

# Photoshop Mastery

Taking Photoshop to the next level

■ BY BEN WILLMORE

## Smart Solutions with Smart Objects

The Smart Object feature in Photoshop CS2 can solve many unique problems. By encapsulating one or more layers into a smart object, the layers will function as if they've been temporarily merged together, making Photoshop treat them as a single unit, opening up a world of possibilities.

Let's look at how smart objects can solve three frustrating problems and give you more creative control over your imagery.



### Warping multiple layers

Choosing Edit>Transform>Warp will allow you to bend a layer into all sorts of interesting shapes. The problems start when you have a complex image with more than one layer selected (for example, our logo is made from a total of five layers). The Warp command will only warp multiple text layers and will be unavailable if more than one pixel-based layer is available. The solution is to choose Layer>Smart Objects>Group Into New Smart Object and then attempt to warp the result, which will be treated as a single layer.

### Warping layer effects

Another common problem with warping is that any layer effects (Drop Shadow, Bevel & Emboss, etc.) that have been applied to a layer won't be warped. It's as if the effects are applied as an afterthought. By grouping the layer into a smart object, you'll cause Photoshop to treat the layer and the

effects applied to it as one element that will be warped at the same time.

In this example, we created a solid-colored rectangle using the Shape tool and then attempted to enhance it by choosing Layer>Layer Style>Pattern Overlay to attach a layer effect to the active layer. To get to the woven pattern used here, in the Pattern Overlay dialog, click on the Pattern preview and click on the down-facing arrow to bring up the pattern palette. Next, click on the right-facing arrow, choose Patterns from the drop-down menu, click the Append button, then scroll down until you see the pattern you want, and click OK.



From left to right: before warping; warping normal layer; result of grouping layer into a smart object before warping

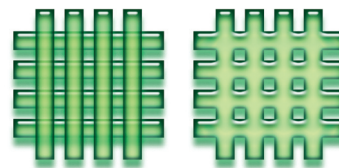
We started to run into a problem after choosing Edit>Transform Path>Warp. (Note: It's called "Transform Path" because we're working on a Shape layer, which is defined by a path). As we warped the layer, the overall shape of the layer was changing but the pattern that we applied in the last step remained static. To solve the problem, press Escape to cancel the Transform, choose Layer>Smart Objects>Group Into New Smart Object to convert the active layer into a smart object, and then warp the result. This caused the pattern and the Shape layer to be treated as a single unit.

### Layer effects on multiple layers

On occasion, you may need to apply layer effects to more than one layer but have the

layers treated as a single element instead of applying the effects to each individual layer. In this example, we have a total of eight layers that contain simple solid-colored rectangles that overlap. With all those layers selected, choose Window>Styles and click on the preset layer style that resembles a green jelly blob. This causes Photoshop to apply the effect to all eight layers individually.

To get Photoshop to treat those layers as a single unit, first choose Edit>Undo Apply Style to get rid of the effects, then choose Layer>Smart Objects>Group Into New Smart Object to group them into a smart object and then apply the style to the resulting layer.



Each layer with style applied (left); All eight layers treated as one smart object (right)

When working this way, you have to double-click on the Smart Object's thumbnail in the Layers palette to edit the original layers that were used to create the smart object (they'll appear in a separate document window). After finishing your edits, type Command-S (PC: Control-S) to save and then Close the window (Command-W [PC: Control-W]) to update the document in which the smart object is being used. This takes a little getting used to, but it's worth it when you consider the problems you can solve by grouping layers into a smart object. ■

Ben Willmore is the best-selling author of Adobe Photoshop CS2 Studio Techniques and Up to Speed: Photoshop CS2, as well as co-author of How to Wow: Photoshop for Photographers. Ben spends many of his days as a "digital nomad" in his 40' motorcoach. Learn about his latest adventure at [www.wherisben.com](http://www.wherisben.com)