



# Photoshop Mastery

Taking Photoshop to the next level

■ BY BEN WILLMORE

## Toning Down a Harsh Shadow

On-camera flashes often cause harsh shadows to appear in the background of your photos. Lightening those dark, semi-soft shadows can be a real challenge unless you're comfortable with Channels. Here's how you can precisely select a harsh shadow so it can be modified for a more pleasing result.

I took this photo at a New Years' party with a point-and-shoot camera, and the on-camera flash produced a shadow that was too dark and severe for my taste. I wanted to lighten it but had trouble getting an accurate selection—until I used Channels, that is.

An Alpha channel is a black-and-white image that represents a selection where white indicates a selected area and black indicates a nonselected area. If the channel contains a soft transition between the solid-black and solid-white areas, then the resulting selection has a feathered edge. What follows are the steps used to create a channel that not only matched the shape of the shadow, but also had a feathered edge that matched the soft quality of the original shadow.



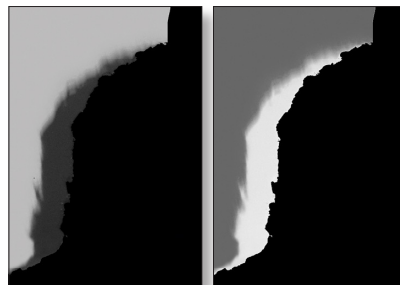
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**Select General Shadow Area.** Start with the Magic Wand tool (W) and using the default settings, click on the shadow to see if this tool could select some of the shadow without getting any of the subject's hair. The first click with the Magic Wand selected a small portion of the hair, so let's lower the Tolerance setting in the Options Bar and try again. When we find the Tolerance setting that allows us to select part of the

shadow without selecting any hair, hold the Shift key and click in multiple areas of the shadow and background to add to the selection. This produces a selection that includes the shadow and much of the surrounding background.

**Paste Shadow into a Channel.** Next, choose Edit>Copy, and then Window>Channels to open the Channels palette. Click on the Create New Channel icon to make a new empty channel (which starts out full of solid black). Then select Edit>Paste to deposit the shadow into the channel.

**Invert the Pasted Shadow.** Our goal is to turn the pasted shadow image into a useful selection. We really need the background to be black and the selection to be white, but after pasting the shadow into the channel, we have almost the opposite. With the selection still active, choose Image>Adjustments>Invert which makes the shadow bright and the background dark.



Shadow pasted into a new channel (left) and result of inverting the channel (right)

**Adjust Channel with Levels.** Next, let's select Image>Adjustments>Levels, click on the



The shadow is now solid white and the background solid black.

Result of lightening the shadow using the selection created in an Alpha channel.

White Eyedropper and then click on the shadow area to force it to white. Then, click on the Black Eyedropper, click on the background to make it black, and click OK.

**Load Selection and Adjust Shadow.** The final step is to Command-click (PC: Control-click) on the channel preview thumbnail in the Channels palette to get a selection. After loading that channel, we now have a perfect selection of the shadow, including its soft edge. Click on the topmost channel to go back to the full-color image. Now lighten the shadow by choosing Image>Adjustments>Levels and moving the lower left slider to the right. Finally, deselect by choosing Command-D (PC: Control-D). ■

Ben Willmore is the author of *Up to Speed: Photoshop CS2 and Photoshop CS Studio Techniques*, and co-author of *How to Wow: Photoshop for Photography*. Currently, Ben is on tour with his "Photoshop for Photographers" seminar. To find out more and get a bunch of free tips, visit [www.wherisben.com](http://www.wherisben.com).