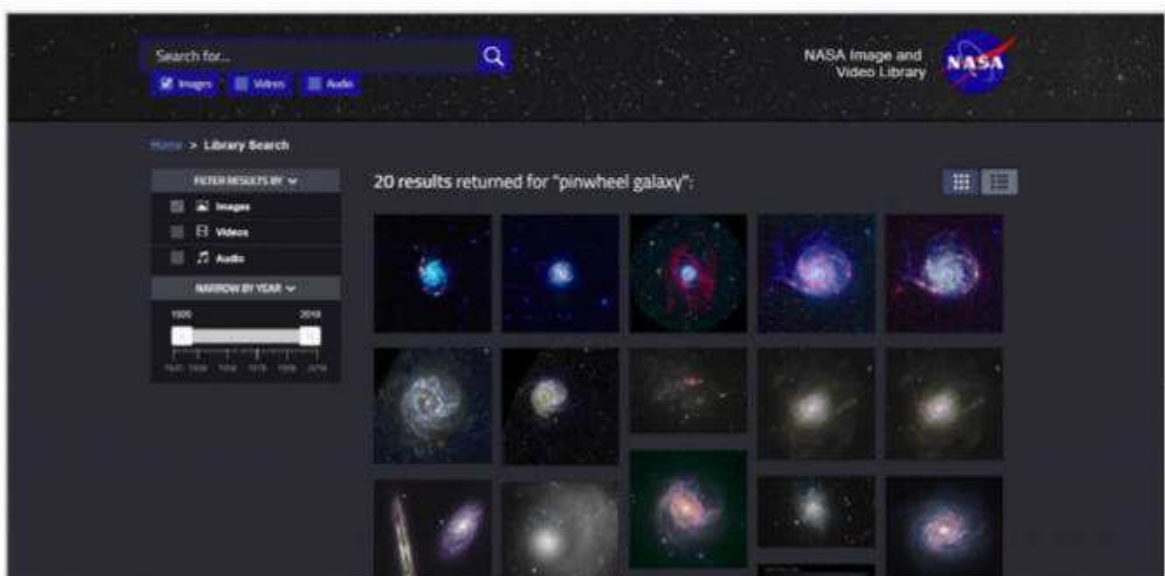
Choose a galaxy
06 Next, choose a star or galaxy image to apply to the eye. The image used in this tutorial is from NASA's extensive library of royalty-free images, so feel free to take a browse and choose one that you like. To achieve the swirling effect we have you'll want to be opting for a "spiral galaxy".

Paste it in
07 Open the galaxy image (the one used here is 'GSFC_20171208_Archive_e001979.jpg'), and copy the entire canvas (Ctrl/Cmd+A then Ctrl/Cmd+C), and paste it (Ctrl/Cmd+V) into your artwork directly below the masked eye copy layer, so that it is only visible within the iris and pupil.

Expert edit

Star brush

Load star shape

01 To add some extra stars and variety to your image, try customising an existing brush. Start by loading an appropriately shaped brush, such as Photoshop's "Starburst- small" in the Assorted brush set.

Adjust Spacing

02 Open up the Brush Panel to access the wide range of adjustable settings and characteristics. First increase the Spacing, then tick Shape Dynamics.

Increase the jitters

03 Increase Size Jitter and Angle Jitter up to 100%. Increase Roundness Jitter, but only to around 35%, or set a minimum roundness to prevent the stars losing their recognisable shape.
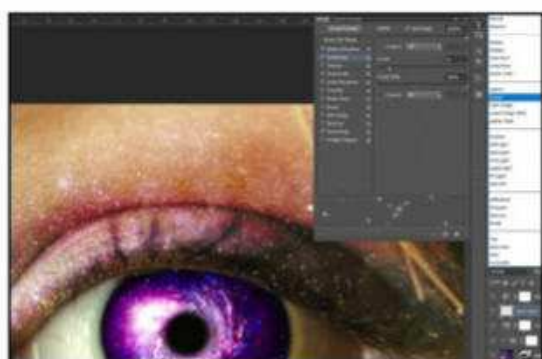
Scattered stars

04 Tick Scattering, increase Scatter and adjust the Count as desired. Now apply your stars with a light colour on a new layer set to Screen.

Change its blend mode

08 Depending on your choice of galaxy image there are several Layer blend modes that you can choose from which give different effects such as Screen, Linear Dodge, and so on. For this image, the Hard Light blend mode works well.
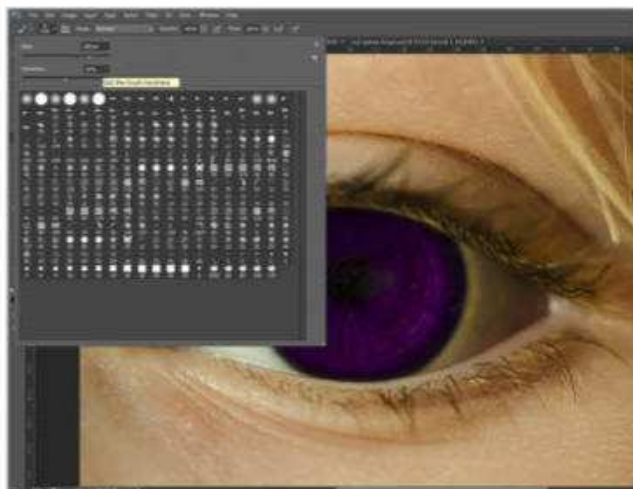
Mask over the pupil

09 Add a layer mask to the galaxy image, the reduce the layer's opacity until you can see the eye beneath. Select the brush tool and the soft round brush, but increase hardness to 50%. Use it at 250px to mask over the pupil. Restore the layer opacity to 100%.

Position the galaxy

10 Un-link the galaxy's layer mask (click the chain icon between the layer and mask in the layers palette). Click on the galaxy layer and press Ctrl/Cmd+T and position, resize and rotate it so that it swirls around the pupil.

Liquify

11 Go to Filter> Liquify. Then choose the Twirl Clockwise tool, and set Brush size to around 1400 and Brush Rate to around 70. Click and hold in the centre of the galaxy for a few seconds to twirl it slightly. Click ok to apply the effect to the photograph.

Adjust Levels

12 Add a Levels Adjustment layer directly above the galaxy layer and tick the clip to layer icon at the bottom of the properties window. Next, you drag the Input sliders to increase contrast and make the stars brighter; Black: 13, Grey: 1.56, White: 198.
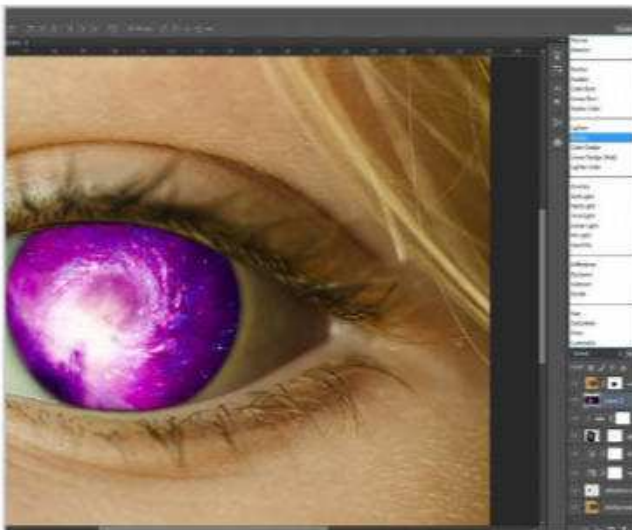
Add some shine

13 To give the eye a more 3D appearance, it needs a new light reflection more in keeping than the square window that we removed before. Copy and paste 'pix_11107_nebula.jpg' in above the galaxy layer, set its Blend mode to Screen.

Transform and mask

14 Then press Ctrl/Cmd+T and resize, rotate and position it so the bright area is to the left of the pupil. Add a layer mask and use the soft round brush to mask and blend around the edges and remove the glare from the pupil.

Add stars

15 Copy and paste 'pix_2609647_stars.jpg' at the top of the layer stack. Set the Blend Mode to Overlay. Press Ctrl/Cmd+T and shrink it down to better fit the canvas. Hold Alt and click the Add layer mask icon to apply a black-filled mask.
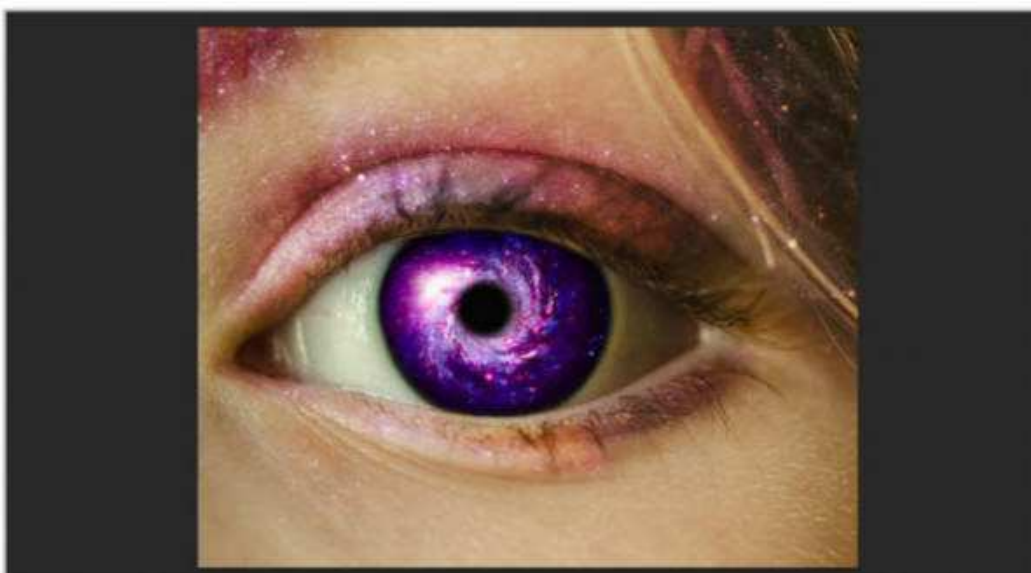
Bring it back

16 Use the soft round brush with white to bring the stars back, over the top eye lid and along the lower eye line, over the hair and anywhere else you want to add some shimmer. Alter the brush opacity to make the stars bolder in some areas than others.

Final adjustments

17 Add a Hue/Saturation Adjustment layer above the stars, tick the clip to layer box and set the Hue to -20. Finally, add an Exposure Adjustment layer at the top of the layer stack and increase exposure to +0.33.

Expert

Andre Villanueva

Symmetrical designs have always intrigued me. Pre-Photoshop, I didn't really have a way to easily generate these types of visuals. After discovering Photoshop, I realised I had finally found the perfect engine for playing with symmetry. Transforms, blend modes and masks have been the ultimate allies in my experiments. I'm an art director and former college media arts instructor. I've been creating digital art since the early-2000s.

Transform, blend and mask creatively

Want colourful, mind-warping blends? Combine blend modes with transforms and masks to create a fractal-fueled symmetrical delight

Fancy creating an intricate mix of colour and blended detail but lack a ton of hours to commit? Inspired by new-age mysticism and forged with key Photoshop features, this tutorial image will illuminate a method of rapidly self-blending fractal imagery in the quest to create a dazzling backdrop or even a stand-alone design that will draw viewers into its entrancing embrace.

Here you'll compose a vibrant representation of a meditative inner-journey. The power generated is so intense that the essence is forcefully projected outward from the fellow at the centre of it all. To form the colourful blends and undulating lines of energy, you'll take some fractal images and apply a quick flip-'n'-blend to produce a series of symmetrical panes. Blend these together to form an increasingly complex metaphysical mélange. Where things gets too muddy or convoluted, lighten the load by adding layer masks and controlling with gradients.

Engage adjustment layers and additional colour and blend modes at the top of the layer stack to tweak the look and explore other possibilities. After completing the tutorial, try using the techniques you've learned (and even some of the interesting panes you made) in future projects.

Place and duplicate
01 Open 'start.psd'. Go to File> Place [CC: Place Embedded], grab '1.jpg'. Rotate, scale and position to fill the canvas before committing the place (press Return/Enter). Press Cmd/Ctrl+A to select the full canvas, then press Cmd/Ctrl+J twice to make two duplicates.
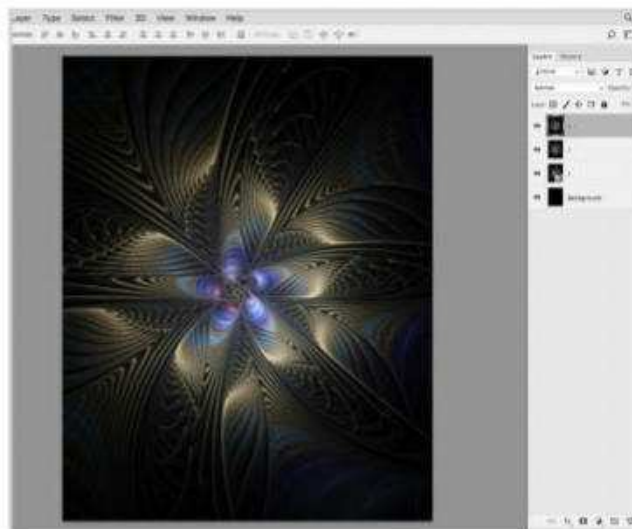
Flip
02 With the top layer selected, press Cmd/Ctrl+T for Free Transform. Right-click on-canvas, choose Flip Horizontal. Press Return/Enter to commit the transform.
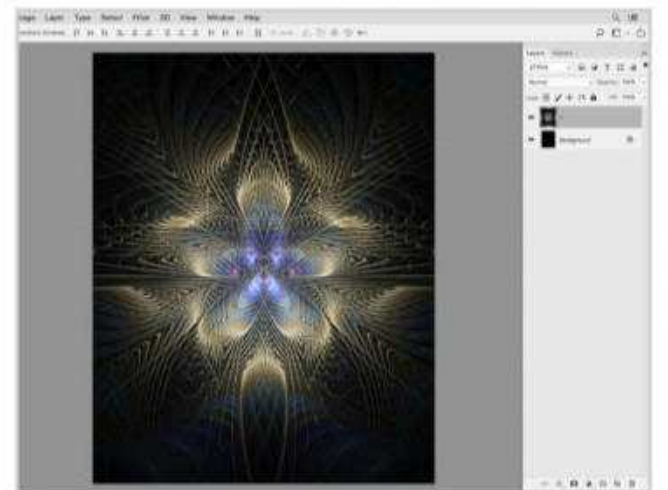
Blend and merge
03 Using the blend mode dropdown above Layers, set the blend mode to Lighter Color. Now that you've blended, Shift-click the bottommost blend layer to select all the blend layers and press Cmd/Ctrl+E to merge.
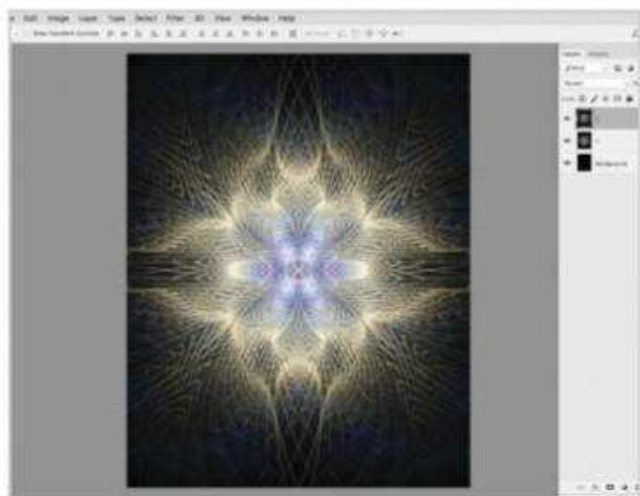
Intensify the blend

04 With the merged blend layer selected, press Cmd/Ctrl+J to duplicate. Bring up Free Transform (Cmd/Ctrl+T), right-click on-canvas and choose Flip Vertical. Commit the transform (Return/Enter). Set the blend mode to Screen.

Add a colour band

05 Click 'Create new fill or adjustment layer', choose Solid Color, #94c6ec. Click OK. Drop Opacity to 80%. Click the mask, press Cmd/Ctrl+I to invert. Select the Gradient tool. Set the foreground colour to white and choose 'Foreground to transparent', Reflected style, 100% Opacity. Shift-click and drag vertically to add colour band.

Place, flip and blend

06 Now you'll create another symmetrical blend. Use steps 1-3 as a blueprint for working with '2.jpg'. After creating the blend and merging, set the resulting layer's blend mode to Color Dodge so it can to fuse energetically with the existing image.
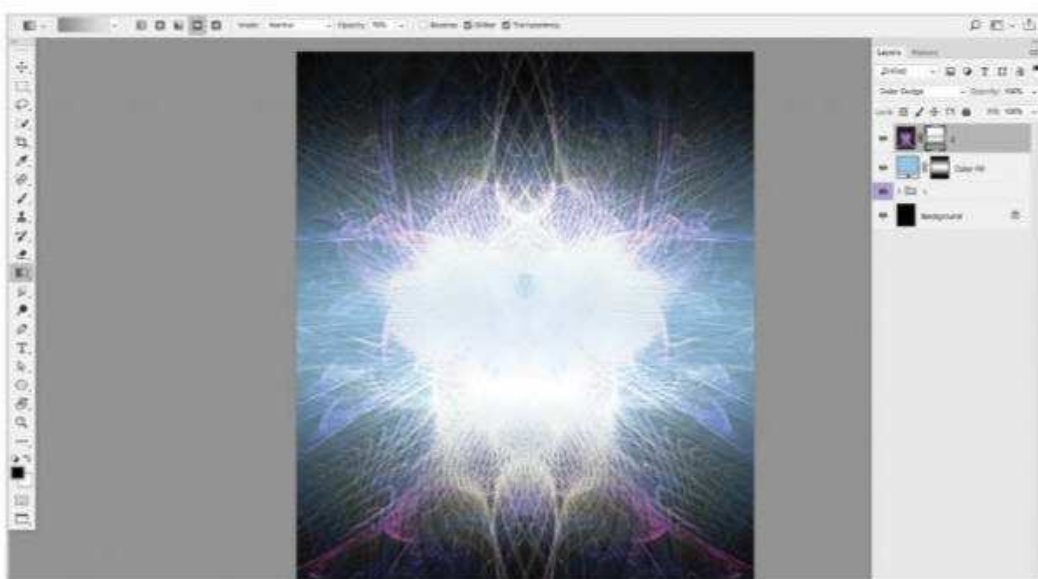
Mask with gradients

07 Tone down some of the brighter areas by adding a layer mask (click the Add Layer Mask button in the Layers palette) and introducing black to the mask. Here, reflected gradients (30-70% Opacity) are used to apply this reduction evenly and efficiently.
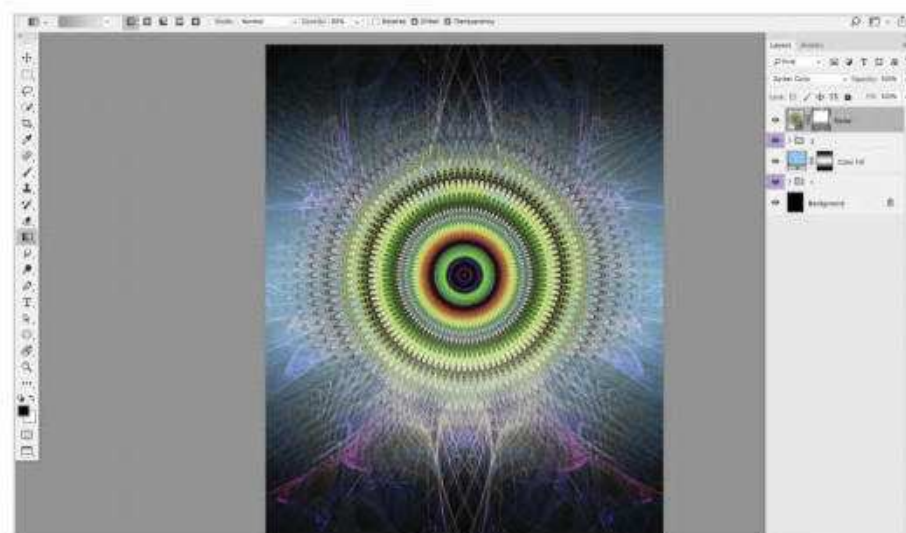
Add radial detail

08 Place 'radial.jpg', scale and position before committing the place. Set the blend mode to Darker Color. If you like, add a layer mask and fade areas with black to help the layer jive better with the image. Use the Gradient tool again if needed. Try the Linear style (30-70% Opacity).

Blend more

09 The more the merrier – add one or two more copies of 'radial.jpg'. You can either keep these in line with the other radial image or cut loose to add a pinch of asymmetry.
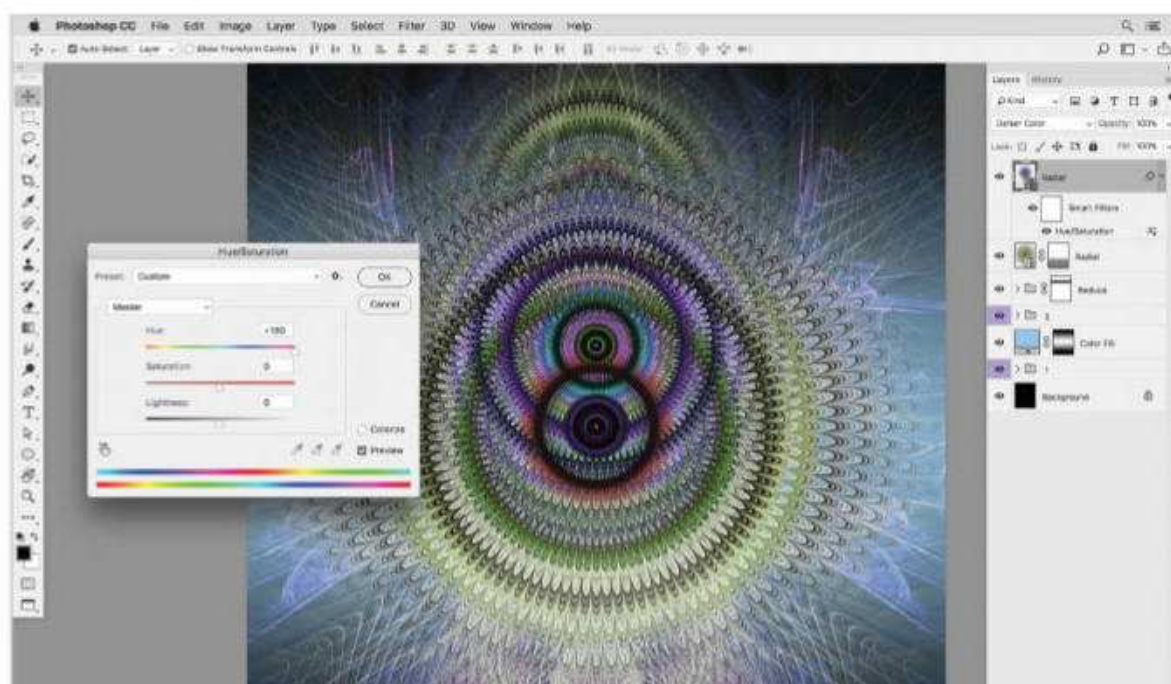
Use Hue/Saturation

10 To introduce some chromatic variation, call up Hue/Saturation (Cmd/Ctrl+U). Play with the Hue slider to shake up the colour. Optionally, adjust the Saturation slider, and tick Colorize if you want a single colour.

Place, flip and blend

11 Do the flip-'n'-blend routine (steps 1-3) on '3.jpg'. After finalising and merging the blend, set it to the Lighter Color blend mode to banish the darker areas. If desired, add a layer mask and reduce in areas with black. Try the Gradient tool's Radial style (here set to 100% Opacity).

Radial madness

12 If you like, mix in further instances of 'radial.jpg'. The Darker Color blend mode is once again used here, but feel free to experiment. Use layer masks where appropriate, and adjust with Hue/Saturation to mess with the colour.

Place, flip and blend

13 Do the flip-'n'-blend routine (steps 1-3) on '4.jpg'. After finalising and merging the blend, set it to the Lighten blend mode. Mask to reduce in areas if desired. Linear, radial and reflected gradients are all employed here.

Form final blend

14 One last blend. Do the flip-'n'-blend routine on '5.jpg'. After finalising and merging the blend, set it to the Lighten blend mode. Option/Alt-click the Add Layer Mask button, then use the Gradient tool (Radial style, 100% Opacity) to add white, revealing the blend.
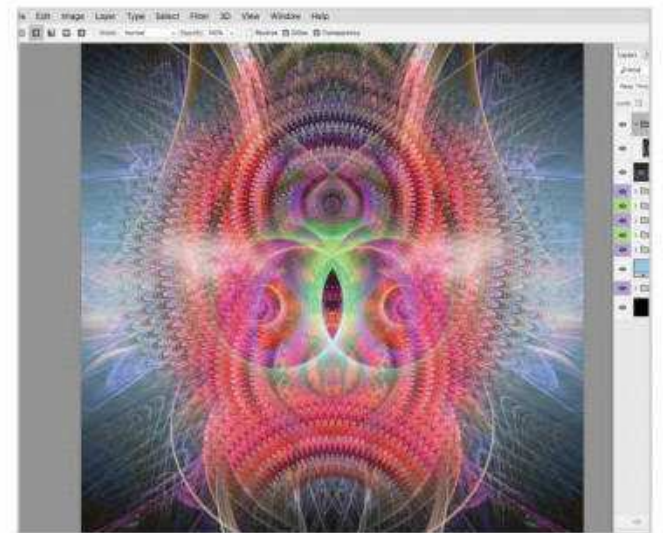
Duplicate and blend more

15 Duplicate (Cmd/Ctrl+J) the blend from the last step 1-2 times. Position/adjust these with the Move tool and Free Transform, and make use of the masks to be selective about what you want to show.

Use Color Dodge

16 Building up a few of the blends from the last step and then slapping another instance on top set to the Color Dodge blend mode can culminate in a deliciously blinding crescendo. By all means, mask out anything too retina-searing. If you like, see what happens with other blend modes.

Add circle

17 With the Ellipse tool [CC/CS: set to Shape in the Options bar], drag out a white circle in the centre. Drop the Opacity to 40%. After placing the silhouette in the next step, you might want to check and see if this circle's positioning or opacity need adjusting.

Add silhouette

18 Now you'll finally add the meditative figure's silhouette. Place 'silhouette. png', scale it appropriately and position centrally at the heart of the energy maelstrom before committing the place. Over the next several steps, you'll dress up the silhouette.

Add Inner Glow style

19 Click the Layer palette's fx [Elements: Styles] button, choose Inner Glow. Feel free to set the glow to your liking [Elements: try starting with Simple preset]. Here the glow is white set to the Screen blend mode. Opacity is set to 90%, Size to 13px. Click OK when satisfied.
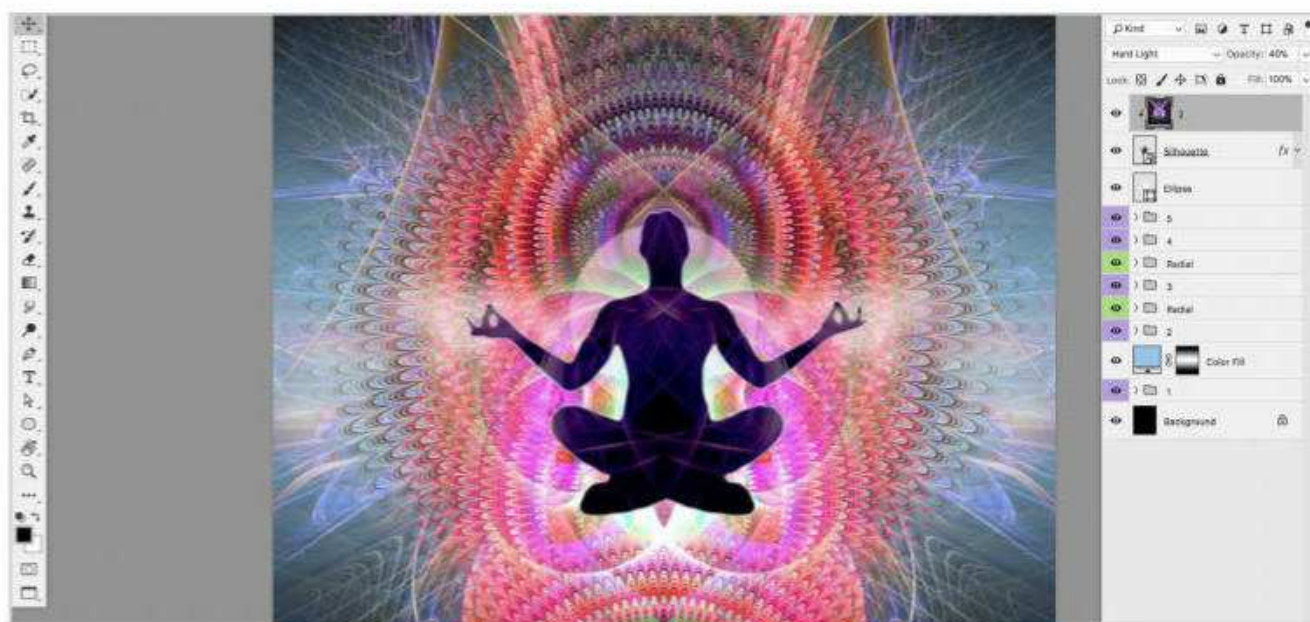
Duplicate and clip layer

20 Option/Alt+click and drag the second symmetri-blend layer up to the top of the stack. Set to the Hard Light blend mode and drop Opacity to 40%. Option/Alt+click between the top two layers to clip. Move/transform the clipped layer for a good fit. Trash layer mask.
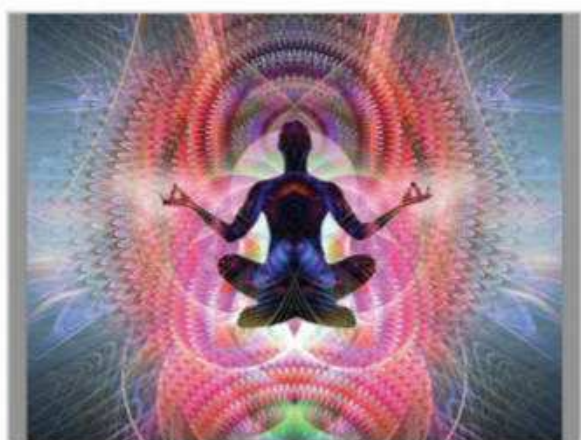
Add to clipping mask

21 Add to the clipping mask by copying additional layers to the top (Option/Alt+click between the top two layers each time). Here a radial image (set to Overlay) and the first symmetri-blend layer (set to Hard Light, 80% Opacity) are brought in. Adjust layer masks and position/free transform where needed.
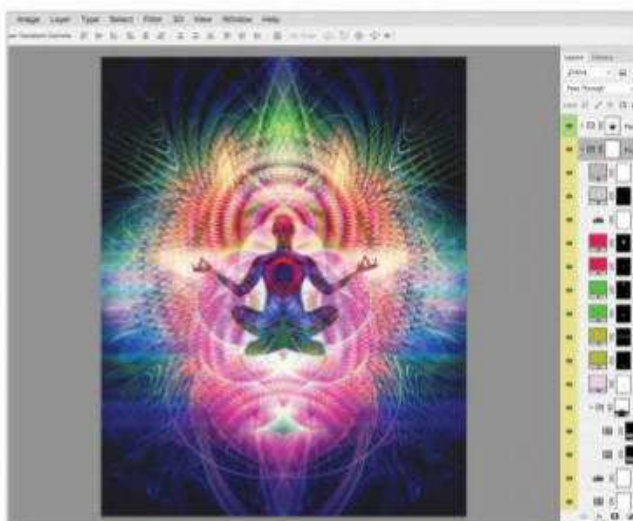
Finalise

22 Take some time to review the image and see if you need to adjust anything. You may want to take a break and come back with fresh eyes before the final review (be sure to save before running off). Tweak colouring further with adjustment layers up top. Save when done.

Expert edit

Pattern Overlay blends

Create shape

01 Use the Ellipse tool (set to Shape in Options bar) to create an ellipse covering the area you want to dress with the pattern overlay.

Apply Pattern Overlay

02 Click the layer palette's fx button, choose Pattern Overlay. Set Blend Mode to Overlay. Pick the Tie Dye preset (or something else). Max out Opacity and Scale. Click OK.
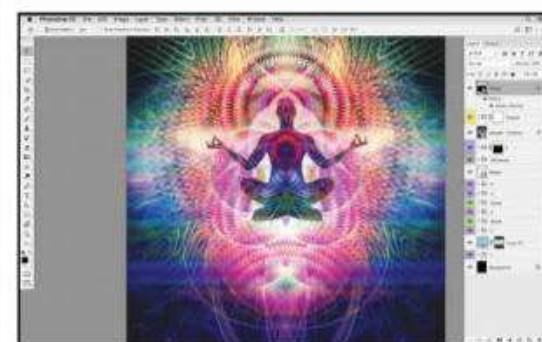
Adjust opacity/fill

03 Drop the shape layer's fill to 0% (above Layers), leaving the layer style to stand on its own. To reduce, drop layer opacity (here set to 50%).
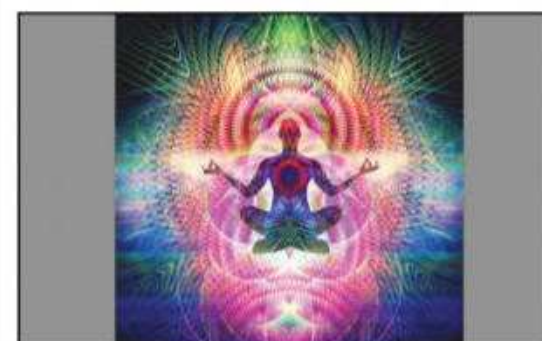
Add more colour

04 Use Free Transform (Cmd/ Ctrl+T) to reshape the colouring. Duplicate and transform to add more colouring. Try other patterns or even put Gradient Overlay to use.

The artist

Anders Wik

I am a digital artist from Sweden. My world of Photoshop began mainly by making comical and surreal compositions of my friends and I. It later became a way for me to relax. I can sit for hours working on a piece. Others do yoga, I do Photoshop! These days I mostly make tutorials and speed videos for my channel. You are welcome to check it out: **youtube.com/user/TheWikTube**

Wolf Moon

How Anders Wik brought light and brush strokes into the relationship between wolf and moon

Essentials

Time taken
3 hours

"I was actually not really into the idea of making this at first," says Anders Wik of his *Wolf Moon* composition. "It was one of those evenings that I could not find any inspiration, so I decided to do a simpler project. It later turned out to become an eye-catcher."

Anders is known for speed-art tutorials on YouTube and says he uses Photoshop to relax. This image came about though after finding the wolf image by accident. "I could not help but feel some sort of 'longing' in its eyes," he says. "So why not make it long for the moon? Since this composition was more about making an animal fantasy poster, I did not have to worry much about scale and angles. Cutting out the two main images I began with the help of the Brush tool, adding fur on the wolf since it is easier to draw it back than trying to cut it from the original image. I then added an outer glow to the wolf in the layer style options."

Although this was a layer-based project, Anders used a lot of brushwork in this image. "Since the fur was a little dark in some areas I kept drawing brighter hairs with a suitable brush and introduced clouds to fill out the composition," he says. "Getting closer to finalising the piece, it had actually really grown on me. So a project does not have to become poor just because you're not into the idea of making it."

Set everything up

01 With the help of the Lasso tool I cut the two main images out and paired them together in a new composition, I then use Transform to resize and then adjusted to make them blend nicely with each other.

Drawing fur

02 Next, I spent time drawing fur to the outline of the wolf's head. It is recommended to adjust the colour on the brush depending on the area you're drawing. I also drew some soft brightness giving the illusion of light shining from the moon.

The final touch

03 After adding clouds to give the composition more life, it's time to finalise. I flattened the image and opened it in Camera Raw. I adjusted brightness, clarity and played around with the colours for the last time, adding more depth.

51

Expert

Rodrigo Marinelli

Since I was a kid, I loved reading books, especially fantasy fiction. It's amazing when you realize how the ability to create is infinite; every day new stories are being written; new worlds are being discovered and new possibilities are being created; the only limit to these worlds is imagination.

I'm an art director and have 13 years of experience in advertising agencies.

I learned and am still learning to use Photoshop through following tutorials.

Create a realistic fantasy scene

Here, we'll use masks, adjustment layers, and a few other tools to create a scene where a traveller discovers an exciting world of fantastical elegance

I t's always great when you wake up and a new idea pops into your head, but unfortunately this is not always the case... sometimes it's hard to find something that inspires you to create something new. When this happens to me, my trick is to read a book and open up my mind. It's amazing how our brains can get into a story and picture the scenes you can discover and explore. In that vein, today we're going to create a scene where a traveller has just discovered a wondrous location beyond their wildest dreams! And of course, said location is surrounded by books; where everything can happen.

As we create a scene with many pictures, it's important to keep in mind that the scene must look as real as possible; it will be necessary to focus on every detail. To help us with this, we'll use masks to blend the images into the scene, adjustment layers to set the colour tone, brushes and blend modes to make lights and shadows, the filter to create trees. We'll use a few more, but these are the most immediate.

Another technique that we'll be utilizing in this tutorial, is how to create a relatively simple effect that draws more focus on to the center of our scene. Without further delay, lets get started!

Enhance the details

01 Create a new document at 400x300mm and place the house.jpg. Then, to enhance the colors and the photo details, duplicate it (Cmd+J), apply the High Pass filter (Filter> Other> High Pass) at 1px and change the blend mode to Soft Light.
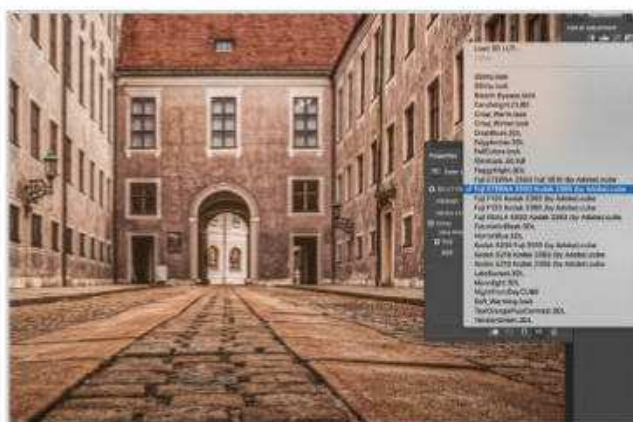
Set the tone

02 Let's make the image look a little more vibrant. To do that, go to the adjustment menu, pick the option Color Lookup and choose the option Fuji Eterna 250D Kodak 2395. Then, change the layer opacity to around about 30%.

Link the adjustment layers

03 Add the layer books_01 from 'houses_book.psd' and place it like shown. To set the colour for this layer, go to the Adjustment menu, choose Brightness/Contrast, hold Cmd+Alt and click on the layer, and set it with 8/0. Replicate the procedure and add Hue/Saturation (0/-14/0).

Work with masks

04 Let's adjust the size of the books. Create a new layer (Cmd+Shift+N), use the Rectangular Marquee tool (M), make a square around the wall, create a layer folder (Cmd+G) and press the button Add Layer Mask. Then, add the folder books, from 'houses_book.psd' and place it like the above.

Draw the shadows

05 Create a new layer, set the foreground colour to black, pick the Pen tool (P) and draw the shadows, just like the image. Activate the selection (Cmd+Enter) and paint it black (Alt+Del). Apply the Gaussian Blur (Filter> Blur> Gaussian Blur) at 147px, change the Opacity to 50% and the blend mode to Soft Light.

Use Brushes

06 Create a new layer, set the foreground colour to white and select the Brush tool. Go to the Brush Preset Picker, choose a Soft Round Brush and set the size to 800px and opacity to 60%. Paint around the corners, just like the image and change the blend mode to Soft Light.

Pay attention to proportions

07 Add the layer garden from 'garden. psd'. To blend it with the scene, set the foreground colour to black, select Add Layer Mask, pick a brush (step 6) and erase the edges. As the lake is a little too big, duplicate the layer, reduce the size and make a mask to erase the edges.

Make a blur effect

09 Let's blur the garden's image just a bit. Duplicate all the garden's layers (Cmd+J), merge it (Cmd+E) and apply the Gaussian Blur (Filter> Blur> Gaussian Blur) with 2.5px. Then, make a mask (step 7) and erase it, leaving only the garden's base ever so slightly unfocused.

Complete the lake track

11 Add the layer lake, from the garden. psd and place it just like the image. Then, make a mask (step 7) and erase the unnecessary parts. The idea is to complete the lake track until it gets to the library door. Finally link a Brightness/Contrast adjustment layer (19/0).

Use the Color blend mode

08 Create a new layer, make a rectangle (M), like shown, and paint it with the colour #986051. Then, change the blend mode to Color and set the Opacity to 30%. Finally, you can link some adjustment layers (step 3) Brightness/Contrast (13/25), Color Balance (3/-18/-9), Color Lookup (Horror.Blue.3DL).

Add details

10 Let's add more details to make the garden a little bit more interesting. First of all, add the 'garden_02.psd' and place it just like the image. Then, make a mask (step 7) to erase the unnecessary parts, and link a Color Balance Adjustment layer (step 3) with 0/0/-26.

Add some flowers

12 Add the 'white_flowers.psd', place it just like the image and change the opacity to 70%. Then, make a mask (step 7) to blend it with the scene, but this time, set the brush size to small, with 67px. This will help to erase all the small details.

Expert edit

Set the details

Use the Warp

01 Let's bring together the two parts of our lake here. Activate the Warp tool (Edit> Transform> Warp) click on the small squares and adjust the shape, just like the image.

Enhance the colours

02 Let's enhance the colours from the white flower. To do that, follow the step 03, link a Brightness/Contrast adjustment layer and set it to 50/0.

Add the shadow

03 Duplicate the tree layer, place it under, activate the selection, paint it black and flip it vertically. Use the Perspective tool (Edit> Transform> Perspective) to set the shape and change the blend mode to Soft Light.

Add some movement

04 Add 'movement_edges.psd' and change the blend mode to Screen. Finally, add the folders movement and movement_02 from 'movement.psd', place it on the scene's centre and change the blend mode to Screen.

Make a gradient mask

13 Add the 'waterfall.psd' and change the blend mode to Screen and the Opacity to about 80%. Select Add Layer Mask, set the foreground colour to black, pick the Gradient tool (G), set it to Foreground to Transparent and gently drag the gradient from the top to the bottom of the waterfall.

Add water splashes

14 Let's make the waterfall look more real. To do that, add the layer base, from 'splash.psd', place it like so in the above image and change the blend mode to Screen. Then, use the layer top, from the same photo, place it on the top and recreate the same procedure.

Create a tree using Photoshop

15 Let's use Photoshop to create a tree. Create a new layer, go to the Filter menu, choose the option Render and then, the option Tree. After that, choose the option 10: Populous Nigra, and set the options just like we have here. Finally, place it on the garden's right side.

Add more elements

16 Add 'chandeliers.psd' and place it just like shown in the image. Make a mask (step 7) and erase the chandelier's bottom, making it looks like it's inside the lake. Then, link a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer (step 3) set to 0/-43/0 and Brightness/Contrast set to 43/0.

Add lights

17 Create a new layer, activate the chandelier selection (Cmd+Click on the layer thumbnail), create a layer folder (Cmd+G) and press the button add layer mask. Then, set the foreground color to white, use the Brush tool (B), paint around the chandelier's base and change the blend mode to Soft Light.

Use the Feather

18 Add 'traveler.jpg'. Then after that, activate the layer selection (Cmd+Click on the layer thumbnail), apply a Feather (Shift+F6), set at 2px, invert the selection (Cmd+Shift+I) and press delete twice. Finally, duplicate the layer, apply the High Pass filter (step 1) and link a Brightness/Contrast adjustment layer (step 3) set to 16/15 to blend our traveller in a bit better.

Focus on the details

19 As the traveller is close to the bright part of the scene, lets add more lights. Create a layer folder, with the mask in the shape of the traveller (step 17). Use the Pen tool to draw the lights, and then apply Gaussian Blur at 40px, before changing the blend mode to Soft Light.

Add depth

20 Let's add some elements to give more depth to the scene. Add 'flying_books.jpg', and use the Free Transform tool (Cmd+T) to rotate them, making it look similar to the above image. To add a sense of depth, apply Gaussian Blur at around 10px. Finally, duplicate it and place it close to the traveller.

Give more bright

21 Add 'flying_books.jpg' again, place it like shown and link a Brightness/Contrast adjustment layer (step 3) set at 67/0. Then, make a layer folder with the mask in the shape of the book (step 17) and use the Brush tool (B) to add lights again, before you can delete the layer mask.

Use feather and masks

22 Now, let's add a few more details into the scene. First, add 'swan.jpg' and make a mask (step 7) to erase the unnecessary parts, making it blend with the lake's water. Then, add 'butterfly.jpg' and apply a Feather (step 18) set at 1px.

Add more trees

23 Repeat step 15 and create another tree, but this time, use the option 30: Zelkova Serrata. After that, place it on top of the scene and use the Free Transform tool (Cmd+T) to rotate it until only the leaves appear, just like the image. Finally, apply Gaussian Blur (step 20) at 5px.

Work with blend modes

24 Add the folder middle, from 'smoke.psd', place it like shown and change the blend mode to Screen. Then add the folder base, from the same file, place it at the scene's bottom and make the same procedure. Finally, add 'texture.psd' and repeat the same procedure once more.

Apply a lens flare

25 Create a new layer (Cmd+Shift+N), set the foreground colour to black and paint it (Alt+Del). Then go to the Lens Flare option (Filter> Render> Lens Flare) and set the light position just like the image. Finally, change the blend mode to Screen and place it at the top of the scene, on the right-hand side of it.

Create a focus effect

26 Create a new layer, set the foreground colour to black, pick the Brush tool (B), set the Brush Preset Picker (step 6) to Soft Round, with size 900px, Opacity 50% and paint only the scene's edges, like shown. Finally, change the blend mode to Soft Light.

Make the final adjustments

27 Go to the adjustment menu and use Brightness/Contrast (0/-8), two layers of Levels (13/1,00/247), Color Lookup (3Strip.Look - 70% Opacity), Gradient Map (Foreground to Background - 10% Opacity), Gradient Map (Violet,Orange - 10% Opacity), Color Lookup (HorrorBlue.3DL - 20% Opacity), and Brightness/Contrast (5/10).

Merging nature and digital illustration

Reshakh Mahmoud talks to us about his eye-catching project, where he takes natural elements and inserts them into stylistic digital illustrations

About the artist

Reshakh Mahmoud
be.net/reshakhart
@reshakhart
I'm Reshakh, a digital artist who has been working in this field for ten years. I love to work on things that are quite personal to me. I always aim to tell stories through my work. I draw and speak through my art to the world. You can see more of my artwork on Behance.

Name of the project
The Precious

Nature has influenced so many artists from so many different eras and walks of life. Despite the fact that Photoshop is a digital medium, it can still be a useful tool for artists in the 21st century to convey their appreciation and wonder of Mother Nature.

When Reshakh Mahmoud, an artist specialising in motion graphics decided to focus on a collection of pieces highlighting the beauty in nature, he turned to Photoshop and Illustrator to bring his artwork to life. The result was something that looked modern, slick and cool, but also colourful and evocative of the world around us.

We asked Reshakh to tell us more about the project and how he made it.

How long have you been using Photoshop, Reshakh?

I've been using Photoshop for over ten years now, from Photoshop 7 to CC 2018. Now I'm using Photoshop in a lot of fields, for things such as motion graphics, texturing, style frames, retouching, photomanipulation, but also drawing artworks and creatures, things like that. Graphics tablets are also very useful for working in Photoshop, too. Using a graphic tablet with Photoshop is my preferred working style.

What are your favourite Photoshop tools?

As an artist who prioritises colour, I find the Brush tools to be my absolute favourites as they make it easy for my imagination to come true. I have a lot of brushes, most of which are premium brushes, although I do believe that anything can be done with regular brushes as well. The second tool I love is the Pen tool. I use it to make shapes in my projects so naturally, it's one of my favourites. Tools like the Move tool, erasers and the Blur tool have also been crucial to my works.

Are those the tools that you used for this project?

Thankfully, Photoshop has a lot of tools that made my job much easier. The Brush tool, for example, was a huge help and I used a lot of brushes in this project. I also used rulers to make sure everything was perfect. I used the Pen to make the exact shapes that I wanted,

All images ©Reshakh Mahmoud
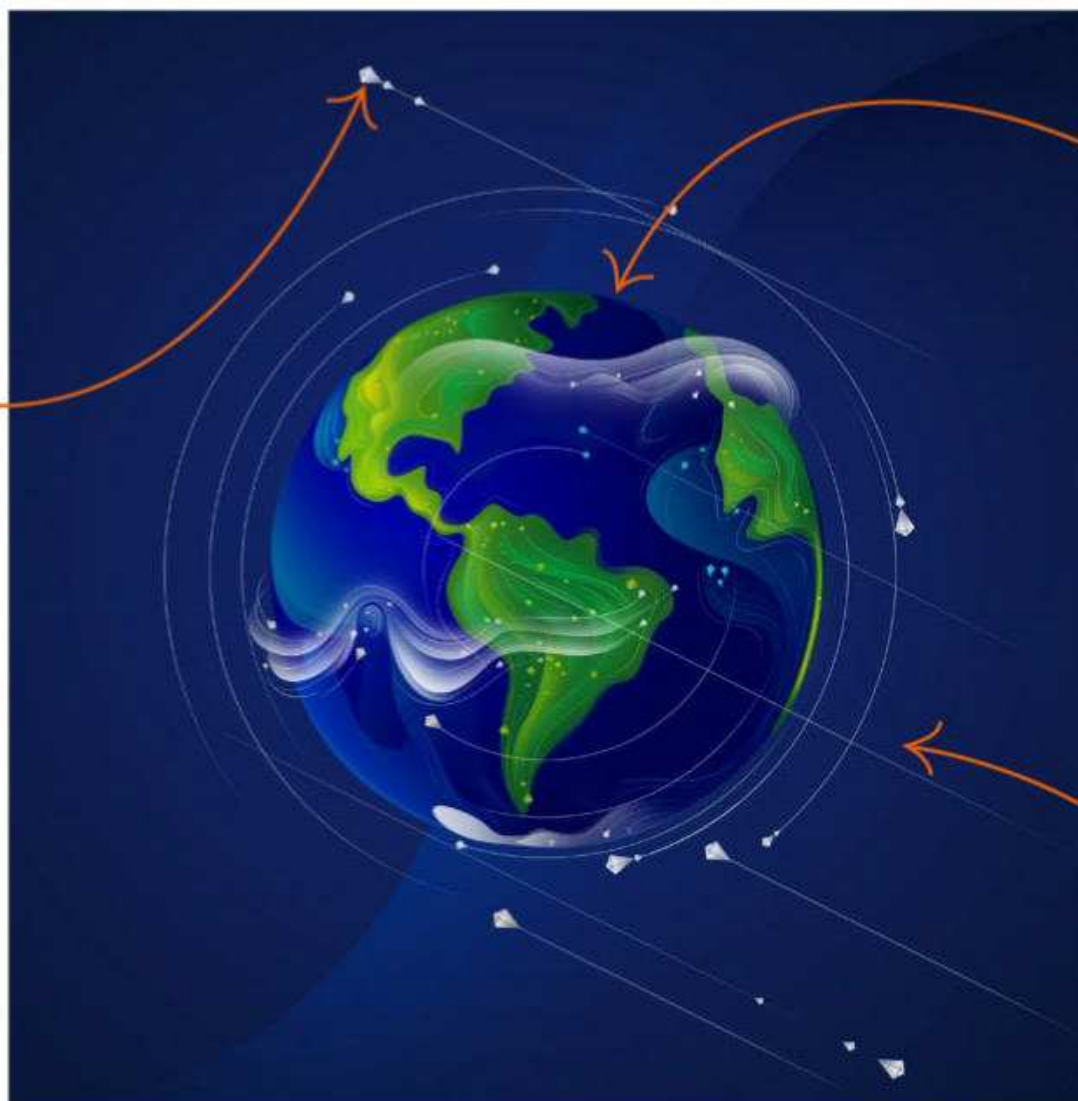
and the Eraser tool to mix the layers and the colours. Other tools like the Elliptical Marquee were also very handy.

What was the idea behind this project?

I wanted to combine bright colours, gemstones, fire and water into one big project focusing on animals and nature. Everything I do is influenced by nature as I believe it to be the best source of inspiration.

And who were your biggest influences for this project?

I have always loved Van Gogh, and the way he used colour in his work has always fascinated me. The artistic approach to this project can be credited to him on some levels.

I wanted to try and use his style of colour layering but adapted it to digital art and added my own spin to it. Van Gogh is one of the most unique artists of all time and the way he used colour to this day remains unparalleled in my opinion.

Did you use Illustrator for this project at all?

For some layers, like lines and vectors, I used Illustrator. It has a lot of options to make your outlines and lines clearer.

What was the feedback like on this project?

The feedback has been very positive overall, one of my closest friends who is also a digital artist called me after he saw the first picture

and told me how amazed he was with the final look. The general feedback that I received was that of amazement and appreciation, and yes, that was quite surprising to me.

Where does this project rank alongside other projects you've worked on?

I'm very proud of this one. And I've worked on a lot of projects for many companies that I'm really proud of. Most of those have been motion graphics-based projects, but I haven't uploaded all of them to my social media pages or website. Now that my own website is finally launching soon, I'm very excited to share some of the work I'm very proud of. It's coming soon, so be on the lookout.

Essentials

Works with

Elements   CS   CC

What you'll learn
Create vectors in Adobe Capture app and Photoshop

Time taken
1-2 hours

Expert

Mark White

As Techniques Editor on *Photoshop Creative*, I've learned all kinds of quick tips to help with even the most impressive-looking pictures.

I think the best thing about mobile technology, is that it brings us closer to the real world, whether we're sharing photos we've taken with friends, or capturing patterns like this.

Create a vector pattern with Capture

Turn drawings into digital artwork with this handy little app, and colour it in with ease in Photoshop

On the FileSilo

Download your free resources at **www.filesilo. co.uk/photoshopcreative**

For many, digital artwork has replaced traditional drawing. Gone is the need even for a sketchpad to take on the go since Adobe introduced their Sketch app; though with the Adobe Capture app, it's easier now to transform full sketches into digital works in no time at all.

Adobe Capture is fairly straightforward. It revolves around the idea of taking aspects of the real world for your creative projects, whether that's a colour palette, a brush or the case of this tutorial, a pattern drawn onto a notepad. Though in this tutorial we're going to simply add a gradient and keep the pattern low-key, you can choose to create all kinds of bright and exciting cartoons by creating the line-work by hand and filling in the shapes with the Paint Bucket tool or with brushes in Photoshop.

In many *Photoshop Creative* tutorials, you'll be told that you don't need to be amazing at drawing to create amazing digital artwork. This is true of this project too, but it can definitely help to turn a good artist's work into even better patterns. If you're a confident artist when it comes to pencil and paper, and you're hoping to embellish your line art with colour, this is certainly the tutorial for you!

Sketch your pattern

01 Start off by grabbing a sketchpad and using a thick pen – maybe a Sharpie – to sketch out a design that you can turn into a pattern. Don't worry about making mistakes, as you can fix these in Photoshop with the Brush tool.
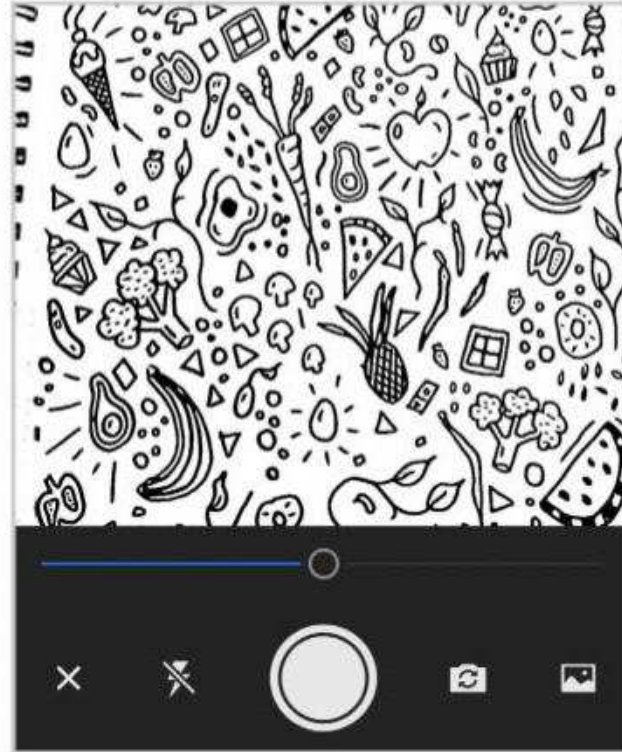
Capture the pattern

02 Open Capture and go to the Shape section. Take a photo of the sketch that you've just made, making sure to use the central slider to adjust the white/black balance in the image.

Refine and Crop

03 With your picture taken, you can get on with making it look the best it possibly can. Go to Refine to touch up the image itself, and crop it to remove anything captured by the camera that isn't the pattern itself.

Smooth

04 Go to the Smooth tab. This will individually render every dot and line in your image to smooth it out and turn it into a vector. When it's fully rendered, click the arrow in the top-right of the screen.
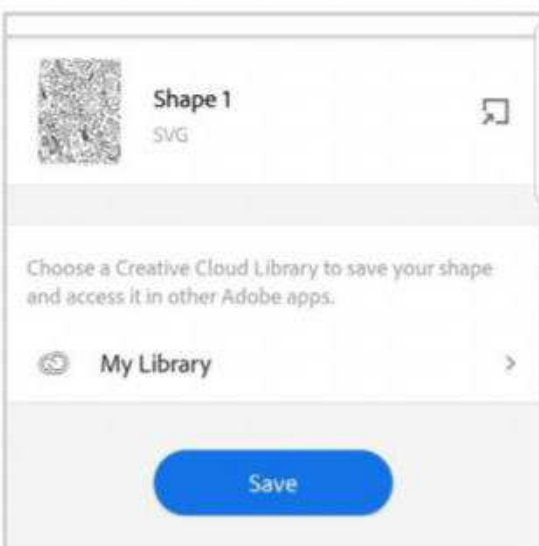
Save

05 Now to save the vector. You can either save it in your CC library, or you can send it to yourself to download on your desktop. Either way, download it into desktop Photoshop, and you're ready to start creating your pattern.

Grab the Magic Wand

06 Hit W to bring up the Magic Wand and uncheck the Contiguous box, before selecting all the black lines that have been drawn, and hitting Mask. Contiguous being unchecked will enable you to select all the black in the image at once.
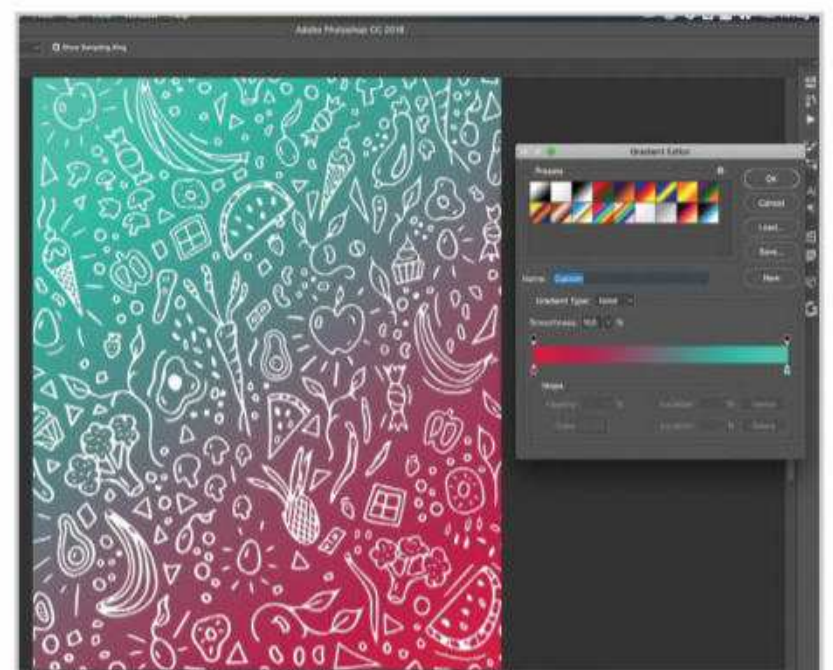
Get creative

07 Clip a new layer to the pattern and fill with a colour – we've gone with white before adding a gradient below. Feel free to select individual shapes from the pattern and colour them on a new layer.

61

Expert

Moe Hezwani

I needed to find a quick and easy way to create 3D-packaging CADs for my clients to three-dimensionally visualise my designs. Photoshop is usually my go-to platform, and I discovered how easy it was to create realistic packaging using the most basic of tools. I was happy with the results and so were my clients.

I'm a professional graphic designer/illustrator, and Photoshop is my usual platform for my designs. I enjoy playing around with Photoshop to mix the composition between photography and illustration to build up a piece of artwork.

Create a realistic packaging CAD

Who needs CAD software when you can create 3D packaging mock-ups using basic tool from Photoshop

When pitching a design to a client, presentation is always crucial. Showing a clean and polished design at any stage of the process is a given, but there are other ways to help it outshine the competition. Making a 3D mock-up to display a packaging design is a great technique that can give any designer an extra edge on their competitors. When done right, mock-ups can enhance a design and help show clients what the design would look like if it was implemented in the real world.

3D packaging mock-ups are not the final product that you're selling to a client; they should be used as a visual tool to display your work. In this tutorial you will discover all the handy tip and tricks in mastering the art of 3D packaging design without any complex steps.

Within this tutorial, you will learn how to create the skeleton of the box using the Pen Tool, then add Layer Style Gradients and Bevel & Emboss to give your mock-ups some depth. Additionally, you will find out how to add wood and paper texture with Smart filters to give your packaging a more realistic approach. Finally, you will use the Type tool and Custom Shape tool to create the branding for your packaging design.
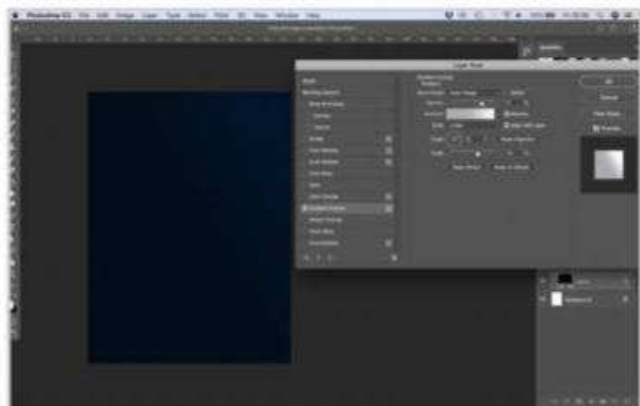
Creating the background

01 Start by going to Layer> New Layer Fill> Solid Color… then fill the Solid Color with a dark navy. Bring up the Layer Style of the Solid Color and select Gradient Overlay. Make a white to light grey gradient with the angle of 30°, then blend mode Colour Dodge with a 70% Opacity.
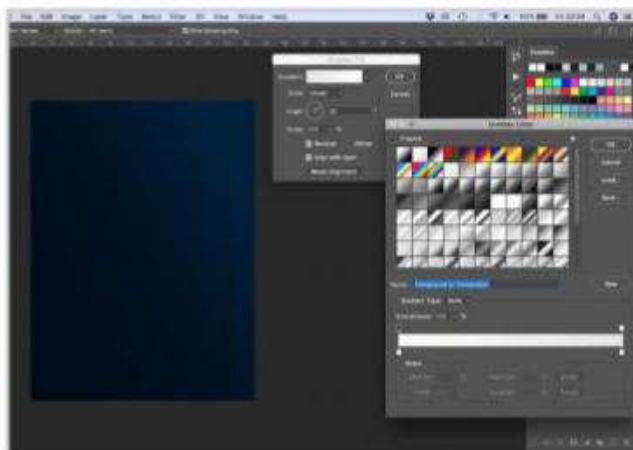
Add lighting to background

02 Make the Foreground Colour white, and then go to Layer> New Layer Fill> Gradient… In the Gradient Editor, select the Foreground to Transparent Gradient. Make the angle of the Gradient 30°, and tick Reverse.
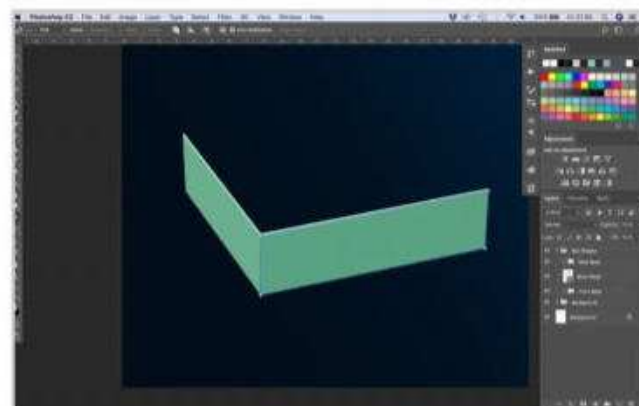
Drawing the box shape

03 Start by using the Pen tool to draw the base of the box, and think about the angle you would like your box to sit at. Drawing a sketch might be easier, or you can experiment straight onto the canvas. Use your eye as the protractor, and ensure you are using Shape layers from the Pen tool.
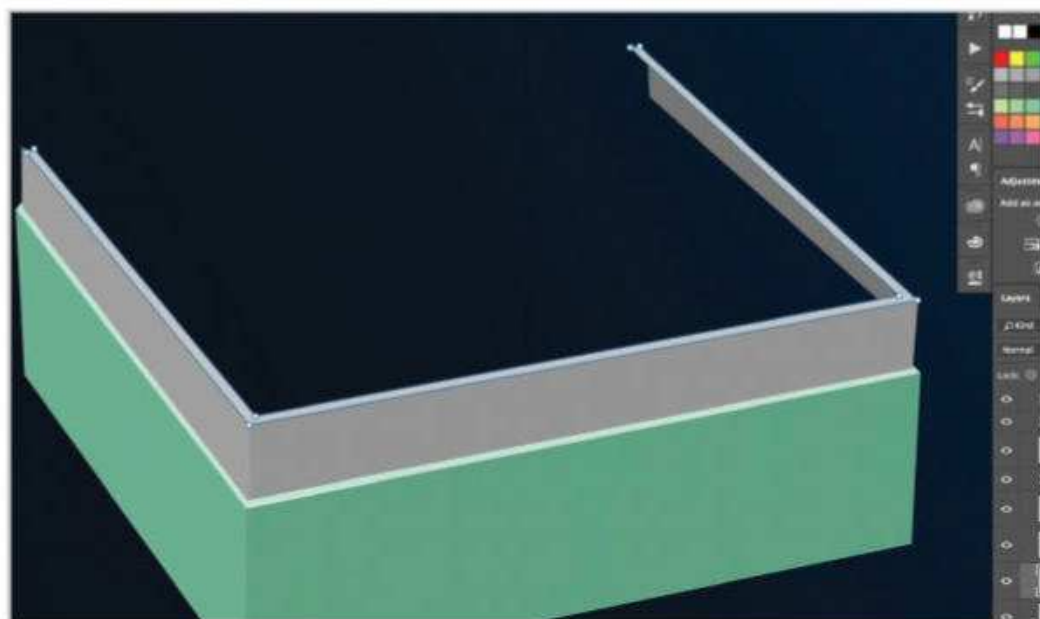
Building the box

04 Using the Pen once again, draw the middle section of your box. Remember when creating a box that it is made out of card, so you will need to also draw the thickness of the box to ensure that the end result looks realistic.
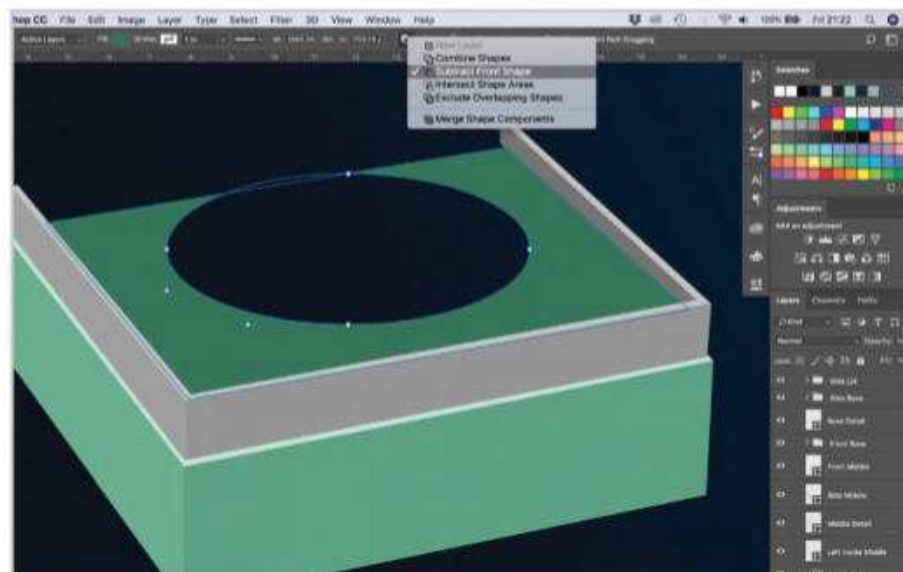
The inside of box

05 Now, draw a rectangle to create the inside of the box. While in the same Shape layer, grab the Ellipse tool and click the + key. Then, draw an oval shape in the top centre of the rectangle. To cut out the oval shape from the rectangle, select Subtract Front Shape from Top Shape bar.
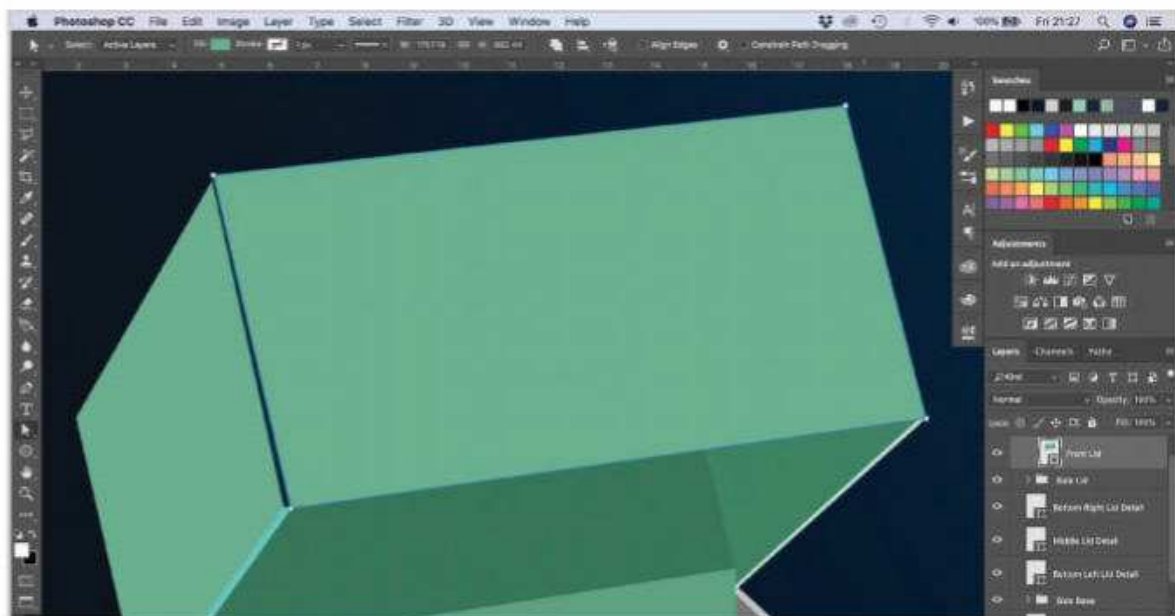
Draw the lid

06 Finally, draw a half-open lid using the Pen, which you can do by drawing a few angled rectangular shapes. Ensure that you are using the same angle as the base of the box. Also, do not forget to draw thin rectangles to represent the thickness of the card.
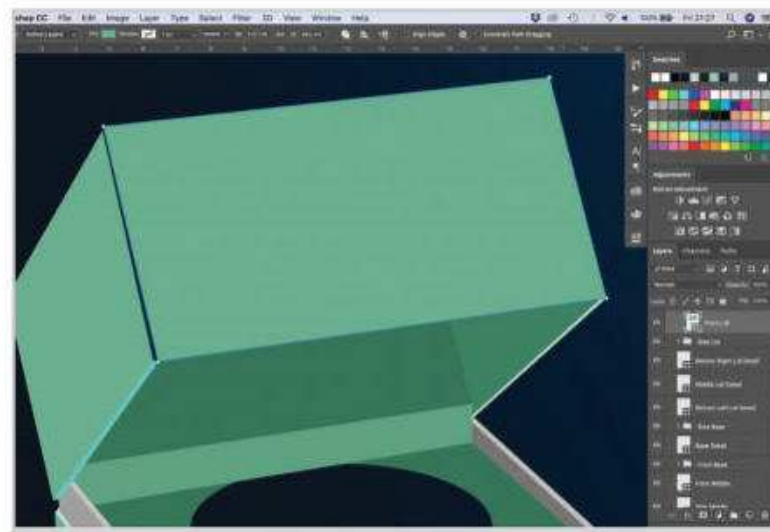
Creating the gradient

07 Now that you have created the base of the box, you can add its branding. Start adding a gradient to the front lid, then bring up the front lid Shape Layers Layer Style and create a dark navy, teal to white gradient, angle at 60° and scale 114%.
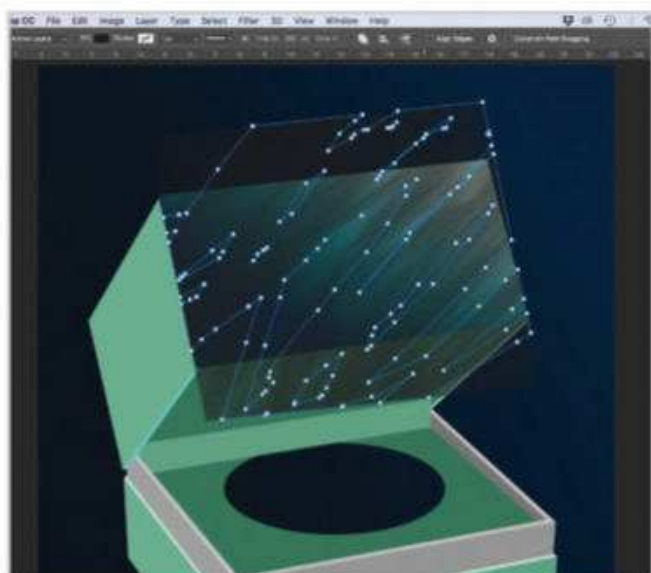
Creating texture

08 Grab the Pen tool and draw a rectangle with jagged lines. Repeat 12 times with different jagged lines. Making each shape layer's Opacity 11%. Next, place all shapes into a folder, Cmd/Click on the front lid Layers thumbnail to make a selection, add a mask to the folder, then change the Blend Mode to Soft Light.
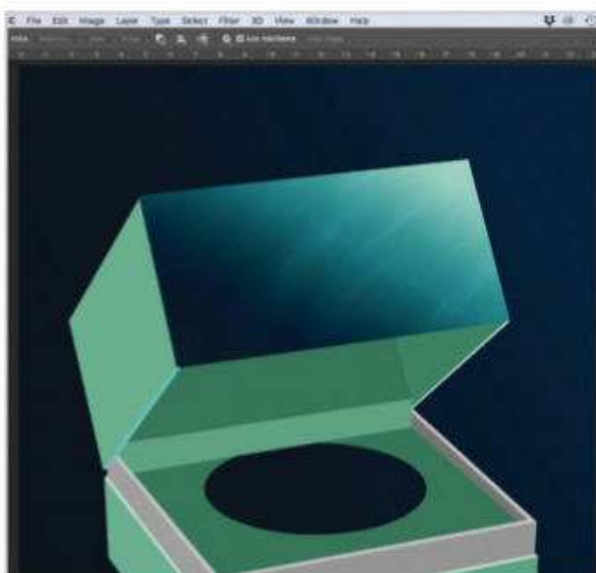
Drawing stars

09 Grab the Ellipse tool and draw a number of white little circles – they don't have to be perfect round. To ensure all circles stay within the same Shape layer, click the + key every time you draw a circle. Again, make a selection around the Front Lid Shape, add a mask to your Stars layer, and change the Blend Mode to Color Dodge.
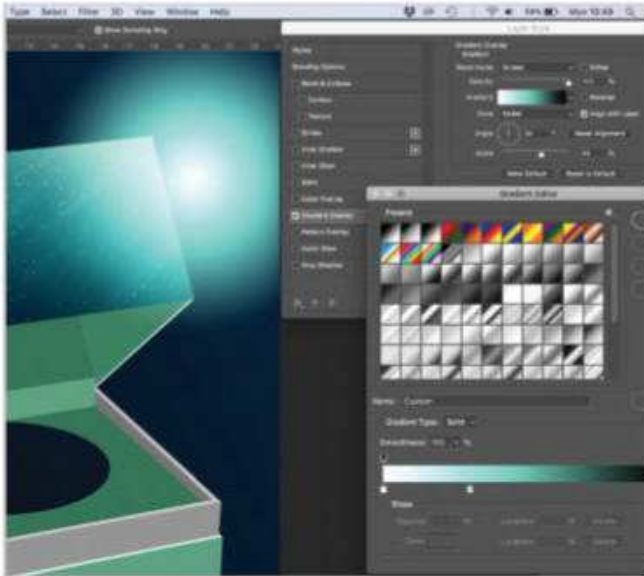
Creating coloured glow

10 Using the Ellipse tool, create a large black circle. Make the Layers Fill: 0%, and in the Layers Layer Style select Gradient. Then create a white, mint-green to black Radial gradient, and make Blend Mode: Screen, Angle: 90° and Scale: 98%. Then, make a selection around the lid and add a mask to the layer. Repeat twice, but with a white, blue to black gradient.
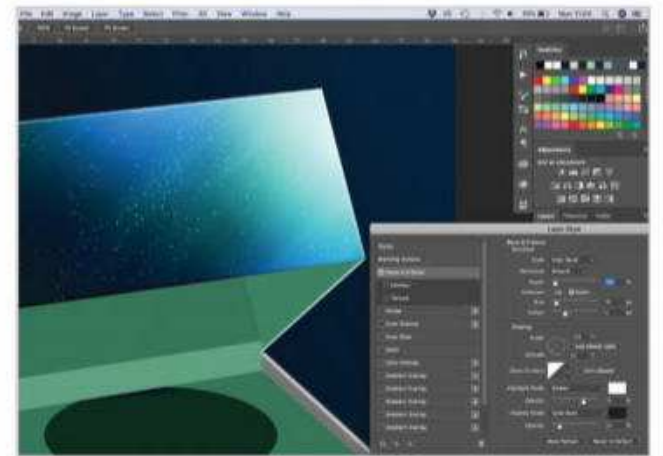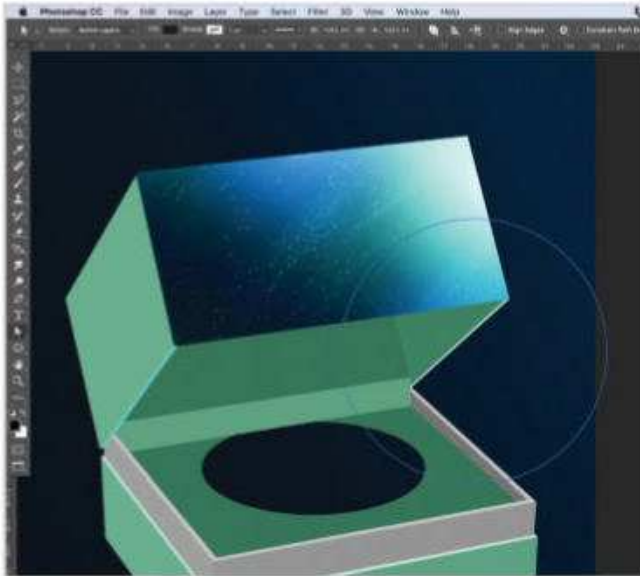
Bevel & emboss

11 Place the texture folder, stars and glow shapes with the lid front shape into a new folder. Then bring up its Layer Style and select Bevel & Emboss, and amend the following settings. Depth: 100%, Direction: Down, Size: 15px, Soften: 5px, Angle: -129°, Highlight Mode: Screen 70% and Shadow Mode: Color Burn 20%.
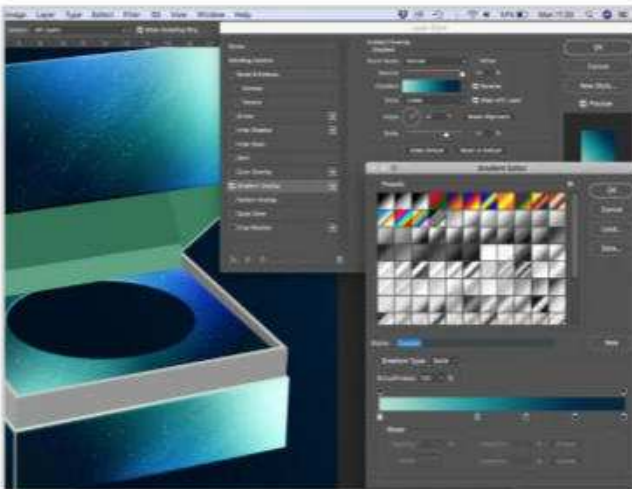
Duplicating layers

12 Repeat Steps 7-11 to the side lid, both base shapes and the inside of the box. Note: the gradient on the left side of the Lid and Base will need to be reversed with an angle of 41°. Do this so the darker sides of the gradient meet on either side of the box.
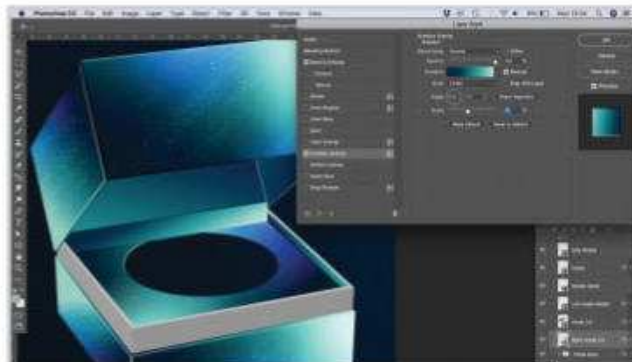
Adding more layer styles

13 Create the same dark navy, teal to white gradient and Bevel & Emboss to the inside lid and the thin rectangle shapes, created to represent the card thickness. Note: depending on the shape's angle, adjust the gradient angle so the dark sections meet from either side of the box. Make the same adjustments to the direction of the Bevel & Emboss so the White Highlights meet.
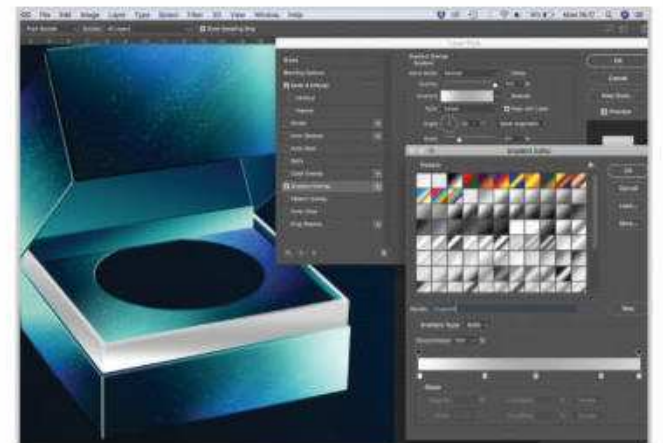
Silver foil effect

14 To create a silver foil effect in the middle of the box, create a gradient using the following settings: White Location 0, K:30% Location 30, K:40% Location 55, K:30% Location 85, K:20% Location 100. Angle 90° and Scale 60%. Then duplicate the same Bevel & Emboss settings from step 11.
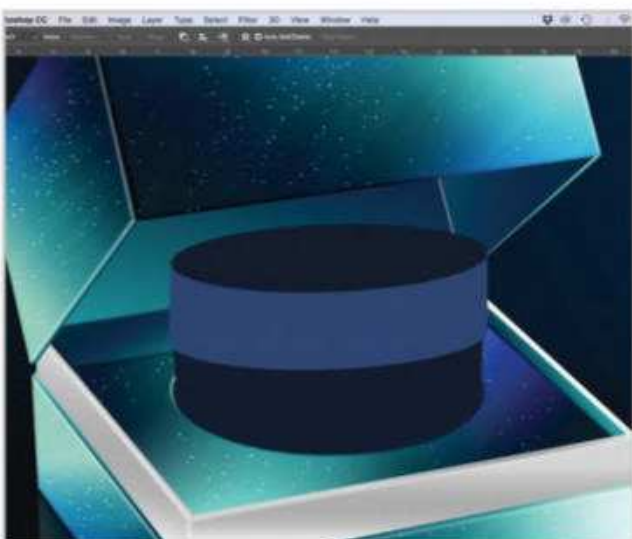
Drawing the candle tin

15 Start by grabbing the Ellipse tool and draw an oval shape to represent the top of the tin lid. Then, using the pen, draw the base of the lid with the same curvature as the top of the lid. Finally, draw the base of the tin, again using the lid's curvature.

Bevel and Emboss

16 Start by bring up the Layer Style of the top section of the lid, select Bevel & Emboss, and use the following settings, Depth: 150%, Direction Down, Size 10px, Angle 76°, Highlight: Overlay 64%, Shadow: Multiply 41%.
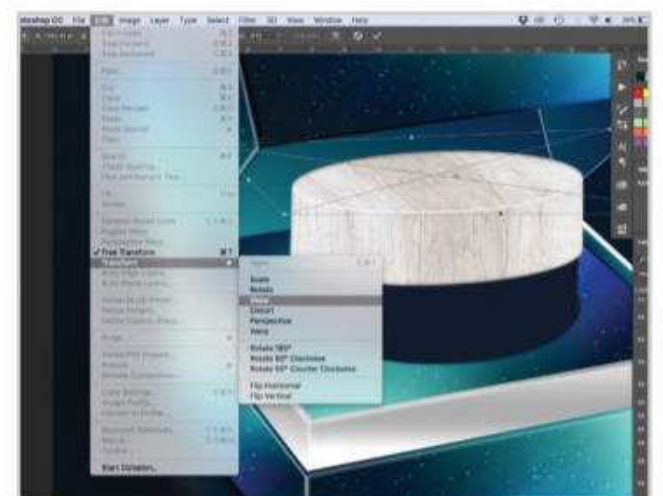
Add a wood texture

17 Paste 'pex_349610_wood-texture.jpg' from FileSilo, and convert it to a Smart Object. Right-click on the texture layer, and select Create Clipping Mask at the top of the candle lid. Next, go to Edit> Transform> Skew, and warp it to sit on top of the lid. Repeat steps 16-17 to the base of the lid.
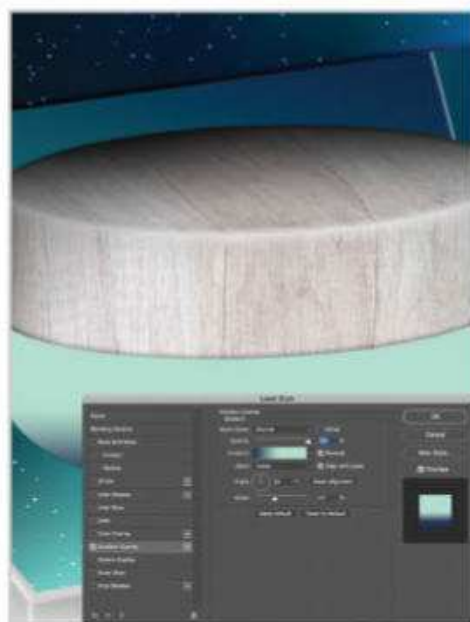
Adding detail to candle

18 For the base, select Gradient from its Layer Style. Make a dark navy/teal gradient, with Angle: 90° and Scale: 69%. Then select Inner Shadow and amend the settings, Distance: 29px, Size: 40px. Finally, create a new layer and make a selection around the base. Add a mask to the new layer. Using the dark navy and the brush, paint the corners of the tin.
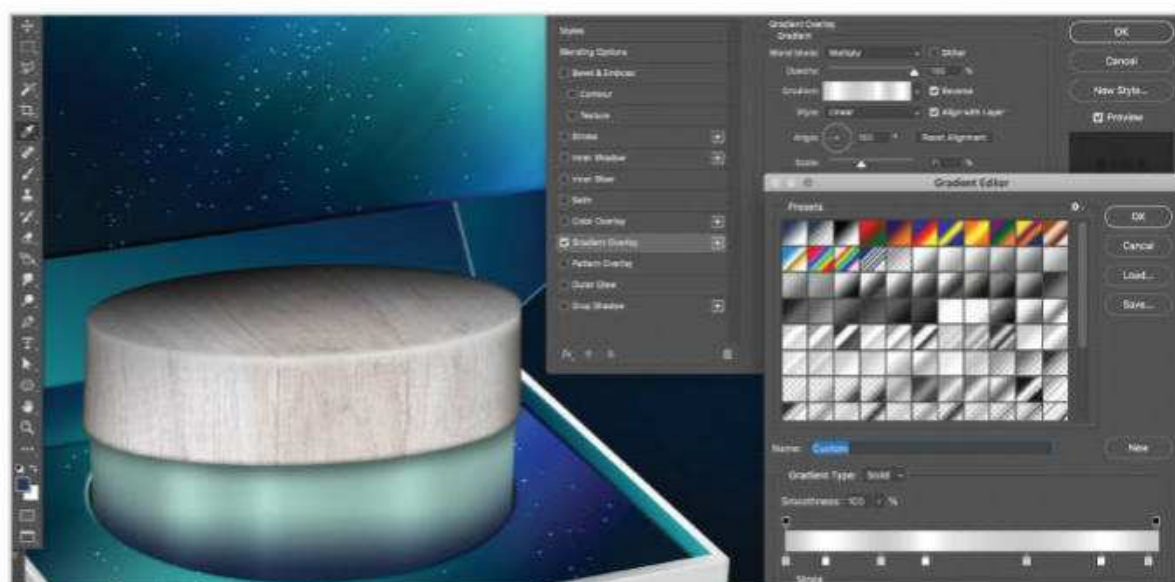
Adding tin shine

19 Duplicate the base of the tin layer and bring it above the paint layer from Step 18. Make the duplicated layer Fill: 0%. Then select Gradients and use the following settings. Blend: Multiply, Gradient: K30% Location 0, White Location 11, K25% Location 26, White Location 38%, K25% Location 65, White Location 85, K25% Location 98. Angle: 180° and Scale: 71%.

Designing the branding

20 Upload the BebasNeue-Regular.otf font from FileSole and type Moon Light and Scented Candle, with the Moon Shape from the Custom Shape tool. Then, with all the layers selected, make them into a Smart Object. Next, go to Edit> Transform> Skew and warp it at the same angle as the lid.

Finishing off the branding

21 For the brandings, select Bevel and use these settings: Depth: 80%, Size: 5px, Soften: 2px, Angle: 21°, Highlight: 97% and Shadow: Color Burn 84%. Then make the Layer Blend: Soft Light. Finally, draw a rectangle under the branding, make the Fill: 0% and use the same Bevel settings. Repeat Step 20-21 for the branding on the tin.

Shadows and highlights

22 Creating a new layer and using a black soft brush with Opacity: 80% and paint around the box darken some areas. Then, using the pen with white, draw a few long triangle shapes to enhance the highlighted sections, make the layer into a Smart Object and add 1.9px Gaussian Blur.

Expert

Rebekka Hearl

As a graduate of a 3D animation course, I am well-versed in the use of 3D tools and modelling 3D objects, and applying them to my digital artwork.

I've been using Photoshop since my teens, and it is still a vital part of my workflow to this day. I don't know how I survived so many years without my Cintiq 13HD, and my favourite Photoshop tool is without a doubt the Brush tool.

Master Perspective With Google SketchUp

Create complicated city scenes with ease using SketchUp: Google's free and simple 3D program

SketchUp is an impressively versatile program: simple to use, and an absolutely integral part of any illustrator's workflow. Plus, some versions are free, so there's no reason you shouldn't add it to your collection. You can download it from **www.sketchup.com**.

3D modelling can be an intimidating new skill to broach for newcomers; there are a lot of new techniques and tools to pick up, and the learning curve can be quite steep – just one glance at Maya's UI will make that clear! No need to worry though; SketchUp is built for ease of access, and is easy to pick up, but offers enough functionality and versatility to equip you with all you need to make 3D buildings and objects for your projects.

In this tutorial, we'll be drawing the exterior of buildings in a city, but SketchUp can easily be put to use for modelling interior rooms as well. You can also download pre-made assets, such as furniture and full buildings. We'll be focusing on how to make assets from scratch for now. Take this opportunity to familiarise yourself with the UI, with the pencil and shape tools, and the select, move and Push/Pull tools. We'll be using these most often to create our 3D city district.
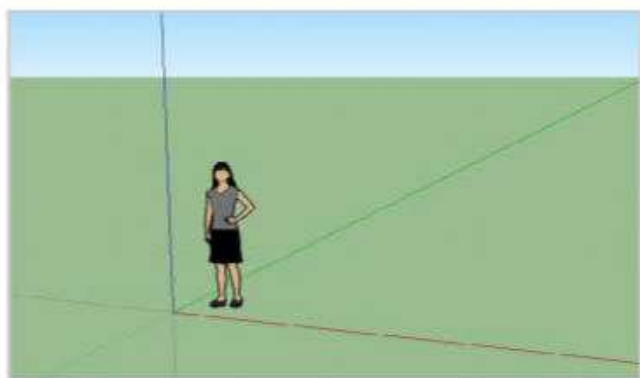
Start up SketchUp
01 Once your copy of SketchUp is installed, open up a new file. No need to worry about file size; SketchUp has an automatically scaling work area. Get used to the movement tools: left click to use the hand, click the middle mouse button to rotate, and scroll to zoom.
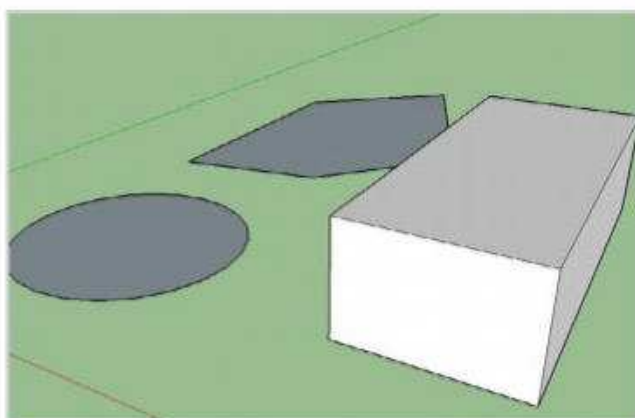
Shape tools
02 Test out the drawing tools: shapes, and freeform using the pencil. The shape tools will adhere to perspective, following the axes positioned in the origin of the canvas. Use the Push/Pull tool to create a 3D object. It's that simple!
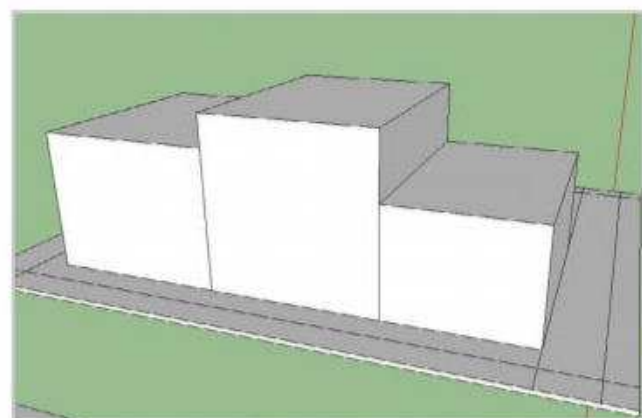
Building blocks
03 Use the square and Push/Pull tool to create three blocks and a pavement. Draw a wide square first, and pull it out just slightly. Draw a large rectangle on top of this flat surface, and split it with two lines. Pull out three uneven blocks.
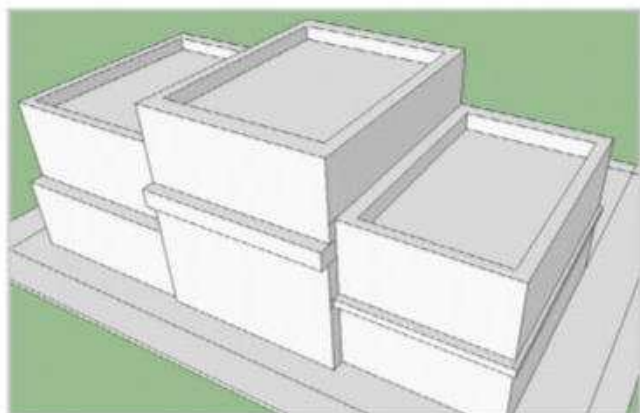
Vary it up
04 A good tip for avoiding boring-looking buildings is to vary the shape. Draw some lines splitting the buildings in half and push and pull sections in and out slightly. Draw a square on each roof and push it in; pull out some ledges on the sides of the blocks.
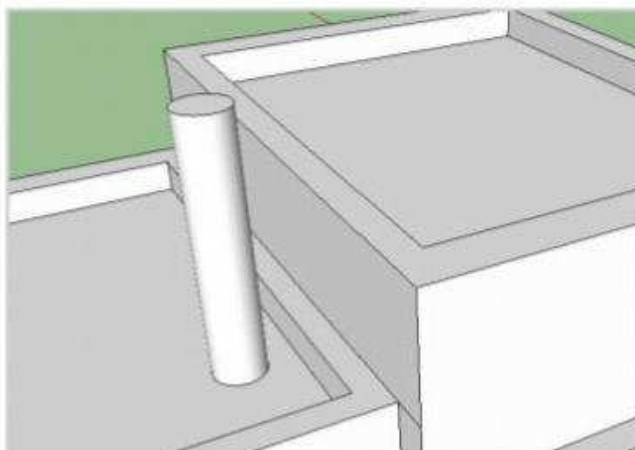
Create a pipe
05 You can push and pull circular shapes too. Draw a circle on one of the roofs and use the Push/Pull tool to draw out a pipe. Notice how it looks different to the flat shapes. Circles can't be manipulated in the same way, so be careful.
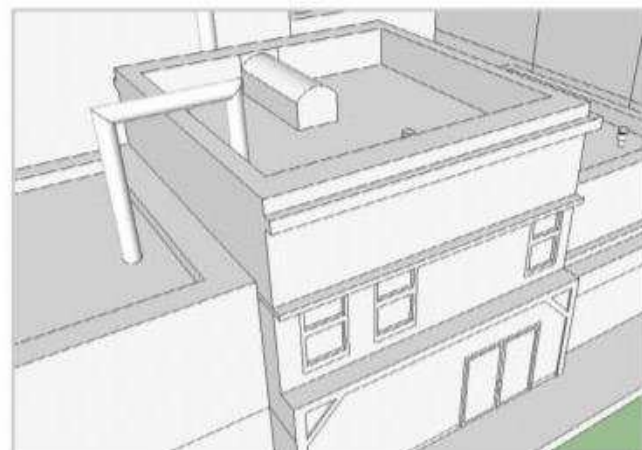
Make a building
06 Keep going until you've got some buildings! You don't have to be overly detailed; just do enough so someone could tell at a glance that it is a building, specifically a set of shops. Include details like windows and doors.

Go nuts!

07 Keep going until you've got a city district! You don't have to go as crazy as I did here (if you don't want to!); you'll just need enough to fill the middle distance from your focal point. Don't forget to add some details, like lampposts and rooftop access doors.
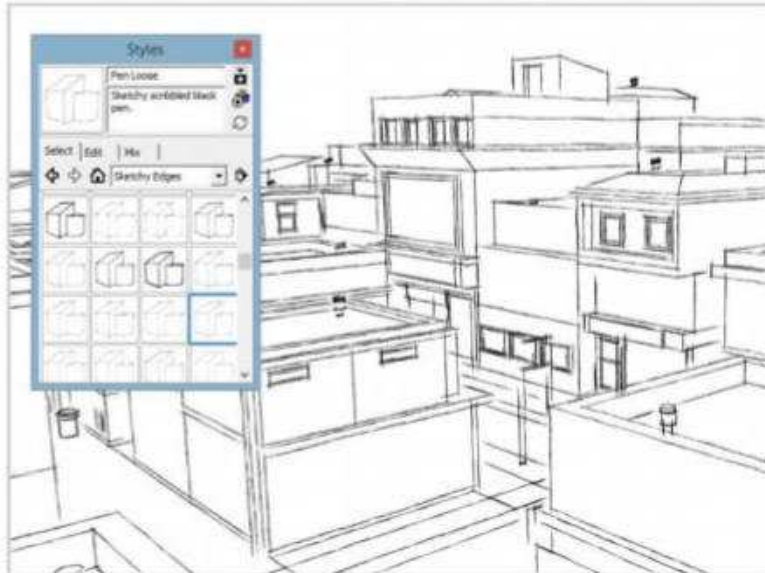
Apply a style

08 One of the most convenient things about SketchUp is the Styles tool. Drawing over all of those buildings in Photoshop is an intimidating task, so get SketchUp to do it for you. Go to Tools> Styles, and apply the Pen Loose style with thin lines.

Expert tip

Character Proportions

The convenient thing about using SketchUp is you are then free to position your subjects. I repositioned the character sketches for this piece multiple times; you too should experiment with ways of creating interest and framing the piece.

You'll have noticed that your SketchUp file contains a flat caricature of a woman. You can move this and use it as a size reference. Take screenshots containing this caricature and you can use it as a perspective reference while drawing.
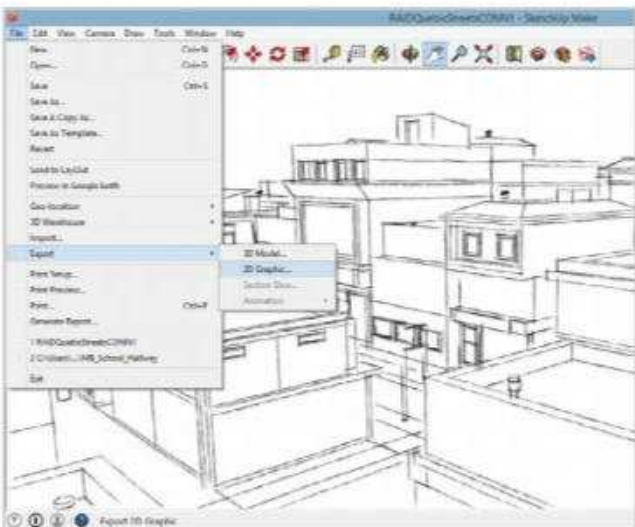
Export the image

09 Once you're happy with your 3D city, prepare it for exporting to 2D. Position your camera exactly how you'd like the JPEG to look: this is the image SketchUp will export. When you're ready, go to File> Export> 2D Graphic, and save it as a JPEG.

Load into Photoshop

10 Create a new image file in Photoshop. The size of the file used in this tutorial is 444x330mm. Load up the SketchUp render, paste it onto your canvas and stretch it to fit using the Transform tool. Fix the blurriness with an Unsharp Mask.
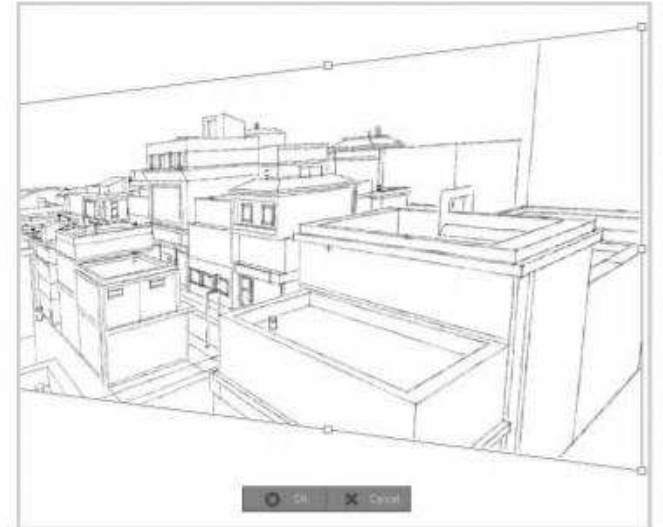
Force perspective

11 To make the composition look more interesting and fill the canvas up, use the Transform tool, right click and select Perspective. Drag the top right and bottom right corners up and down respectively to create forced perspective.
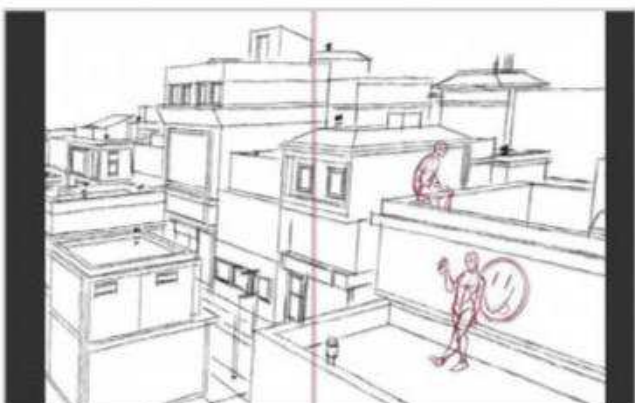
Reduce saturation and sharpen

12 Now to make the final preparations your scene needs before we can move onto the painting stage. Use another Unsharp Mask to remove any blurriness from the lines. Go to Image> Adjustments> Brightness/Saturation and move the Saturation slider all the way down.

Place your subjects

13 Now the stage is set, you can start the drawing process. Create a new layer and, using the Brush tool set to a bright colour and 10px, draw in your basic sketch of your characters. Make liberal use of the Transform tool to make sure they adhere to the scene's perspective.

Set to multiply

14 It'll be easier to draw and paint your characters on a darker background. Set your city layer to Multiply, create a new layer below it, and fill it with a dark saturated purple. This will later be the night sky.
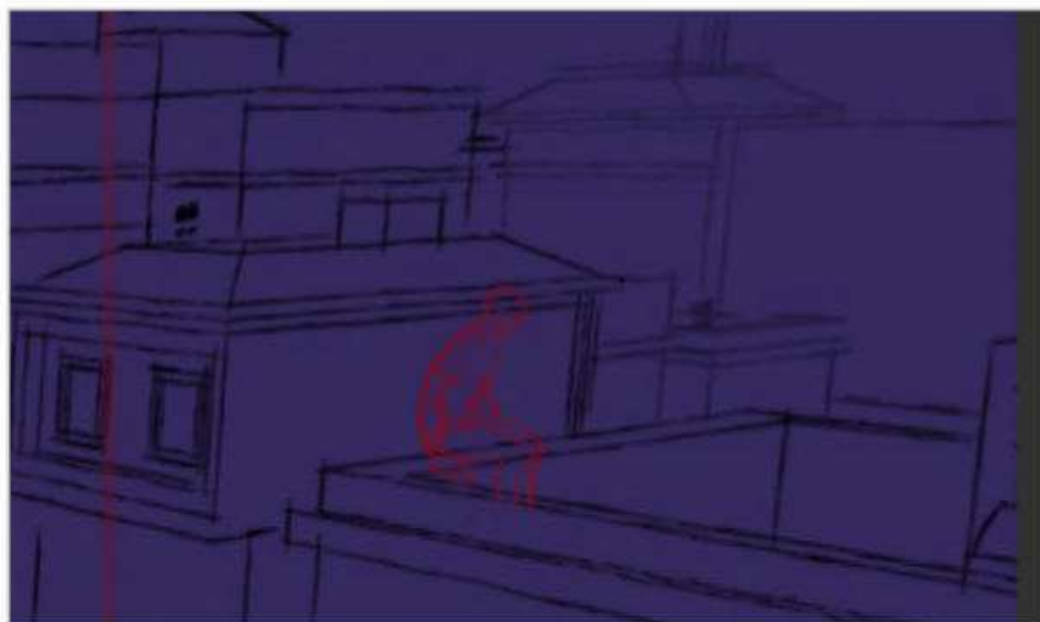
Fade out

15 Using the Marquee Select tool, select around the buildings that are furthest from the main scene. Press Ctrl+X to cut them from the layer, paste them onto a new one (also set to Multiply) and reduce the opacity to 35% or lower. This creates a sense of depth.
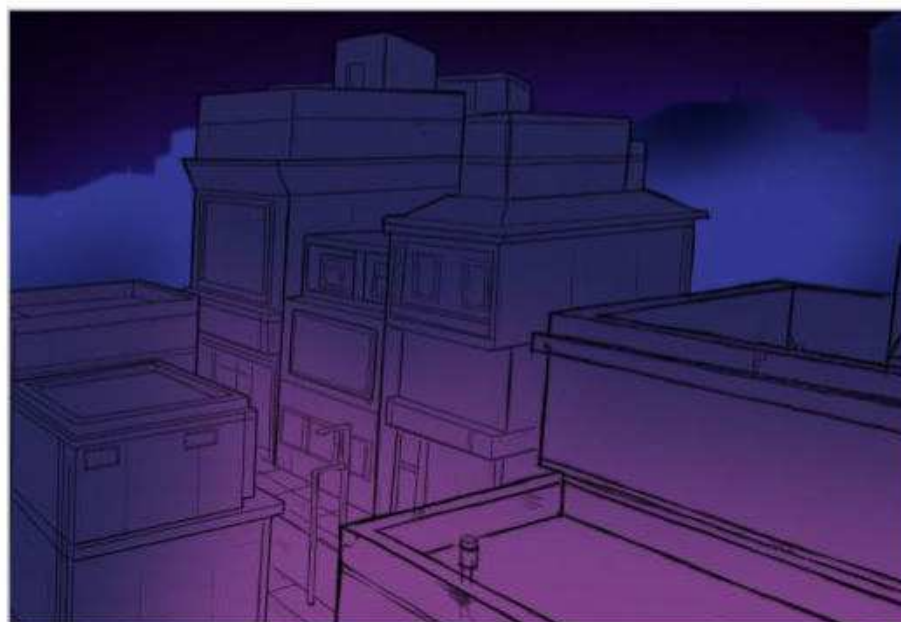
Colour fill

16 On a new layer beneath the city lines, use the Marquee tool again to draw around all the closest buildings. Use the Bucket tool to fill the layer with a light purple. Create another layer beneath it and fill the far-off buildings with a deeper purple.

Sketch up the lines

17 Using a rough brush (preferably one that mimics a pencil texture if you have one), draw over the lines of the building your characters will be standing on. Use a thick brush at 25px+ to make sure the lines are pronounced. This makes them appear closer to the viewer.
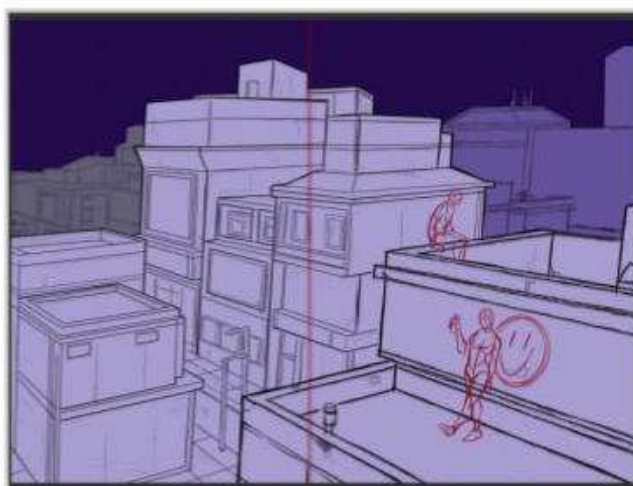
Line the buildings

18 No cutting any corners here I'm afraid. Reduce the opacity of your SketchUp layer, select the line tool set to 7px black, and draw over each of the lines on a new layer. Then select the Brush tool and sketch over them, thickening edges and adding details.

City colours

19 Go back to the flat layer of colour you made for the city, create a new layer above it and select Create Clipping Mask. Set to Multiply, 50% opacity. Select a deep blue, like the sky, and shade the building using the Marquee tool.
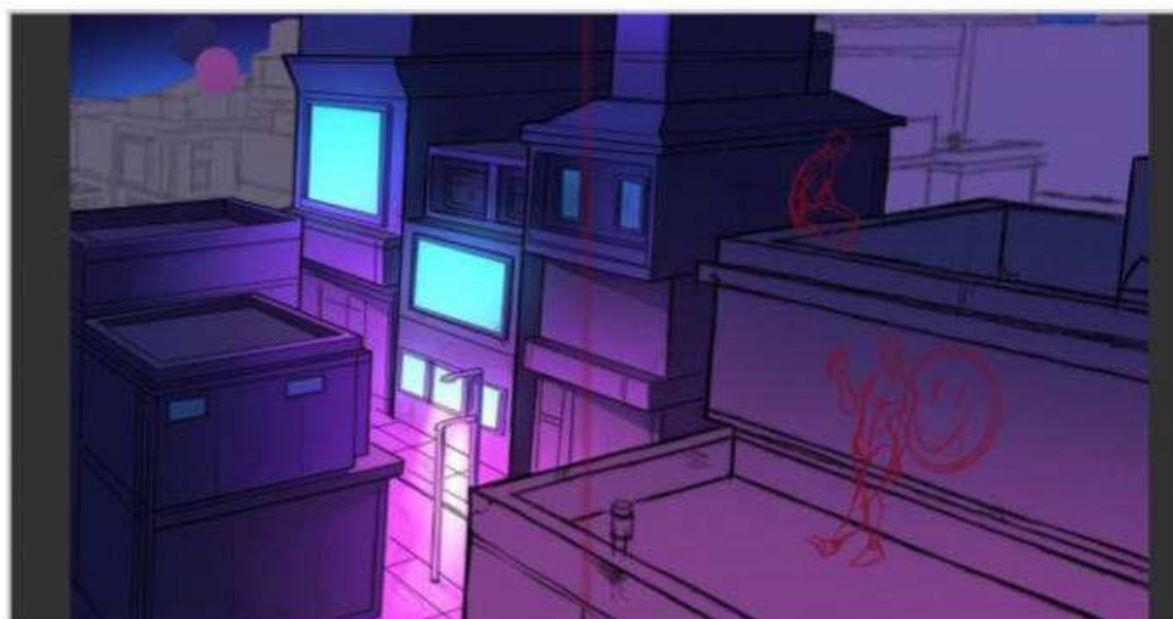
City light

20 Create a new layer above the Multiply layer and set to Colour Dodge. Select a dark pink in your secondary colour slot. Use the Marquee Select tool to select the front of a building, and draw a highlight using the Gradient tool: purple from the bottom, and blue from the top.
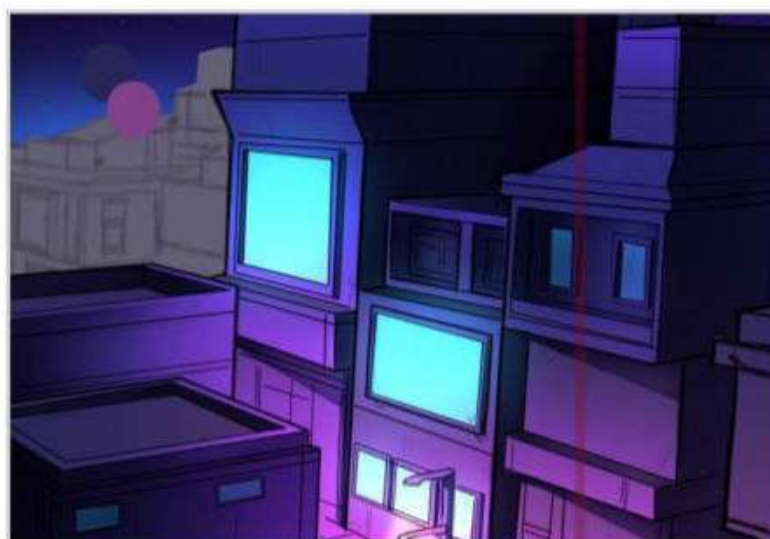
Deepen the shadows

21 On the same layer, use a bright aqua to colour in the screens. Then go back to the Multiply layer and duplicate it. Ctrl+click the layer to select everything on that layer. Set the eraser to a 50% opacity airbrush and lightly brush over the darkest shadows.
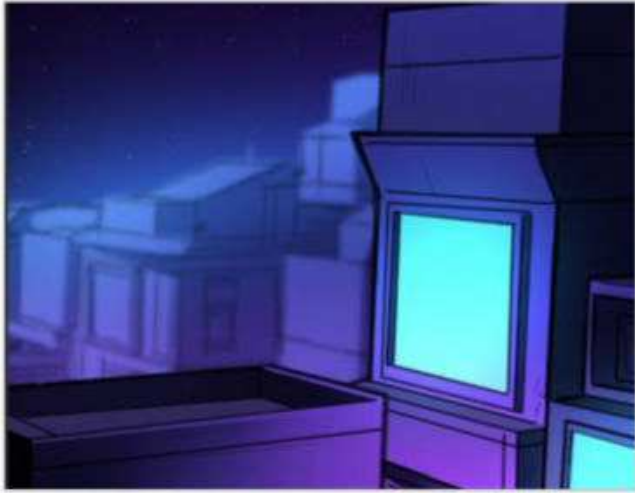
Far-off distance

22 Apply the above steps to the far background, but reduce the opacity of the Multiply and Colour Dodge layers to 30% and less. When you're done, combine the layers and go to Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur set to 30. Further erase the lines of these buildings if they stand out too much.

Highlight of the night

23 Back on the Colour Dodge layer of the foreground buildings, select the aqua you used for the screens and prepare a 20px line tool. Draw along the edges facing the night sky and the city lights below. Erase the edges with your airbrush eraser.
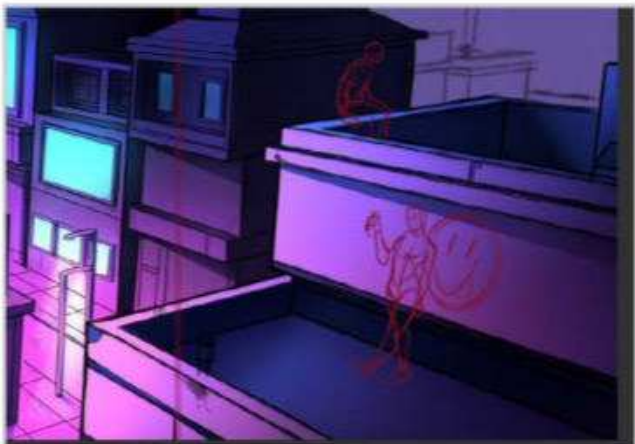
Light up the stage

24 Apply the above steps to the foreground buildings. But rather than reducing the opacity of the Multiply and Colour Dodge layers, increase them to 70% and above. Make sure the contrast and brightness on these buildings is high in order to draw the viewer's attention.

Change your mind

25 It's fine to change your mind at any point in the creative process! Create a new layer above the building layers and draw a new character using a hard brush set to black and 10px, leaning on a building in the close foreground.

Throw some shade

26 Select outside the character's lines, and on a new layer beneath, bucket fill with a flat colour. Select Preserve Transparency and colour her in. On a new Multiply Clipping Mask layer, shade them in, keeping the city's light source in mind. Reduce opacity to 70%.

The final touches

27 The best part: add the final touches. Draw an electricity pole to frame the left side of the picture. Combine all of the layers, open Brightness/Contrast, and increase both by 5. Duplicate the layer, and set to Colour Dodge. Reduce opacity to 25% or below.

Expert edit

Blending In

Flat colours first

01 A tip for making your character's colours suit the background. Start by colouring them in with their normal palette as if they were in white light.

Apply the overlay

02 Create a new Clipping Mask layer set to Overlay and fill it with a colour that is prevalent in the background. In this case, we'll use a dark blue.

Cast shadows

03 Using another Clipping Mask layer set to Multiply, use a large airbrush of the same colour to add broad shadows. Erase with an airbrush in lighter areas.

Highlights

04 Create a final layer set to Colour Dodge. In the areas you erased, select a colour from the background and airbrush over your character.

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On the FileSilo

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MASK CAREFULLY
When you've blurred a layer, hit Mask and use the brush to give more focus to specific areas of your image.

What does it mean?

RADIUS – The Radius of a blur refers to the amount something is being blurred. It's measured in pixels and is simply the number of pixels that are being combined together. You don't need to worry about learning all the technicalities in order to use it, but is worth bearing in mind when blurring.

Tool focus…

Get to grips with blur

What do each of the blur filters actually do?

Start image

In Photoshop and Elements, it's important to give your artwork and photos a clear focus. Sharpening tools exist for that reason, and highlighting certain parts of your image canhelp give a picture shape, draw attention to the right areas, and add dynamism.

With this in mind, it's important to remember the role of a blur filter. Blurring your images can help direct the viewer's focus towards the main subject of your photo, such as the centre of the star trails in the image above. You can sharpen this subject to draw more attention to it, granted, but another way that you can show some depth of field between a subject and its background is simply to blur the background a little, too.

Blurs can be used for so much more than this, though. Blurs can add movement and excitement to your image, as you can use them to suggest zoom, a subject running, or in the case of the image above, the illusion of star trails. You can use blur to create bokeh effects too, to smooth the skin of a portrait or even to get an average colour of a selection in Elements. The possibilities are endless; this is a core feature of Photoshop and Elements, after all.

Let's take a look at all the different blurs and what they can be used for. It's rare that you'll complete a whole project without using blurs, even if you're only using them sporadically. Hopefully you'll find one here that you've never used before!

A bit of a blur A focus on what each of the blurs can do
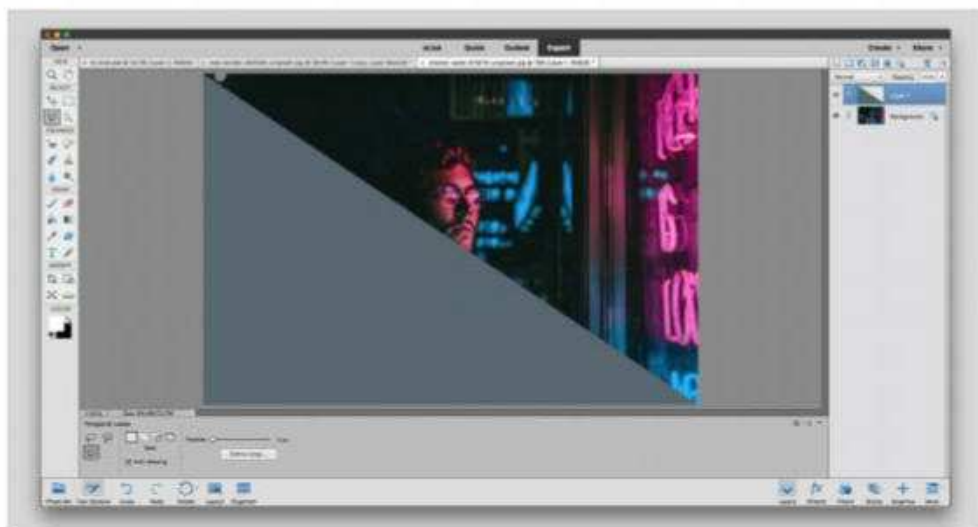
Average Blur

01 The most basic of all the blur functions, the Average Blur takes an average of all the pixels in your selection, and fills with this colour. This is most useful when you're creating a composition; create an Average Blur layer to get the overall tone of the piece.

Blur and Blur More

02 Blur and Blur More are the simplest options for just smudging pixels together. They're not overly effective, and can be fairly subtle in a bigger picture, but they can be repeated to build up more dramatic effects.
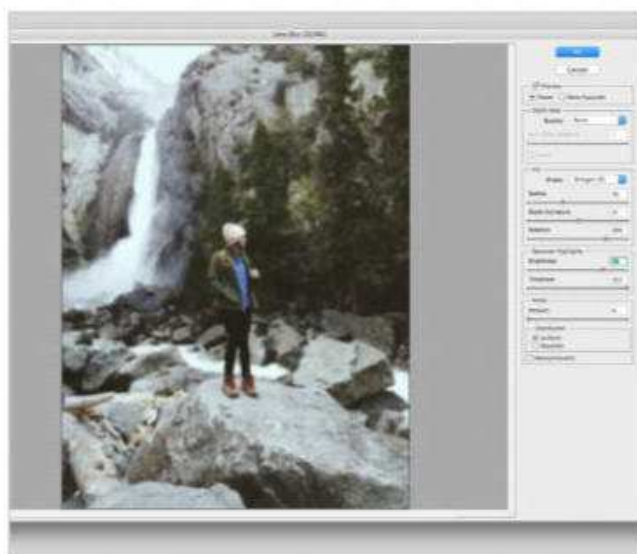
Lens Blur

03 The Lens Blur option produces more sophisticated blurring effects based on actual cameras. You can choose the shape of your blur, add noise and be far more accurate than with other blur options.

Motion Blur

04 The Motion Blur will apply the smudge of a blur in a specific direction. This is particularly good for subjects that you want to depict as moving in a specific direction, and you can refine it with masking.

Radial Blur

05 The Radial Blur is essentially very similar to the Motion Blur; the only difference is that the Radial Blur applies itself either as a zoom or a circular motion, rather than just in one direction.
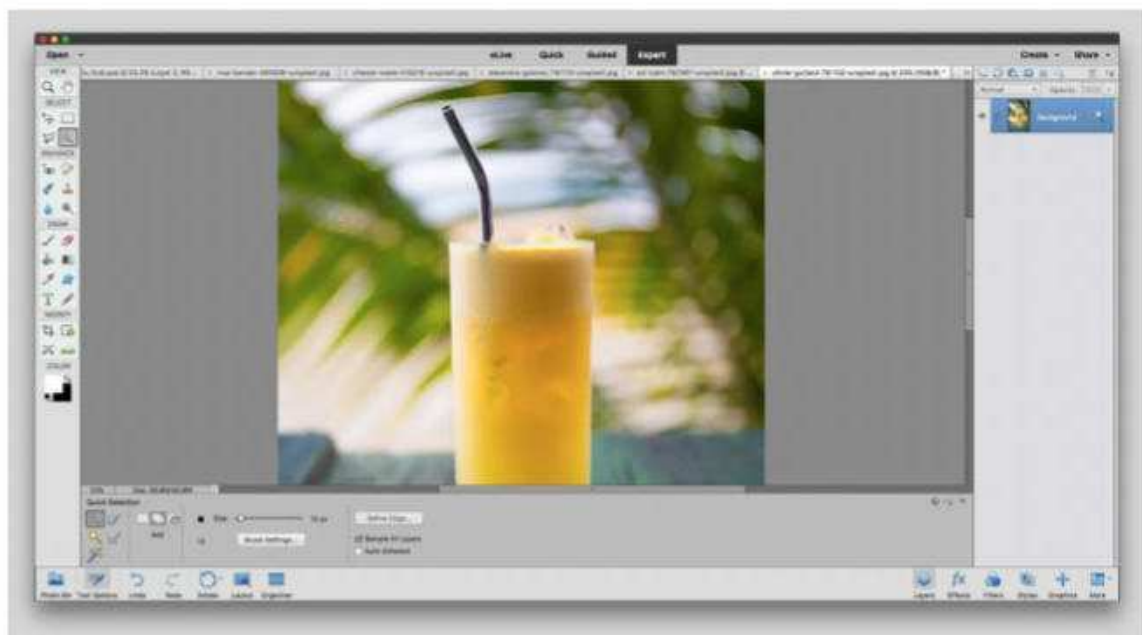
Smart Blur

06 The Smart Blur option is good for smoothing your image but it also leaves sharpened bits of your image behind. It recognises edges and enhances them, and it can be used for painterly effects as well as photographic finishes.

Surface Blur

07 The Surface Blur is similar to the Smart Blur, except it doesn't leave sharpened areas. It too can produce painterly effects, but it's perhaps best used for smoothing out skin when you're retouching a picture; mask for best results.

On the FileSilo

Download your free resources at **www.filesilo. co.uk/photoshopcreative**

Digital art...

Get creative with photos

Use the Elements toolbox & commands to edit photos creatively

It's fun to create a beautiful composition using your holiday photos or any other images you have in hand. In the following steps, you'll learn how to use filters, masks, adjustments and other editing techniques to tweak the photos and get to grips with Photoshop Elements in Expert mode. First, you'll start creating the background using basic selection tools and masks. Next, you will learn how to apply filters to create a realist snow texture. Then, you'll work with layers styles to add subtle effects. Finally, you'll use a preset to create the snow falling from the

sky. These techniques are essential for all those who want to get serious about digital art and Elements has some fantastic tools and filters to help you create a perfect photo composition and get the job done. Work with stock images or photography invariably involve creativity and lots of tweaks and edits to get things looking just right, so follow each step closely to gain a good understanding of how these techniques works. Download the stock images from FileSilo and let's start learning.

Essential techniques Learn to apply filters, adjustments, and masks to compose images

Create a blank file

01 Open up a blank canvas. Go to File> New> Blank File or press Cmd/Ctrl+N. Name your project 'Snowman'. Set the Width to 222mm, Height to 300mm, Resolution: 300ppi and click OK.

Create the background

02 Go to File> Place 'pix_1041542_sky. jpg'. In the Tool Options check Constrain Proportion and set the Width to 100%. Drag the image up, and then press Return/Enter. Now reduce the Saturation. Go to Layer> New Adjustment Layer> Hue/ Saturation. Set Saturation at -25 and click to clip to layer.

Mask the house

03 Go to File> Place 'pix_3088488_ house.jpg' and press Return/Enter. Grab the Polygonal Lasso Tool (L). In Options, set Feather to 1 pixel and select the house. Now add a layer mask, go to Layer> Layer Mask> Reveal Selection.
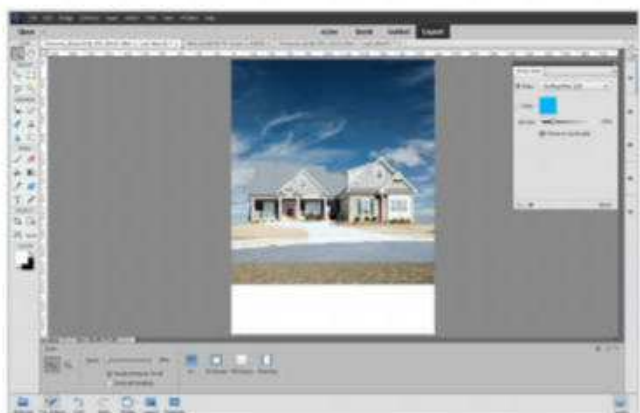
Adjustment layers

04 Now, let's make a quick colour correction. Go to Layer> New Adjustment Layer> Photo Filter. Open the Drop Down menu and choose Cooling Filter (82) and click to clip to layer. In the Layers panel, set the Blend to Screen and reduce the Opacity to 80%.
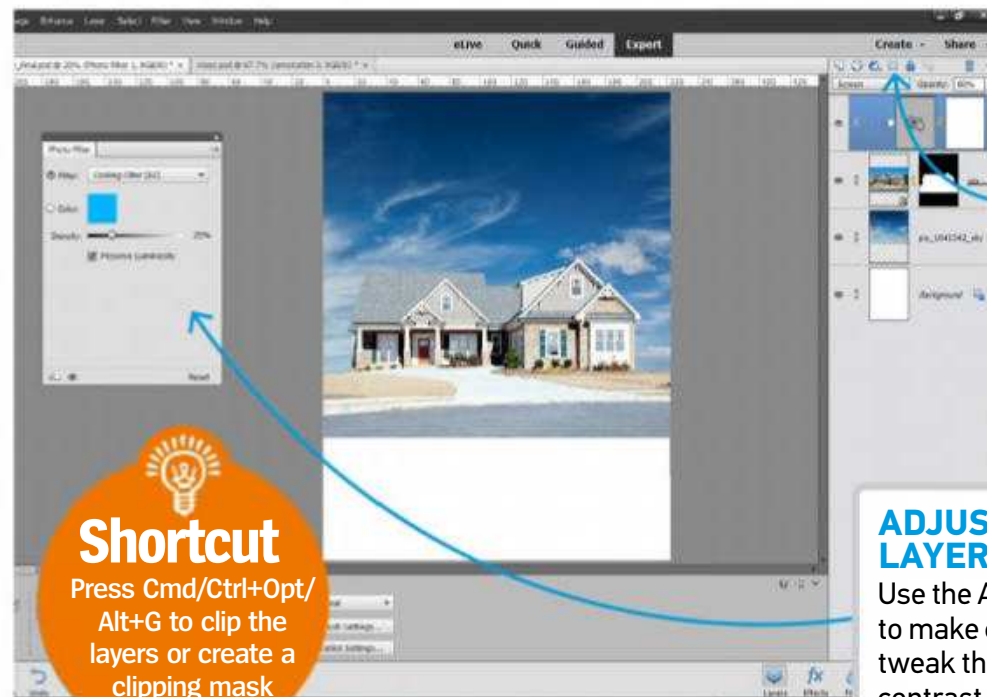
Shortcut
Press Cmd/Ctrl+Opt/ Alt+G to clip the layers or create a clipping mask

MASK SHORTCUT
On top of the layers panel there are shortcut buttons to add masks, layers, adjustments, create groups, and lock pixels

ADJUSTMENT LAYERS
Use the Adjustment Layers to make colour corrections, tweak the tones, enhance contrast, and more.
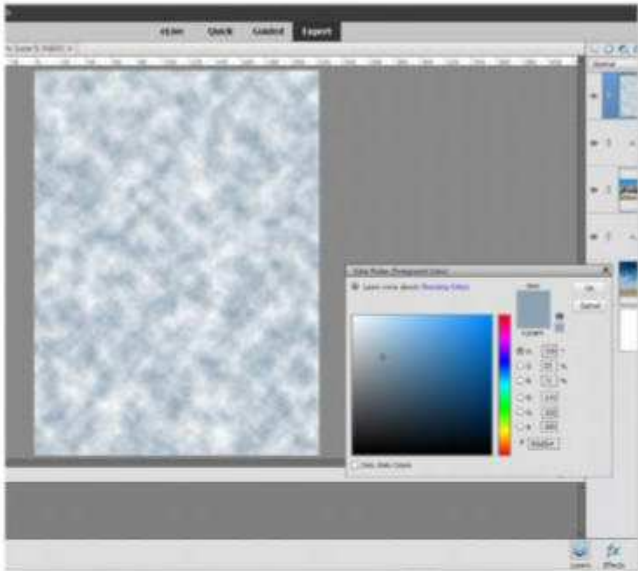
Create the snow texture

05 Let's use the filters to create the texture from scratch. Add a new layer (Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+N). Name it Snow Texture and click OK. In the Toolbox, set the Foreground colour to #8da2b4 and the Background colour to white. Now, go to Filter> Render> Clouds.
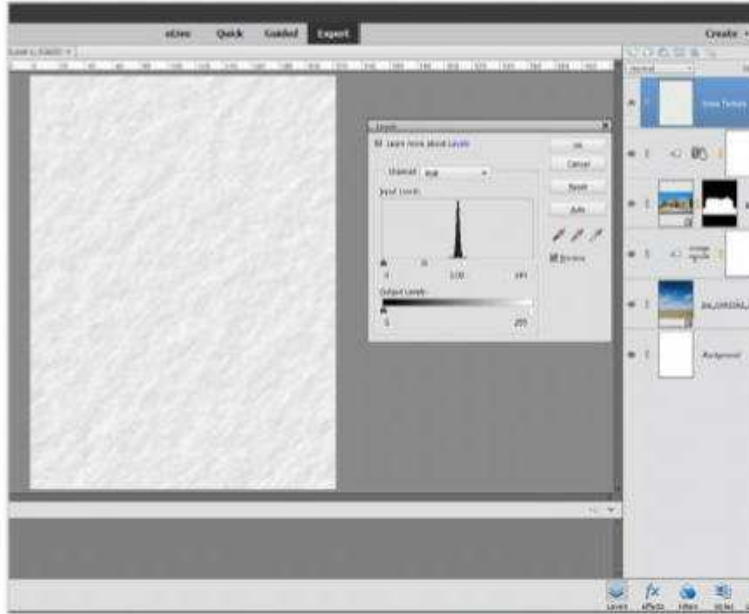
Create a bump surface

06 Use the Emboss filter to create a subtle shaded relief effect. Go to Filter> Stylize> Emboss. Set the Angle to -45°, Height: 8 pixels, Amount:100% and then click OK. Now, open the Levels (press Cmd/Ctrl+L). Set the Inputs to 0, 100, 140 to brighten the image.
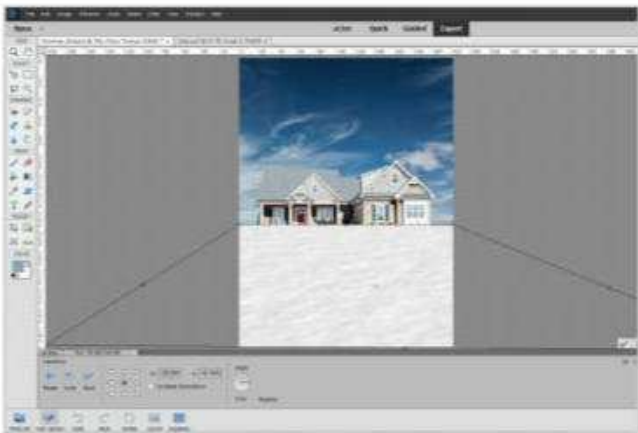
Adjust the perspective

07 First, duplicate the layer (Cmd/Ctrl+J) then hide it by clicking on the eye icon – we'll use this in the next step. Go back to the original Snow layer and press Cmd/Ctrl+T. Drag the handles to reduce the size and holding Shift adjust the perspective.
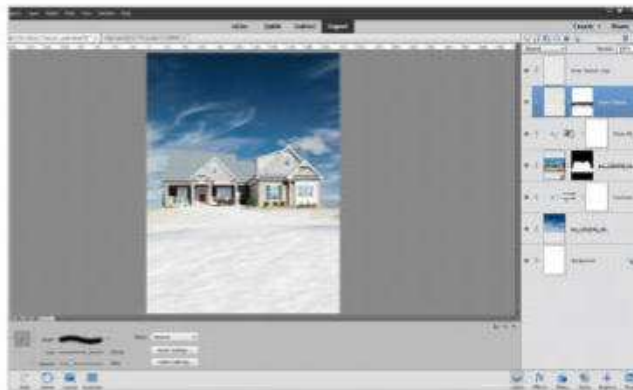
Layer Mask

08 Add a Layer Mask. Go to Layer> Layer Mask> Reveal All. Grab a soft tip brush (B) and start painting on the mask to hide unwanted areas. Now, let's unhide the Snow Texture copy layer. Drag it under the original Snow Texture layer and clip it (Cmd/Ctrl+Opt/Alt+G).

More snow

09 Go to Layer> Layer Style> Style Settings. Set Lighting Angle to 90°. Check Bevel and set Size: 7px, Direction: Up and click OK. Go to Layer> Layer Mask> Hide All. Grab the Lasso Tool (L). Draw the selections on the mask to form the snow and the icicles on the roof. Fill it with white (Opt/Alt+Delete).
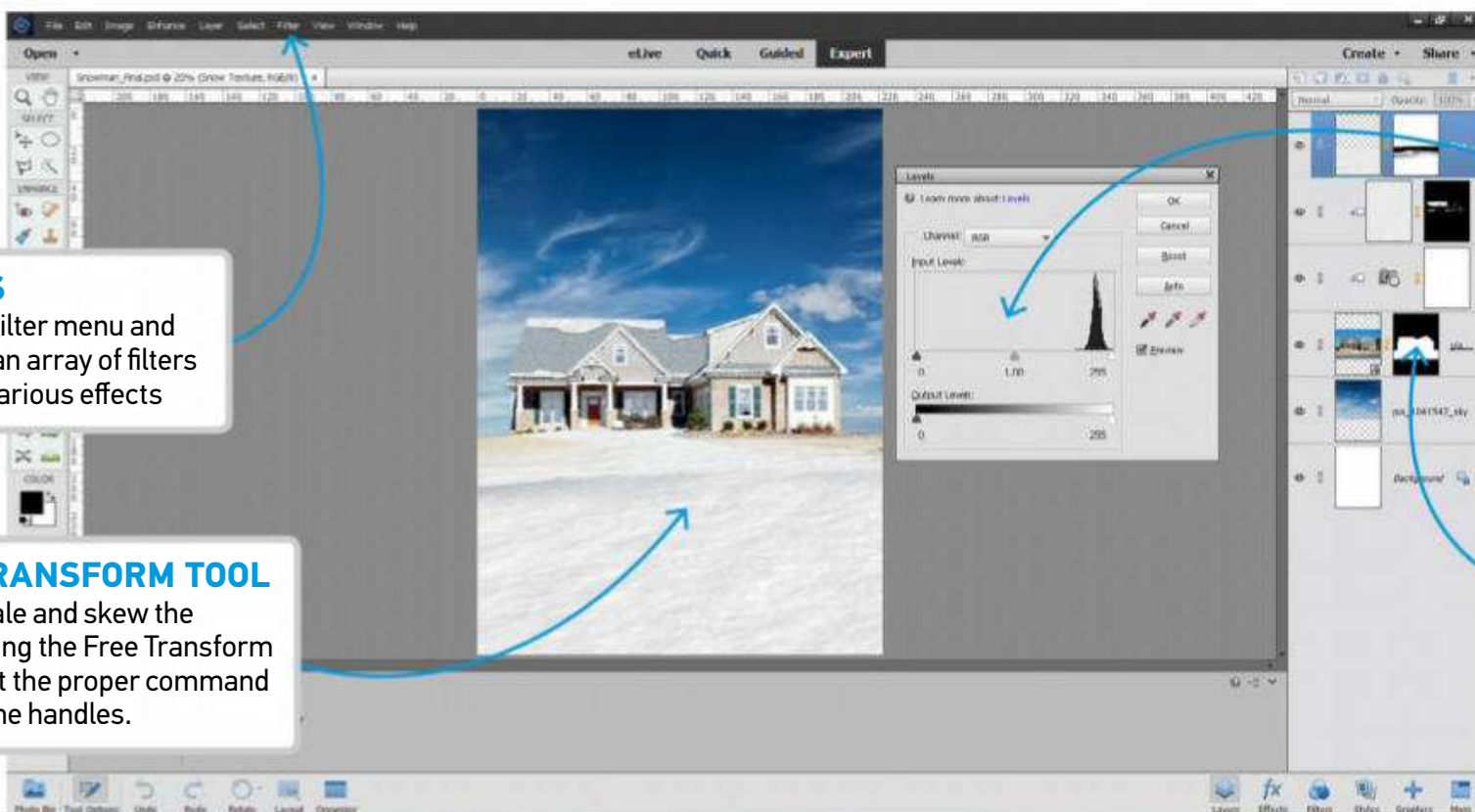
FILTERS
Open the Filter menu and you'll find an array of filters to create various effects

FREE TRANSFORM TOOL
Rotate, scale and skew the images using the Free Transform tool. Select the proper command and drag the handles.

LEVELS ADJUSTMENT
The Levels is one of the best adjustment layers. It controls the tonality, allowing you to quickly correct the contrast.

LAYER MASK
Adjusting the brush opacity or pressure allows you to control the level of transparency of the mask.

Place the kids

10 Go to File> Place 'pix_kids.jpg.' Grab the Quick Selection Tool (A) and select the kids. Click on the Refine Edge button. Adjust the edges, and choose Output to New Layer with Layer Mask, then click OK. Resize the image and apply the mask (Layer> Layer Mask> Apply).

Paint the footprints

11 Create a new layer (Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+N) under the kids layer. Go to Layer> Layer Style>Style Settings. Set Lighting Angle to 90°, click Bevel and set Size: 7 pixels, Direction: Down and click OK. Set the Foreground colour #8da2b4. Grab the Brush tool (B). Choose a chalk brush and start painting the footprints.

Create the shadows

12 Duplicate the kids layer (Cmd/Ctrl+J). In the Layers panel click on Lock Transparent Pixels button at the top. Press Opt/ Alt+Delete to fill with the foreground colour. Grab the Lasso tool. Select one of the kids and cut and paste into a new layer. Press Cmd/Ctrl+T and tweak the shadow.

Place the snowman

13 Go to File> Place 'fo_ snowman.jpg.' Grab the Quick Selection Tool (A) and select the body. Now, grab the Polygonal Lasso Tool (L). In Options, click 'Add to Selection' and select the arms. Then, apply a Layer Mask. Drag the layer behind the house and place the 'tree.png' to complete the composition.
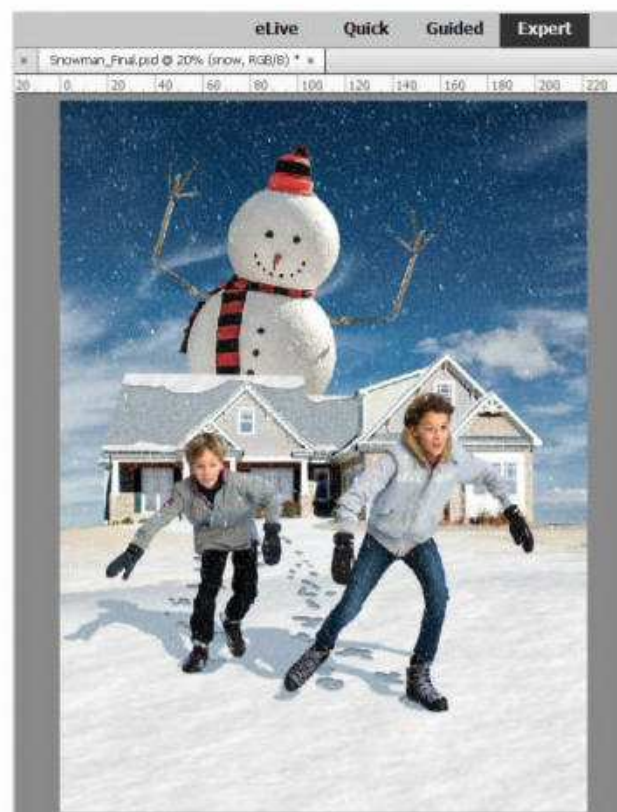
Let it snow

14 Create a new layer on top of the layers stack. Fill it with black. Click in Effects or press F2. Open the drop-down menu and choose Seasons, then click in Snow. Press Cmd/ Ctrl+L and tweak the inputs to reduce the amount of snow. Finally, change the blend to Screen.

Post-editing tricks
Go the extra mile in Elements

After you finish editing your composition, create a merged copy of all the layers. Make sure the top layer is active and then press Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+Opt/Alt+E. Rename it 'final_comp'. Press Cmd/ Ctrl+T to open the Free Transform tool and in the Tool Options bar check Constrain Proportions and set the Width to 115%, then press Return /Enter.

Next, go to Filter> Render> Lens Flare. Set brightness to 120% and choose the Lens Type: 105mm Prime. In the preview window, drag the lens to top-right and then click OK.

Go to Enhance> Adjust Lighting> Shadow/Highlights. Set Lighten Shadows to 10% and Midtone Contrast to 30%, then click OK. If you like, you can also make some subtle changes to the kids' facial expressions. Go to Enhance> Adjust Facial Features and start playing with the settings.

Finally, make a colour correction using the Photo Filter. Go to Layer> New Adjustment Layer> Photo Filter and click OK. Then choose Deep Blue.

Shortcut
Press 'D' to set the default Foreground/ Background colour.

GO FOR GREEN
The most common Northern Lights images that you'll see are a shade of aquamarine and green; use this for ultimate realism.

What does it mean?

SCREEN – One of the most important blend modes Photoshop offers when it comes to creating light effects. Anything that's lighter on the Blend layer than the layers below will automatically brighten up the photo. It's good to use alongside the Overlay and Soft Light modes to add more colour.

HARMONISE COLOUR
Duplicate the Northern Lights layer to the top of the layer stack, set to Soft Light, 30% and Filter> Blur> Average to harmonise colours.

Start image

Photo edit...

Create a Northern Lights effect

Why bother going to Iceland when you can fake it in Elements?

You've booked the flights, and your stay at a hotel that has a glass roof. You've packed your warmest clothes, and arranged to visit when Aurora Borealis is passing over. But there's still a chance that the Northern Lights could be a no-show.

Whether or not you're going to Iceland to see the magnetic phenomenon, this is a project that can really brighten up your night shots, whether they're taken in the upper reaches of the northern hemisphere or otherwise. This is a tutorial that uses blend modes, layers and masking to create a stunning colour effect in your shots, and it's one that you can apply to loads of different photos. Though you can manage this effect with brushes and filters, we're going to use stock photos, as it's far easier to comp in. Why not search for some yourself online?

Let's dive into creating a Northern Lights effect. The great thing about this is that you don't have to venture into freezing temperatures for it!

Let there be light Create night photos with stock images and blend modes

Set to Screen

01 Start by opening your nighttime image and dropping in a Northern Lights-supplied image into your document. Set it to Screen, and using Transform (Cmd/Ctrl+T), resize it so that it's positioned over your image.

Alter blend modes

02 Reduce the Northern Lights layer to 80% opacity and duplicate it. Set this duplicate layer to 50% opacity and set to Soft Light to bring out a little more colour. Group these layers together by selecting them and hitting Cmd/Ctrl+G.

Mask a little

03 Hit Mask on your group. Use the Quick Selection (A) to select the trees and the subject, and fill with black on the mask. Use a soft 50% opaque brush to touch a little further at the edges of the subject and trees so that there aren't harsh edges to your effect.

Tweak the colour

04 Clip a Hue/Saturation layer to your group by Alt/Opt+clicking. Use the Channel dropdown to choose the Cyan shade of colour, alter the hue or saturation to change the colour of the effect, and use a mask to pinpoint this effect.

Other night-time phenomena Transform your late night images with other effects

Fireworks

Everyone loves a firework display (except perhaps, your pets). Create amazing firework effects without the big bangs by dropping in stock photos of fireworks against black backgrounds on your pictures. Clip Hue/ Saturation layers and up the saturation to give them even more kick.

Moon

Adding a moon or planet to a dark sky can be a great way to add intrigue or realism; you can create an amazing planetary scene or even just resize the moon – like we have here – for a surreal effect. Add your moon, set to Screen and adjust the Levels (Cmd/Ctrl+L) to complete the effect.

Nebula

A nebula can look pretty, and really brighten up a dark sky. Set it to Screen and place over your image, then select the rest of the scene with Quick Select. Select a Soft Brush (B), Alt/ Opt-click to choose colours from the nebula, and brush these colours over the rest of the scene to create a realistic-looking city.

Start
image

Create a forest in your lounge

Have a stag party with layers, masks & forest-themed stock photos

What makes a picture surreal is simple. Surreal compositions are ones that place something somewhere that it doesn't belong; this could be quite a simple premise or you can take it to ridiculous extremes. For this image, we're going to go with something quite silly, but it's not something so surreal that you can't create with some of your own images.

Bringing the wild indoors is quite a simple idea but for this, we're going to need exactly the right blend of rocks, branches and moss to mask into the photo. Elements and Photoshop are both great for masking tasks, and perhaps the easiest way to complete these are by using brushes. Soft brushes are good for relatively soft edges such as water, and harder brushes can be used for more defined objects like rocks. The key is in the blend, and that can be made with adjustment layers, and more brushing.

The best way to make an image feel realistic – well, as realistic as a deer in your living room can be – is to pay attention to the details. Be sure to zoom in, mask around individual rocks, and if something you're trying composite doesn't work, don't force it to. The best compositions are simple in many ways; sometimes all you need is a good idea and a lot of time and effort to bring it to life.

82

Deer, oh deer Build a rocky floor and place elements over it using masks and blends

Place your background

01 Create a new document (Cmd/Ctrl+N). Start off by inserting the supplied file of the living room – or your own chosen living room if you'd rather! Hit Transform (Cmd/Ctrl+T) and resize the background image as you wish.

Mask the sofas

02 Grab the Quick Selection (W). We're going to select around the outside of the sofas and fill with white on a new layer, so that when we need to mask around the sofa, we can just Cmd/Ctrl+click this layer preview to select quickly. Hide this layer once you're done.
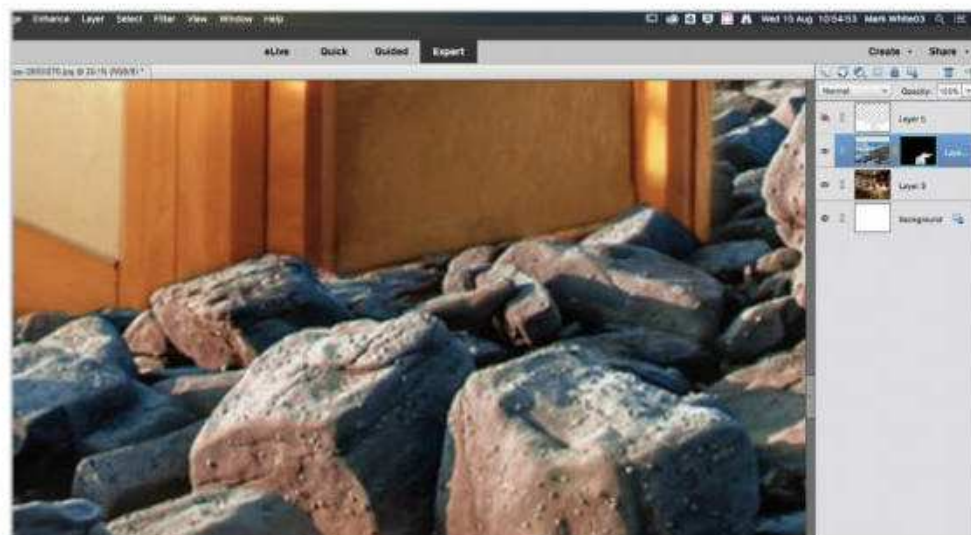
Blend in some rocks

03 Now you can insert some rocks, and with the help of the hidden layer you've just created, mask out the sofas. With a soft brush, just mask so that it looks like the room's floor is covered with rocky debris.

Refine the mask

04 Reduce the size of your brush, zoom in and touch around the outside of individual rocks so that the image feels a little more real. Vary the hardness of the brush if you need to and alter the opacity if it helps.

Layer up the environment

05 Add another of the supplied rock images and use the same techniques to insert this texture across the floor of the image. Trace around the edge of the rocks to mask them into the image, and hide them behind the table for realism.
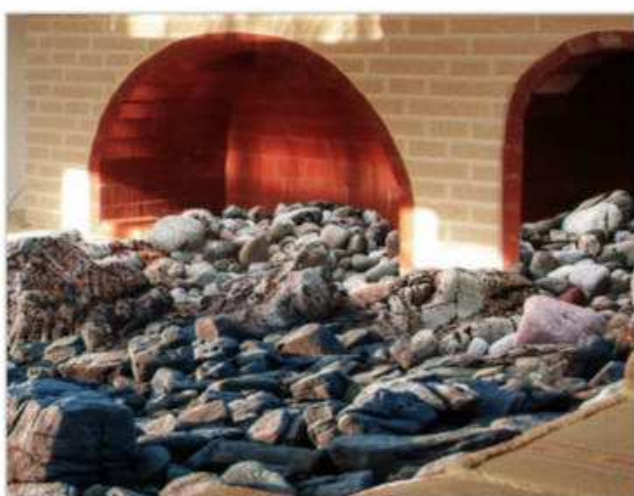
ROCK EDGES
Hard brushes are best for masking in the rocks in your image, as you can trace their outline easily.

MASK WATER
Soft brushes can be used with water, as it doesn't have a hard edge; fade it into your work.

MASKING AROUND THE SOFA
Make sure to keep the hard edge of the sofa in tact when you're masking the rocks in, so that it looks realistic.

MATCH LIGHT SOURCES
Use Soft Light and Overlay layers to apply different amounts of light and shade to the image depending on where it should fall.
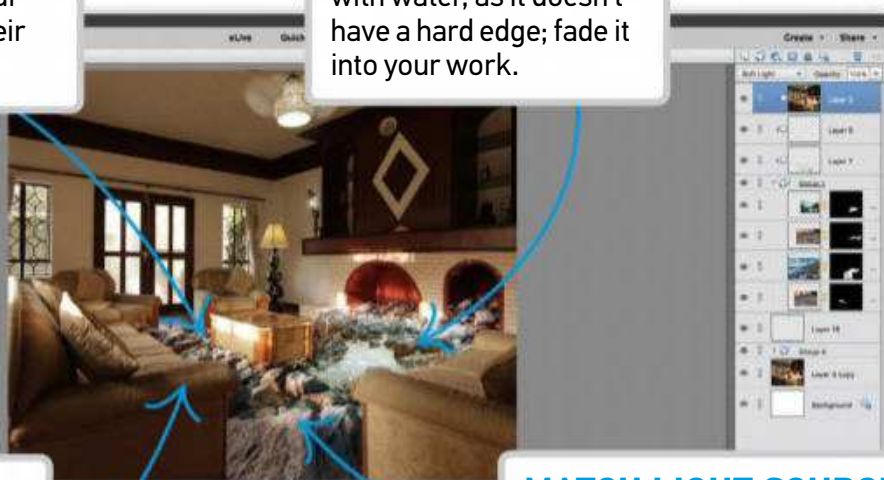
Harmonise the colour

06 Group the rock layers together. Duplicate the background layer of the living room and move it above the group, then Alt/Opt+click to clip it. Set to Soft Light, go to Filter> Blur> Gaussian Blur and set to 20px. Hit OK.

Introduce more elements

07 Add the mossy branch to the image, masking it out and then add a shadow on the layer below; add another branch coming out of the sofa, and you could also insert some toadstools to the image to give the scene even more of a forest feel.

Expert tip

Making adjustments

Subtle tweaks and changes to your picture can make a big difference to the final piece. For example, you can create a new layer and set it to Color, before using different brushes to recolour and harmonise the image. It can also be a good idea to create an Overlay layer, then use black and white to add highlights and shadows.

When you've completed the image, create a stamp layer (Cmd/Ctrl+Alt/Opt+Shift+E) and go to Filter> Blur> Gaussian Blur. Set this to Soft Light and alter the Hue/Saturation (Cmd/Ctrl+U) until all the colours have blended together nicely.

Place your deer

08 Add your deer to the image and place him on top of the table. Use a black brush on a mask to erase the background around him and nudge the layer so that it's well-placed on the table.

Make the table mossy

09 Add some more moss, this time to the table. Place it over the hooves of the deer and around the table to continue the forest theme, using different opacities and hardnesses of brush to get a realistic effect.

Add embellishments

10 Place the trunk with the vine wrapped around onto the wall and set to Soft Light. Duplicate the layer, set to Normal and just mask the leaves onto the image to make them stand out a little more.

LEAVES
The leaves can help add a little more detail to the room as a whole and are a nice touch for the picture.
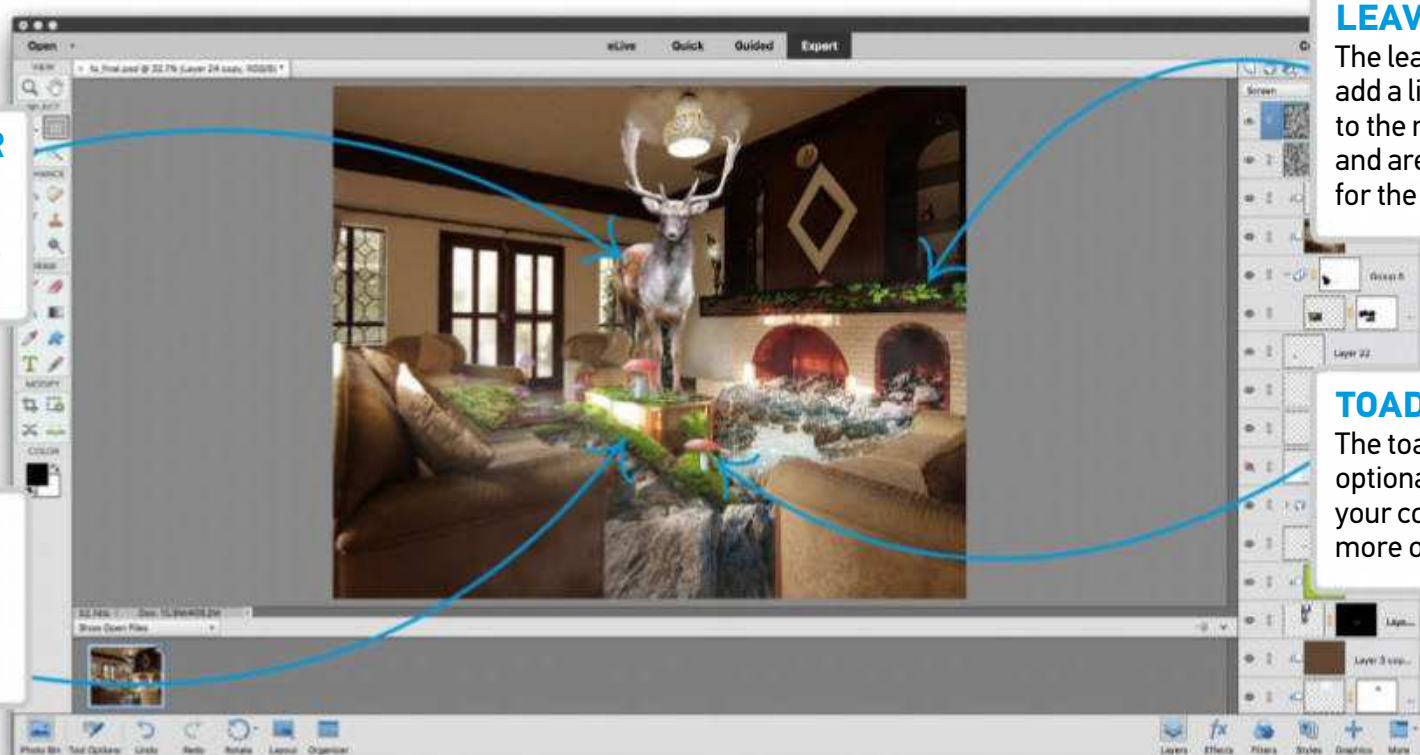
ADDING THE DEER
Make sure that the deer is resized so that it's tall enough to fit on the table and under the ceiling.

TOADSTOOLS
The toadstools are optional but can give your composition more of a fantasy feel.

MOSS
Use a soft brush to mask the moss on the table into the photo; this will allow you to fade it in.

Dodge and burn

11 Duplicate the deer layer twice; set one of these layers to Screen and the other to Multiply, before hitting Mask on both and inverting the masks (Cmd/Ctrl+I). Use a soft white brush on each to fade in highlights and shadows on the deer.

Blur the light

12 Select the light from the background and copy it twice, rotating each one either side of the original light. Merge and copy to a new document; crop this new document to a 1:1 ratio and go to Filter> Blur> Radial Blur. Choose Amount: 37, Quality: Best.

Work on the light

13 Copy your blurred light from the new document and paste it back above the deer's antlers. Reduce the opacity if need be, and with a soft, white, low opacity brush on a new layer, touch in some bright light.
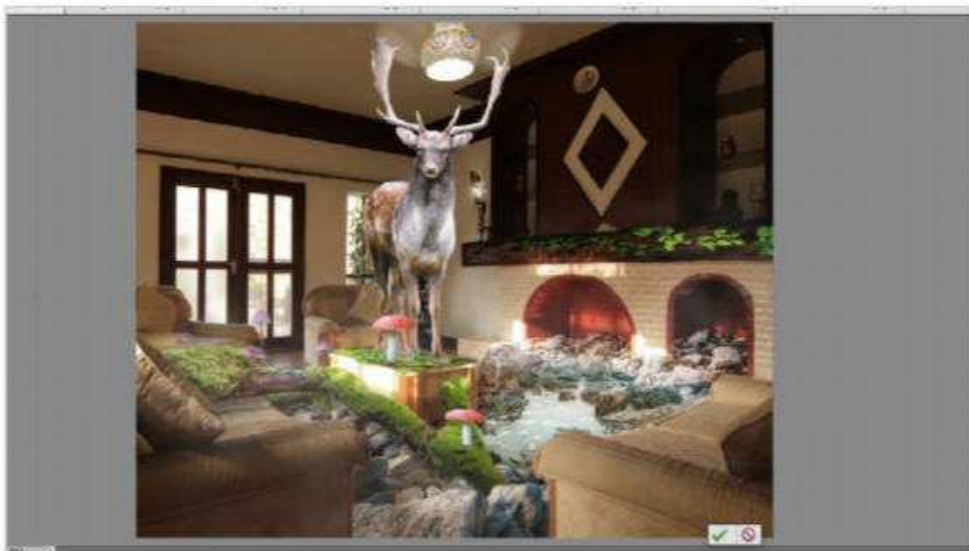
Crop

14 Now you can crop the image to make sure the focus is in the right places. Hit C and drag the tool to create the crop. At this point, you can also create a stamp layer of the project (Cmd/Ctrl+Alt+Opt+Shift+E) and go to Filter>High Pass to sharpen: set a radius of 3px and set to Overlay.
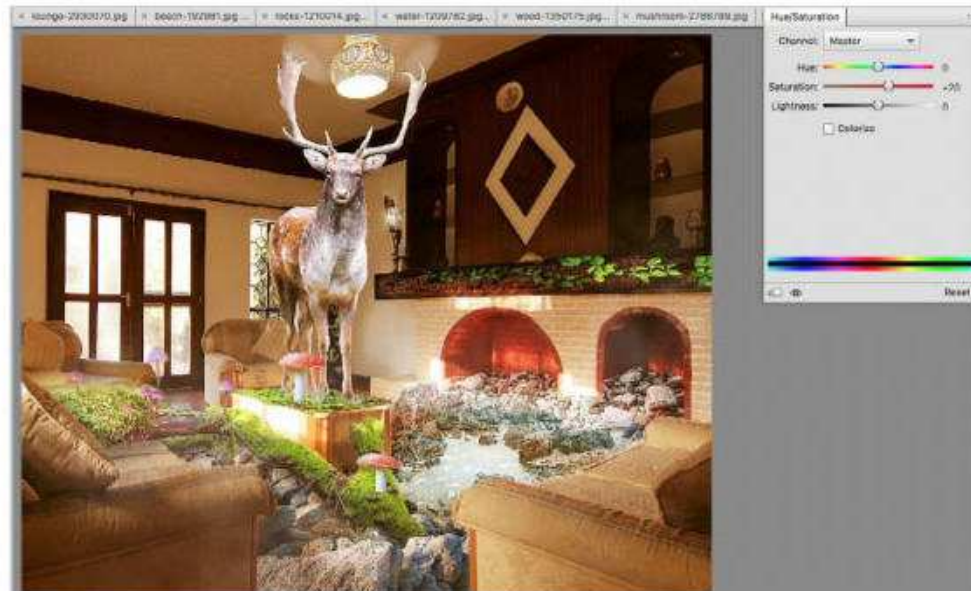
Adjust

15 Finally, let's give a little more colour and brightness to the image as a whole. Use Hue/Saturation, Levels and Brightness/Contrast to help improve the feel of the image and unify all the colours within the picture.

Adding smoke

Add some mysterious mist to the piece

Creating smoke or steam is easy to do in both Photoshop and Elements; all you have to do is a render clouds.

To start with, set your swatches to black and white (D). Go to Filter> Render to discover the Clouds option and click this; here, you'll get a random rendering of some clouds. Now set the layer to Screen and hit Mask, before inverting (Cmd/Ctrl+I). From here, you can fade the clouds in using a big, white, soft brush with low opacity.

This is just a nice touch for your image to make the scene look a little more like a real misty morning in the forest. Build up these layers for an even smokier effect for your finished composition.

Shortcut
Hold Shift as you crop to maintain the image's aspect ratio

HARDWARE   **Price** £699.99 $649.99 US   **Web** www.epson.co.uk

Epson EcoTank ET-7750

Print your artwork with the latest generation of cartridge-free printer

The specs

Company
Epson

Features
3-in-1
Cartridge free
5 colour system
Up to A3

3-IN-1
Print, copy or scan, and do it double sided. The ET-7750 prints your photos in either A4 or A3.

PAPER TRAYS
The dual paper trays at the bottom are very stiff. You can select the specific type of paper you are using on the screen.

HIGH INK CAPACITY
Print up to 3,400 photos with the included ink, creating album images that will last up to 300 years.

5 best features
Discover what the EcoTank has to offer

No mess refill

01   Each bottle has a drip-free nozzle that will only fit in the correct cartridge, meaning you don't have to worry about accidentally mixing inks. The super-high capacity tanks mean you'll hardly have to think about refilling anyway.

LCD screen

02   The 6.8-inch LCD display is on a hinged control panel at the front. From here, you can navigate through network and prints settings through bright and straightforward UI. However, it isn't a touchscreen, which loses points.

Diverse media handling

03   The ET-7750 handles automatic duplex printing for your day-to-day printing needs. It also handles borderless photo printing for a crisp and professional finish. You can also print onto DVDs/CDs and envelopes.

Epson promises excellent savings in return for this hefty investment. With enough ink included to print you up to 3,400 photos and ink-efficient duplex printing, it's easy to see how this will pay off over time.

The ET-7750 is Epson's top-of-the-range multi-format printer. Being three-in-one means you can copy, scan and print, but not fax (the horror!). It boasts cartridge-free printing, automatic duplex, A3 printing, a high-quality scanner and plenty more. It's main selling point has to be the ink bottles included. In the box you will get two of each of the five-colour system inks. This includes your dye CMYK inks, and a photo-specific pigment black for exceptional image depth. It's a great idea for Epson to move the tanks to the front of the machine so you can physically see how much ink is left, rather than relying on sensors. It is satisfying to see how much ink you are using and therefore saving. Each bottle has a key nozzle to avoid accidentally filling up the wrong tank and mixing your inks, plus a valve to stop the flow automatically and prevent overfilling.

The 6.8-inch display is not a touchscreen, and so navigation is done through the buttons next to the screen. This is no real problem, as the readability is fine, and the panel tilts forward for easier reading. It's just when it comes to typing in a wi-fi password that it becomes pretty irritating. To access the paper trays, you have to tilt up the front display panel. Here, you will find two paper trays and one printable CD/DVD tray. The rear feed tray is for A3 and speciality media. It is worth noting that it cannot print A3 glossy photos, but is meant for colour tabloids or poster etc. For all this functionality, it is heftier in build

than some of the other models. The bulk of the machine is solid, but the various paper trays feel very flimsy and breakable.

You can connect virtually anyway. In the front, there is an SD card and USB slot, with one more USB slot at the back. You can also work over wi-fi or through various mobile apps. However, there is no NFC compatibility. The diversity is a wonderful thing. You can imagine yourself making super-high quality photo prints, as well as running off some nice Instagram snaps. Initially, prints came out streaky, which is discouraging. But after a few tests they were excellent.

The scanner can't be overlooked as a resource. The ET-7750 scans at a crisp 1,200x2,400dpi using a compact image sensor. Scan in your sketches and hand-drawn art, and create assets for Photoshop with excellent results. It is unfortunate that the scanner bed is not quite A3.

Setup is nice and easy. In the box you get a simple user manual leaflet showing you the

ink-loading procedure and where to download the setup wizard. Ink cartridge charging takes about seven minutes, and will run off a few test sheets. The ink bottles have slightly more in than will initially fit in the tank – a nice touch to make up for the ink used in the set-up process. You might feel the urge to put down paper to protect surfaces or wear gloves, but in test there wasn't a drip in sight.

£700 is a hefty price for a printer with a few mechanical shortfalls. But in the long run of buying cartridge after cartridge for a printer of the same quality and diversity, you are bound to save money.

The verdict

8 Great for an office with a lot of colour printing and multimedia needs, though some mechanical flimsiness doesn't initially make it feel worth the price.

Standout feature

Five-colour ink system
In the box, you'll receive two bottle of each of the CMYK colours. You will also receive two double capacity bottles of pigment ink. This will make the blacks in your images all that more vivid, and shows this machine to be a specialist in photo printing.

High quality

04 Scan with a 1,200x2,400dpi compact image sensor and print with a 5,760x1,440 dpi Epson Micro Piezo™ print head. This printer doesn't sacrifice any quality.

Print from anywhere

05 With modern printers, there is excellent accessibility, as well as a built-in SD card slot and USB input. You can also print via dedicated wi-fi apps like Epson Connect, Apple AirPrint and Google Cloud Print.

APPLY MASKS
For greater precision when defining areas to be animated, freehand masks can be painted onto the image – a familiar functionality to Photoshop users.

ANIMATION TOOLS
Add and delete Motion Arrows and Anchor Points to incorporate and exclude areas from the animation respectively. Adjust the speed of the animation.

PLAY AND SHARE
Review your animation effect by pressing the play button and make adjustments if necessary. Directly share your animated image to all main social platforms.

The specs

Company
Corel

Additional specs
Photo animation
Photo auto enhancement
Image cropping
Direct image sharing

The verdict

6
While PhotoMirage can add energy to a website, it does get repetitive. For the same price, other applications are more beneficial.

PhotoMirage

Blurring the lines between stills and video, is this specialist application more than a gimmick?

Novelty plays an important role in the evolution of modern photography. The images we produce are used for a seemingly endless variety of media and functions, so it is not surprising that new hardware and software effects come in and out of fashion on an almost monthly basis.

The premise of Corel's PhotoMirage is to blend still imaging with motion, to create a unique medium, which is neither photography nor video. It allows the user to add movement to isolated areas of an image, while keeping other, detail rich zones still. The interface is clear and easy to use – a main pitch of the application is that it is simpler to work with than video-editing software, which will likely appeal to photographers who are averse to learning an entirely new format.

Movement is introduced by adding Motion Arrows to the areas requiring animation – a single click and drag will define an origin and direction to the movement, while the length of the arrow determines the extent of its stretch. This is complemented by a comprehensive array of masking tools, to remove areas to be kept stationary.

This reliance on a small number of tools is a definite strength, and eye-catching animations can be created in minutes. However, this does potentially limit its versatility, so tailoring effects to an image can be a challenge.

In terms of features, PhotoMirage has a stripped-back specification, which makes it less intimidating to beginners, but highlights the specific nature of its purpose. The majority of tools are aimed at adding to the precision of the animated areas, such as masking and Motion Arrows. This speeds up animation, but reduces its wider usefulness.

The results are engaging if animation is correctly applied, and will add an extra level of appeal to website banners and landing pages. Unfortunately, the effect often has a notably false look, which will likely make it age badly. While it has already become an incredibly popular style, it's questionable whether there is enough to keep users interested.

Create your first animation Start producing dramatic effects within minutes

Open your image
01 Click Open and Navigate to the correct file, or use the File menu in the top left of the screen.

Add Motion Arrows
02 Click on what you want to animate and drag in the direction of movement. Add more arrows for greater motion.

Add anchor points
03 Select the Anchor point tool and add points around objects you'd like the movement to flow around.

Create precise masks
04 Choose Mask and paint over areas that require sharper transition between animated and unanimated.

Crop, adjust and output
05 If your image is unedited, try applying the auto adjust feature, for better exposure and colour.

HARDWARE **Price** £229 (approx) / $299.99 US **Web** palettegear.com

Photoshop creative
EDITOR'S CHOICE

PALETTE CORE
The cube with the screen on it indicates which profile is being used by the Palette Kit, and it's the one that connects to the computer via micro USB.

SLIDERS AND DIALS
Alter quantitative values such as brush hardness or volume with the slider and dial-style cubes.

ARCADE-STYLE BUTTON
This button can control simple hits like switching colour, but it can also connect to programs like Microsoft Word and Chrome to make menu shortcuts.

Palette Kit
Control Photoshop with this completely customisable set of LED add-ons

Photoshop may be fairly straightforward to pick up, but that doesn't stop us looking for ways to make it even simpler. From using actions to speed up your workflow to seeking out the quickest way to do something, we're all guilty of looking for the easiest way to use the software, and that's the thinking between Palette's incredible new invention.

The Palette Kit consists of a small cube with a screen on it, which combines with other small cubes (and cuboids) that have dials, arcade-style buttons or sliders. You can buy packs of these cubes, packaged as Starter Kits, Expert Kits or Photography Kits, and you can buy cubes individually. Each one can control a different element or tool of Photoshop, from exposure to brush hardness, meaning that you needn't remember keyboard shortcuts anymore, or even where certain features live in Photoshop's interface.

The Palette Kit is as customisable as anything within Photoshop itself, as you can click the cubes together in any shape or form. It's adaptable, versatile and you can assign whatever controls you want. You can even give specific cubes a different LED colour, and you can assign different profiles for working on different things within Photoshop. It's a breath of fresh air for anyone seeking a more hands-on approach to shortcuts, and is compatible with a mouse or graphics tablet. It can be set up in no time at all, too.

The Palette app is easy to use with the hardware as well. Altering controls with the cubes is really simple, and you can switch whole profiles – which can change every cube's control depending on the project – with the touch of a button; the only slight annoyance with the Kit is that whenever you change program, there's a big banner across the bottom of your screen to signify the profile has updated, which really isn't need.

This product isn't just useful; it's so much fun. It makes the creative process feel quick, but it also makes your work all that much more unique. If you're spending all your time on Photoshop, the Palette Kit will help it to pass a little quicker, and to feel a little better.

"You needn't remember keyboard shortcuts anymore"

The specs

Company
Palette

Additional specs
Compatible with Photoshop
Compatible with Lightroom
Compatible with Capture One
Compatible with InDesign

The verdict

10 The Palette Kit has almost limitless possibilities, incredible precision and versatility. It's the add-on you never knew you needed.

SOFTWARE **Price** £75 (approx) / $95 US **Web** studiomagic.co/

FITS NEATLY INTO PHOTOSHOP
The StudioMagic plug-ins can be compartmentalised usefully into the sidebar in Photoshop for ease of use.

SLIDERS AND PRESETS
StudioMagic is comprised of filters and sliders like most other plug-ins, and it's really simple to alter effects once they're applied.

CREATE VARYING EFFECTS
From weather effects to reflections and adding a background to a subject to grunge filters, there's something for everyone.

StudioMagic I & II

Conjure realistic effects in your photos, without having to spend the time and effort

Five great features
How can you improve your compositions with features from this add-on

Compositor
01 Add stock photos and other elements into your image with the Compositor section of StudioMagic II. This includes rainbows and birds, and can be a cool way to finish off a photo you've edited with other sections of plug-in.

Hyperzap
02 Add filters to your image using these effects. This is a good final step if you need one after adding compositing elements. Increase the intensity of the effect in order to customise the filter depending on the image.

Lighting Effex
03 Similarly to Photoshop's own Photo Filter adjustment, this part of StudioMagic II is particularly good to use with the weather effects just to give an overall warming or cooling effect to your image. You can choose your own colour to use, too.

P hotoshop is one of the most sophisticated software packages on Earth, photo-editing or otherwise, and depending on the project, you can spend hours compositing or editing photos simply because you get sucked in. Shortcuts can be your best friend in this scenario; knowing how to do something in half as many clicks, or even just one click, can dramatically cut the time you spend editing. It's one of the reasons that actions were brought into the software, after all.

StudioMagic aims to build on the principle of using actions in your work. Both versions of the plug-in offer quick solutions for what can be quite lengthy tasks. They're javascript-based plug-ins that slot either into the sidebar or Photoshop or as a tab next to your Layers palette, and can be called upon in the same way that you'd refer to an action to help get a job done quickly.

For example, if you want to create rain in Photoshop, you either have to blend in a stock photo create a new layer, add noise, use a variety of filters from the Filter Gallery, and then set to Screen, via adjusting the levels of the picture. It's a long-winded method for something that should be quite simple, and you can spend anywhere between five and 20 minutes doing this. With StudioMagic II, you can simply double click to create realistic-looking rain in an instant.

If StudioMagic sounds easy to use, that's because it is. It's rapidly quick, well labelled, and you'll have no problem finding your desired effect from the list. You can customise effects using masks with ease, and on LayerCake's website, you can find all kinds of info on the specific effects that each of these add-ons can help you with. For ease of use, StudioMagic gets an A+.

The actual effects themselves range from good to great too; there's nothing really letting them down. StudioMagic I revolves around cutting subjects out with precise **masking techniques** and adding highlights to them, before placing realistic shadows; StudioMagic II is an entirely different proposition, focusing on weather effects, lighting fixes, reflections and even composition help such as adding clouds to your images. While StudioMagic I is ideal for photographers who want to improve their portraits with expert contrast and professional cut-outs, StudioMagic II is an advanced companion for photomanipulations as well as photo edits. Both work nicely for different reasons, and can be of use to a range of Photoshop users.

If there is a bone to pick with StudioMagic, it's that StudioMagic I is a little underdeveloped – if that's something that bothers you, of course. It's actually quite nice when you're working that StudioMagic I is so similar to an action palette, as it feels part of Photoshop itself. You might be expecting a little more from an extension that you spend money on, but that's where the second instalment comes in. There are stock effects in the plug-in worth much more than the program's actually worth, and that's where the value comes from. And anyway, can you really put a price on saving that much time from your workflow?

That's what StudioMagic does best at its core. It's a time-saver, it can enhance your photos rather than just editing them, and it does so with relative ease of use. This is a couple of plug-ins that anyone from the bare beginner to the seasoned professional could benefit from; these are add-ons that you'll return to time and time again, and they'll more than pay for themselves with the amount of effort you'll save on long-winded editing tasks.

"StudioMagic is rapidly quick, well labelled, and you'll have no problem finding your desired effect from the list"

Reflections
04 Creating reflections in Photoshop can be quite an arduous task that takes a while to get right. By using StudioMagic II, you can create instant reflections ready to mask into your image, complete with ripple effect.

Season Shifter
05 A particularly good feature to use alongside the snow, rain and sunset options of StudioMagic, the Season Shifter can dramatically brighten or cool your image ready for a range of other effects to be applied.

The verdict
8 StudioMagic I is a fairly standard photo editing package, but combined with StudioMagic II, these can be really useful for editing.
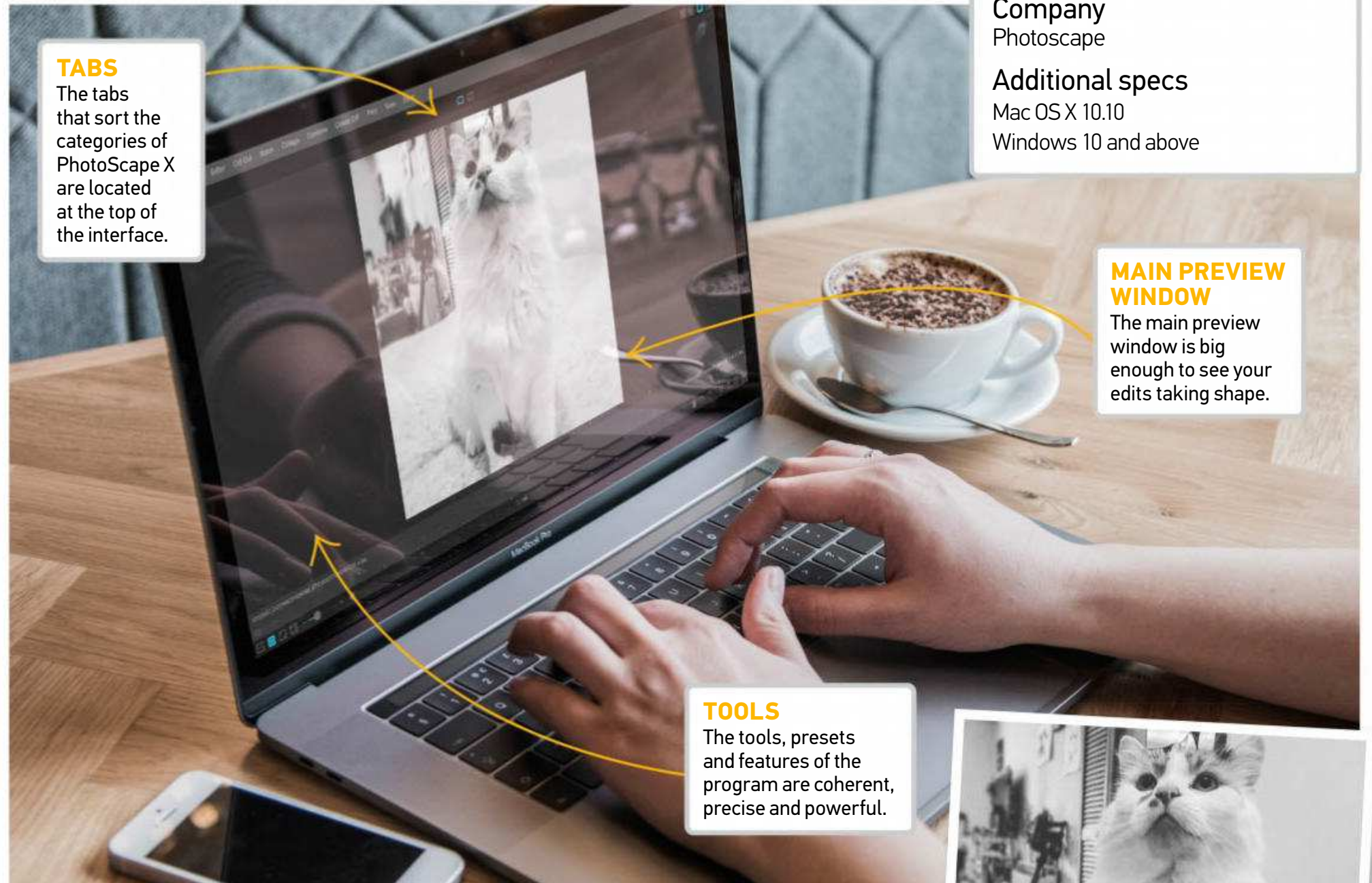
TABS
The tabs that sort the categories of PhotoScape X are located at the top of the interface.

MAIN PREVIEW WINDOW
The main preview window is big enough to see your edits taking shape.

TOOLS
The tools, presets and features of the program are coherent, precise and powerful.

The specs

Company
Photoscape

Additional specs
Mac OS X 10.10
Windows 10 and above

Photoscape X

Fix your photos with this free program that's small but mighty

There are plenty of Photoshop-esque programs out there that offer photo-editing tools for both beginners and sophisticated users. There can be all manner of reason for trying them to: sometimes you might find a tool you prefer in another program, and sometimes you can use these programs as companions to Photoshop itself.

Photoscape X is among the finest of the lot. With tools such as blemish removal, Liquify, Spot Healing and a Clone Stamp, Photoscape X is a worthy retoucher for your photos before you move into Photoshop. Equally, you can create cool effects like the Tiny Planet, Circular Crop, Frame and Mosaic. The software has a lot of novelty effects, but equally it's more than worth using in a more sophisticated manner.

Photoscape is really easy to use, and versatile for your projects. It has batch-editing capabilities, as well as tools to help you edit individual shots, and you can create gifs and collages with no fuss at all. It's perhaps a better option than Photoshop for quickly getting content out for social media, though Photoshop is far more sophisticated, and the two programs can work well in tandem.

Photoscape is extremely quick and easy to get to grips with; it has an organiser-style section at the start, and everything is split logically into tabs across the top of the program. Should you wish to purchase stickers too for the program, there's a Store tab on the far right of the interface. This is a good cross between the kind of app that you'd use on your phone and the familiarity of Photoshop.

If you're looking for something just a tier below Photoshop and you don't want to spend extortionate amounts of money on a program then it's hard to go wrong with PhotoScape. It's fun and easy to use, but can really sort the serious stuff as well as the social media posts. It's powerful for the price too, and can certainly become a valuable asset when you're editing photos. For a free download, it's definitely worth downloading and seeing whether or not it can offer you something different.

The verdict

8

High-quality software at a reasonable price, PhotoScape X is powerful without losing any of the user-friendliness that makes it so appealing.

SOFTWARE

Price Free **Website** hde7.com

SAVE IMAGE
Use the arrow icon in the bottom right to save and share your image.

EFFECTS
To find all the effects that Fotogenic offers, click on the P button in the centre of the window.

SMALLER WINDOW
Fotogenic doesn't maximise, and can sit over your Photoshop window so that you can refer back and forth between the two programs.

Fotogenic

Can this software complement Photoshop's photo-editing?

Photoshop's a little daunting sometimes. With this in mind, there are plenty of smaller, more modest apps that can create simple edits for your photos; you might just want a quick filter before putting it on social media, or retouch a model slightly before importing them into a Photoshop composition.

Fotogenic is the perfect Mac app for such editing needs, despite doing that annoying thing of spelling 'Photo' as 'Foto'. It's quick to use, easy to apply over your photos, and though the interface bounces a little irritatingly, it delivers quick and decent

The specs

Company
HDE7

Additional specs
Windows compatible
Mac compatible
Available on Google Play
Available on App store

results for your photos without fuss. The Pro version is $3.99, which isn't awful by any means, but there are some great effects that you can create with just the free features enabled.

Where Fotogenic really thrives is in quick portrait editing. It's a useful smaller app to have open, and makes things a lot more straightforward than Photoshop when it comes to make-up application, sharpening and skin smoothing. You can apply vignettes with ease, and there are photo filters to be discovered too. All in all, it's high quality, despite the fact it's free.

If you're looking for something for quicker edits than Photoshop, this could be the program for you. It's a great app too if you're someone hoping to edit quickly and post on social media. It's by no means essential, but given that it's free, it's well worth trying out. Yes, despite the fact that 'Fotogenic' should really be spelt with a 'Ph'.

The verdict

7 A fairly standard photo-editing package, but one that has a purpose on your desktop, Fotogenic can be a great companion for Photoshop.

APP

Price Free
Web cyberlink.com

The specs

Company
Cyberlink
Additional specs
iOS 9.2 or later • Android 4 or later

Photodirector Photo Editor

Meet the photo editor that can do almost everything Photoshop can

Cyberlink's Photodirector app is one of the more powerful photo editors available for your phone. You could see it as an extra Photoshop add-on to use on the move: yes, it's an extender.

It contains all the basic photo-editing abilities that most apps have, such as saturation and tonal tweaking tools, but it has features far more polished than the average phone app. You can remove objects from photos with content-aware technology and there's an intuitive skin retoucher too; the Android version contains a Curves-like tool just like Photoshop itself, and there are HDR effects that can make your images pop with colour and texture.

Photodirector is easy to use, too. Though it's powerful, it's not too complex for a beginner, and the arrangement of the interface is perfect.

SLIDER
Control anything in your picture using the sliders. The settings are simple to use and can create pinpoint results easily.

The verdict

9 A great app for when you can't get to Photoshop, it's easy to use and sophisticated enough for even the most advanced photo editors.

Art from the Imaginarium

Gary Nicholls on steampunk photography, the importance of detail and dedication, and how he creates his work

g-n-p.co.uk   @artimaginarium

God is in the detail when it comes to Photoshop work, but Gary Nicholls has really taken that to a whole new level. The photographer has spent 40 hours a week on his *Imaginarium* project – a fine-art photo book – for the last six years.

We asked him about how he creates his work, his tips for fellow Photoshop users and what he's up to next.

How long have you been a Photoshop user?

I started using Photoshop properly in 2007, after buying my first entry-level Canon DSLR. I now own a Canon 5D Mk IV as I need the resolution to create my art. I use Photoshop on average for 40 hours a week. Photoshop enables my imagination to come to life and I never use stock images. All the images I use I have personally taken.

Have you always been into art?

I studied design technology and technical drawing at school (and later became a teacher in those subjects), which meant I was not allowed to take Art as an option. My father had taught me to paint. He is a great advocate that every child needs hobbies! I later took art night classes at Southend Technical College.

How does your work start? Do you create a sketch first, or just build an image and go from there?

Neither of those! The ideas are probably the easiest part of the process: I eat, sleep and drink them. They come to me at odd times and I "see" them completely finished in my mind's eye. In order to find the setting I have "seen", I search the internet for locations, then travel there, wherever in the world that may be. The end result has to replicate the image I first "see" for that picture, so researching the location has always been paramount. Finally, I then organise a studio shoot with the characters so that I have full control over the lighting.

What are your favourite Photoshop tools?

Firstly Camera Raw. I use this a number of times through the process, creating different effects. Then a Nik Colour plugin to paint in detail where I need it. When dropping in the subjects, I use the Selection Tool and Refine Edge. In terms of finishing the image, Hue/Saturation and Colour Lookup are used in every image, to create my "look". I do not use Frequency Separation to edit skin, preferring instead to use High Pass Filter, Gaussian Blur and Layer Style. Liquify, Colour Dodge and the various scaling and distortion tools I use in most images and I love displacement mapping. I only use Photoshop, not Lightroom.

Do you have any top tips you'd recommend for how to create work like yours?

Only learn the Photoshop technique you need to create the image you are working on. Write your "new" technique down in a notebook: this is crucial as Photoshop is such a vast program, you will never learn it all. To begin creating a fine art image, start by writing a random sentence. For example: "The dog sat watching the girl in the blue Victorian dress, walking up the crumbling wall while carrying a basket of flowers." This will then generate an image in your mind. Because you are close to that sentence, the image will already be there in your mind.

So do you see yourself as an artist or a photographer?

Hard to actually give it a name, but I am an artist with a camera. My style is a cinemagraphic one based on detail, from corner to corner of an image, 'with an old masters' look but a surreal feel.

Your style must have evolved from your arty beginnings to more photographic images now.

My style evolved through my workflow, trying new techniques and adapting them

to create a look that I like, working layer after layer in the same way the old masters did, to create the image. My style is created using light, not focus, because the images are so detailed. I watch period dramas to understand how to create a cinemagraphic look to the finished image and study the lighting used.

You've been working on this project for six years. What's coming up next for you?

I am currently working on the second volume of *The Imaginarium*, which will be completed next year. After that, the final volume should take a further two years. Given it is a fine art story, I have to write it too. However, I will be travelling the globe to visit as many steampunk groups as possible in multiple countries to create a 4,000-person image, with no cloning. So the final book might take a little longer!

The Screaming Tree The background is Yosemite, in the USA. The tree is made up of multiple women, with a bark texture overlaid using displacement mapping and Liquify.

All images © Gary Nicholls

The Street Firstly I travelled the UK to photograph the 37 buildings, then photographed 150 people in the studio. There were 14 layers to every person, with another three layers of shadows to each. I used the Distortion Tool and Scale Tool to correct perspective.

The Magic Waters Using Liquify and the Distortion Tool, I created the water dress, making sure the ripples matched what would be happening in reality.

All In I have used Knoll Light Factory to enhance the green light, Nik Detail Enhancer on sections of costume and finished with Colour Lookup: teal and orange at 15%.

When We Dance Angels Run And Hide The reflections needed to be added using Liquify. Again, Detail Enhancer was needed, and light rays were created using a brush, Gaussian Blur and increasing the grain in the rays to create the dust look. The ballroom was actually multiple shots blended in HDR.
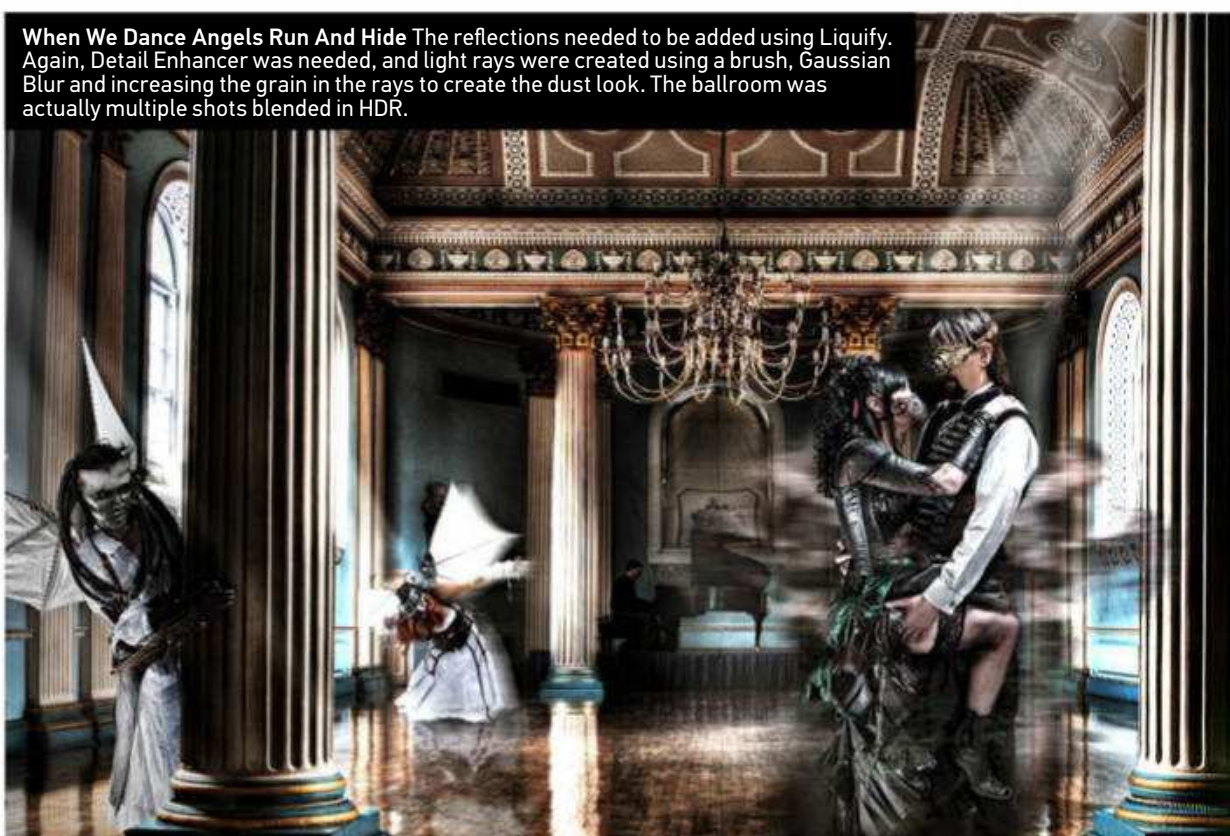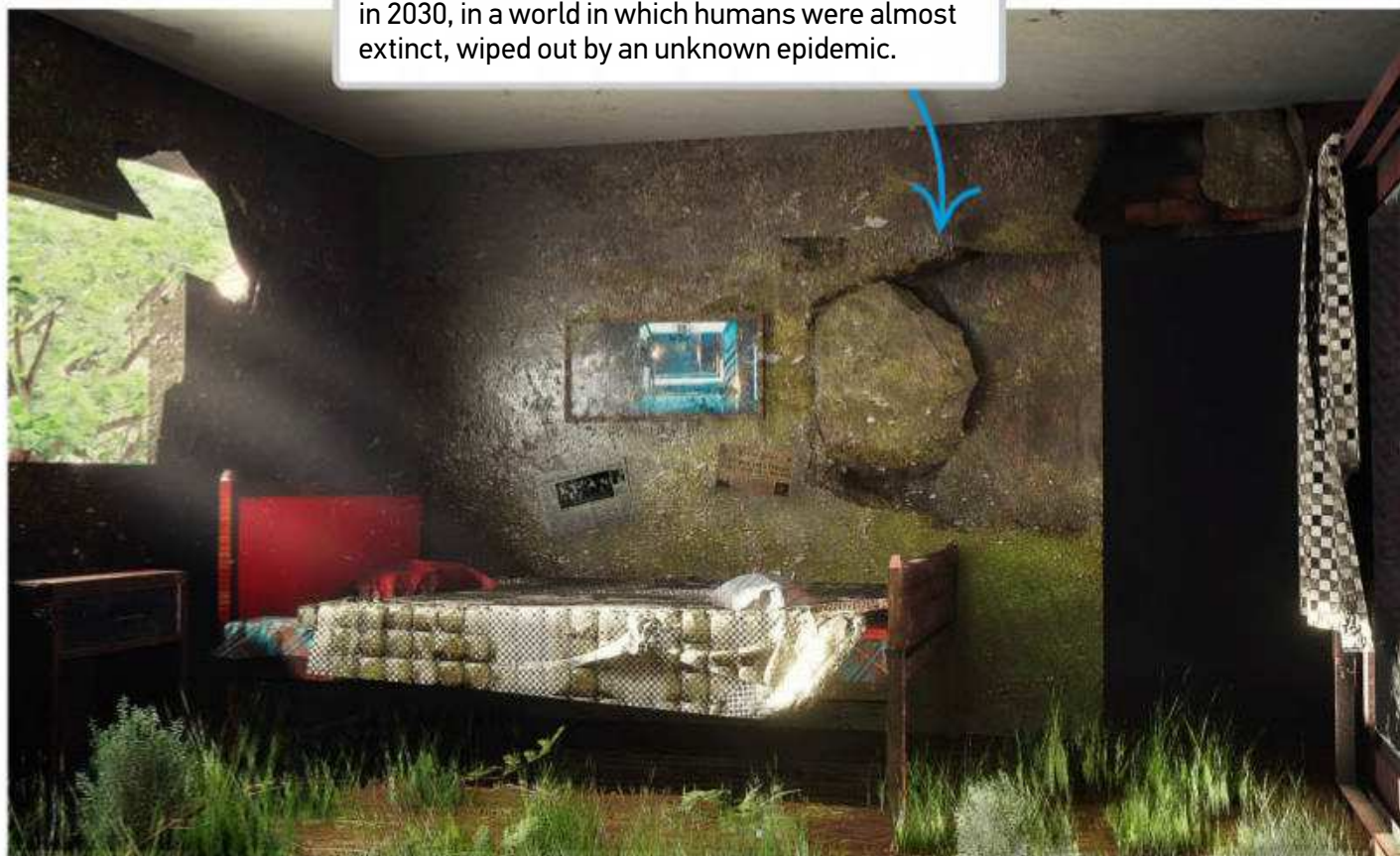
Alice's Night Circus I had a full day's circus shoot in the studio, with the performers going through their acts. Cutting out the elements was time-consuming. I create my look by making adjustments in Camera Raw to a combined layer, after all the editing is completed.

Planet -14b

Mystic Elf

Mauricio Xavier

My name is Mauricio Xavier and I live in the Brazilian city of São Paulo. I am passionate about digital art. I always like to learn and share any new techniques I discover – it has become one of my favourite hobbies! My passion for digital art began when I first used Photoshop, I was just amazed by the massive amount of tools and the myriad creations that can be made with this program.

Spirit

MAGIC PLANET
This was a 3D piece with digital painting. The idea was to create a planet that is saturated by magic; this piece of art was also created and inspired by the game *No Man's Sky*.

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