



# Photoshop Mastery

Little things make a big difference when working in Photoshop

■ BY BEN WILLMORE

## Let's Get Visual

Have you noticed that certain areas of Photoshop force you to think with numbers when you might prefer to work visually? Let's look at what we can do to get around those confusing numbers so you can really see what you're doing.

When working with selections, you can choose Select>Feather to make the edge of the selection fade out, or choose one of the options from the Select>Modify menu to manipulate its shape, but none of these commands give you a visual preview of what's happening to your selection. With some clever maneuvering of Photoshop, we can get those commands to do a better job of showing us, visually, what's really going on.

Let's take a look at a different way of making a selection, where you aren't limited to using the standard selection tools (Lasso, Marquee, etc.). To enter this alternate state, make a selection and then type "q" to turn on Quick Mask mode. With Quick Mask on, the areas that were selected will look normal and the rest of your image will be covered with a red overlay.



Now you can modify your selection with the Paintbrush tool. If you paint with black, you'll add to the red overlay, which will reduce the selected area. Paint with white to remove the red overlay, which will add to your selected area. If you need a feathered edge, just switch to a soft-edged brush and the mask will fade out wherever you paint. When you're done changing the selection, type "q" again to turn off Quick Mask mode and you'll get back your modified "marching ants" selection.

Now let's look at how to use Quick Mask mode to enhance or replace many of the commands that are found under the Select menu in Photoshop.

Let's start with the Feather command. When feathering a selection, Photoshop asks for a number. But we don't want to think in numbers, we just want a good preview of the selection so we can make an informed decision about how much feathering we want. So, try this instead: Make a selection, type "q" to turn on Quick Mask mode, and then choose Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur. This will do the same thing as the Feather command, but you'll have a slider that you can move around and you'll see a visual preview of your image that will make it much easier to see how you're affecting the selection. Once you're done, type "q" again and you'll have feathered the selection.



To replace the commands found under the Select>Modify menu, we're going to have to try out some more filters while we're in Quick Mask mode. You can replace the Contract command with the Filter>Other>Minimum command. The opposite of that would be the Expand command, which can be replaced by applying the Filter>Other>Maximum command. In addition, Smooth can be replaced with the Filter>Noise>Median command.

All of those replacements work just fine as long as you start with a selec-

tion, type "q" before applying the filters I mentioned, and then type "q" again to turn Quick Mask off again.

I don't often use the Select>Border command because it introduces problems into an otherwise perfect selection. First off, Border will automatically feather a selection without giving you any visual hint of what it's doing. Secondly, Border will round off the corners of any rectangular selections.

If you like the Border command but would prefer that it didn't feather your selection, then go ahead and use it but do the following to remove the feathered edge: Type "q," then choose Image>Adjust>Levels, change the three input settings to 125, 1.0, and 133, and then type "q" again to get back to your selection.

If you'd like to completely replace the Border command, then try replacing it with the Filter>Stylize>Glowing Edges command and set Brightness to 20 and Smoothness to 1. Now you can adjust the edge width setting to control how large a border you'd like. That will prevent the corners of your selection from becoming rounded and it will give you a non-feathered edge. If you'd prefer rounded corners, then just turn up the Smoothness setting. This won't give you a preview in the main image window, but you will see a preview within the filter dialog box. ■

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