



Photoshop Mastery

Taking Photoshop to the next level

■ BY BEN WILLMORE

Efficiency with Curves

If you use Curves regularly, you'll be happy to know that there are several intriguing features waiting to be discovered that can increase your productivity, precision, and happiness. Using these tricks on a daily basis will easily double your speed when working with Curves.

You probably know that when using Curves, if you hold the Command (PC: Ctrl) key and click within an image, it adds a dot on the curve that's based on the brightness level of the area on which you clicked. But did you know that when you add the Shift key to the above technique, a dot is added to all of the color curves (Red, Green, Blue, or Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, Black) that are found under the Channel pop-up menu at the top of the dialog?

The position of the dots is based on the numbers found in the Info palette. Be careful when using this technique, as you may run into a bug if you click on an area that contains an RGB value of zero. This will cause Photoshop to highlight the wrong dot: Instead of the dot representing zero, it will make the 255 dot active.

To switch between the individual Channel curves, press-and-hold the Command key (PC: Ctrl key) and type a number from 1–3 for Red, Green, and Blue, respectively, (or 1–4 for CMYK) and ~ for the composite (RGB or CMYK) curve.

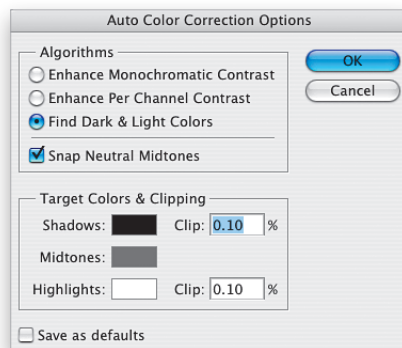
Once you've added some dots to a curve, you can press Control (PC: Right-click) and then Tab to cycle through the dots (add Shift to move backward in the rotation). Another way to change which dot is active is to Shift-click when your mouse is close enough to a dot that your cursor changes into a crosshair with arrows. This will select the dot that's closest to the cursor. Once you've selected one or more dots, you can use the Arrow keys to reposition the dots (hold Shift to move them in larger increments), or press the Delete (PC: Backspace) key to remove the points. To move more than one dot at

a time, Shift-click on each dot that you'd like to be active and Shift-click a dot that's already active to deselect it.

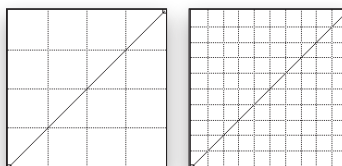
Options

If you frequently use the choices found when you click the Curves Options button, then consider using the following menu commands in the Image>Adjustments menu (*Note:* Each also has a keyboard shortcut listed in the menu):

- Auto Levels is the same as using Enhance Per Channel Contrast
- Auto Contrast is the same as using Enhance Monochromatic Contrast
- Auto Color is the same as using Find Dark & Light Colors



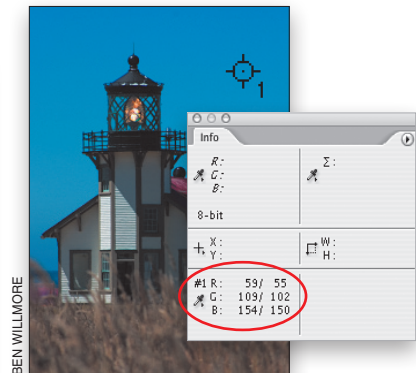
If you'd prefer a more detailed grid (one with lines that are in 10% increments instead of the default 25%), hold the Option (PC: Alt) key and click anywhere within the grid area.



If you've messed up the curve so much that you'd like to start over, hold the Option (PC: Alt) key, and click on the Cancel button, which is relabeled Reset.

Once you've applied a curve to one layer (using the Image>Adjustments menu), you can switch to a different layer, hold the Option (PC: Alt) key, and choose Curves again to apply the same settings to the second layer.

If you need to keep track of what's happening to the RGB (or CMYK) numbers that make up an area, Shift-click within the image window while the Curves dialog is open to add a Color Sampler to the image.



This will also provide an extra readout in the Info palette that includes two values separated by a slash: The number on the left indicates the value before the adjustment, and the number on the right indicates the post-adjustment value. Once you're done using a Color Sampler, you can hold Shift-Command (PC: Shift-Ctrl) and click on the sampler a second time to remove it from the image (this must be done while the Curves dialog is still open). ■

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 adventures at www.wherisben.com.