



Photoshop Mastery

Taking Photoshop to the next level

■ BY BEN WILLMORE

Lasso Tool Tips

Some think the Lasso is a hand-operated tool that's best left for when the more automated tools fall short; however, armed with a few choice tips, you might find that the fusty old Lasso is anything but antiquated and has more going for it than you can imagine.

Did you know that there are actually three different Lasso tools: the Lasso, the Polygonal Lasso, and the Magnetic Lasso? Just click-and-hold your mouse on the Lasso tool icon in the Tool-box to access the other versions. I suggest that you stick with the Magnetic Lasso tool, as it has the capabilities of all three of the Lasso tools combined.



Auto-cling

The Magnetic Lasso tool makes selecting an object easy. Just press the Caps Lock key to transform your cursor into a circle with a crosshair, then place the crosshair on the edge of the object you'd like to select, click the mouse button once to start, and then drag around the object (there's no need to hold the mouse button down). The Magnetic Lasso will constantly search within its circular cursor trying to find an edge to cling to so you just need to keep the edge within the circle.



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Width determines cling zone

The Width setting up in the Options Bar determines the size of the circle

and therefore the "cling" zone. You can change the Width setting while dragging around the edge of an object by pressing the bracket keys ([and]) to respectively increase or decrease the Width. If you have a well-defined edge, you can use a larger width setting and move faster; for a less distinct edge, use a smaller "brush" and carefully follow the contours.

Edge Contrast

The Edge Contrast setting determines how much contrast there must be between subject and background for it to be considered a "clingable" edge. The higher the setting, the more contrast is needed to get the tool to cling to an object. Use higher settings for objects that are quite different than their backgrounds and lower settings when the subject and background are very similar.

Working with anchor points

As you drag around the edge of an object, Photoshop will deposit square points on the edge of the object you're tracing. Those points anchor the selection, preventing you from backing up unless you press Delete to remove the last anchor point. The Frequency setting determines how often anchor points will be added. Use high settings for intricate edges and low settings for simple, smooth edges.

When working in tight quarters, the Magnetic Lasso tool has a tendency to suddenly jump from the edge of one

object to another, which can often mess up an area that you've already dragged across (if it hasn't been anchored yet). In that case, you can manually add an anchor by clicking the mouse button while the crosshair is on the edge of the object you're tracing.

Use Option/Alt for other tools

If you find that the Magnetic Lasso is having trouble clinging to an edge, you can quickly access the other Lasso tools by holding the Option (PC: Alt) key. With that key held, you can create straight-line segments with the Polygonal Lasso by clicking in multiple areas (without dragging), or drag to create a freeform shape with the normal Lasso tool.



Finishing your selection

When you're done making a selection with the Magnetic Lasso, double-click to finish the selection (or press Escape to abort the selection). Once you get used to working with the Magnetic Lasso tool, there will be no reason to ever manually trace an object—it might help keep you sane. ■

This article was adapted from *How to Wow: Photoshop for Photography* by Jack Davis and Ben Willmore. Ben, who is an inductee into the Photoshop Hall of Fame, is author of *Photoshop CS2 Studio Techniques* and *Up to Speed: Photoshop CS2*. Find out more about Ben at www.wherisben.com.