

# Photoshop Mastery

Little things make a big difference when working in Photoshop

■ BY BEN WILLMORE

## The Sky's the Limit

Photographers go to no end to produce a perfect sky. They watch the weather, change their sleeping habits, stock up on film and filters, and then wait for the right moment to arrive. But if all that still results in a lackluster sky, you can count on Photoshop to add the missing sparkle.

The key to a great-looking sky is often a matter of contrast and saturation. If the colors are bland and the image looks flat, then that's exactly how people will describe the image. With a little experimentation in Photoshop you can turn even the dreariest sky into a masterpiece.

The first thing you'll need to do is isolate the sky by making a selection. The great thing about the technique we'll be using is that your initial selection doesn't have to be perfect. I often start with the Marquee tool (M) and create a selection that covers the majority of the sky but doesn't touch any other element in the image. Then, to expand that selection to include the rest of the sky, I choose Select>Grow. If that doesn't do the job, I might resort to holding Shift and clicking with the Magic Wand (W) on the rest of the sky until the whole thing is selected.

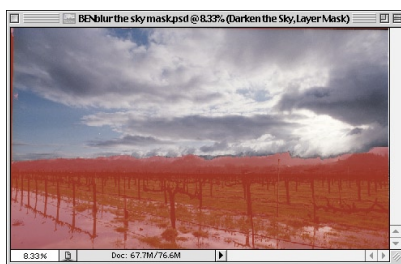
Now, let's add some contrast to the sky using one of Photoshop's blending modes. Choose Layer>New Fill Layer>Solid Color. In the dialog box that appears, name the layer something like "Darken the Sky," set the mode to Color Burn, and then click OK. When asked for a color, choose white by typing 0 in the H and S fields and then enter 100 in the B field. Next, with the B field active, use the Down Arrow key to change that white to a shade of gray (add Shift to make larger changes) and watch the sky as the contrast starts to increase and the colors become more vivid.



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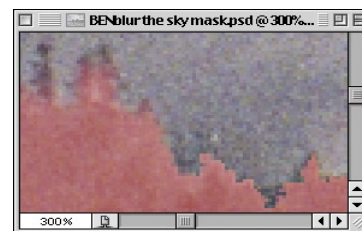
(Left) The original image; (Right) Result of darkening the sky using Color Burn mode

Now that the sky has a little more personality, it's time to check if the selection we started with was accurate enough. (Make sure the solid color layer you just created is active before you try this.) If you press the \ key, Photoshop will show you which areas of the image were changed by covering the rest of the image with a red overlay.



Typing \ will turn on the red overlay.

If you notice areas where the transition from red to normal looks a bit too harsh, then paint across that area with Photoshop's Blur tool (R). You can also change where the red shows up by painting with black (to add to the red areas) or white (to remove red). Just remember that the red area represents the areas that will not be darkened by the layer you just created. You can also choose Filter>Other>Minimum, or Filter>Other>Maximum to push the red area toward or away from the sky area, respectively.



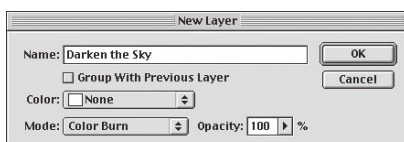
The left side of this image was softened using Photoshop's Blur tool.

If you decide later that you'd like to change the settings you used to darken the sky, you can double-click on the shade of gray that shows up on the left side of the solid color layer in the Layers palette. Shades of gray will darken the image without shifting the colors of the image. I often like to work with a bluish-gray to shift the color of the sky. Be careful, though; otherwise you'll end up with overly blue clouds, which won't look realistic.

If you find that the color of the sky might look better with a boost of saturation then Command-click (PC: Control-click) on the mask that appears on the right side of the solid color layer and then choose Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Hue/Saturation and bump up the Saturation setting.

This technique works best when the sky varies in brightness and color. It won't do much to a solid blue sky, but feed it a few wispy clouds and you'll be amazed at how dramatic a change you can make. ■

Ben Willmore is founder of Digital Mastery, a Colorado-based training and consulting company that presents the national seminar tour of "Photoshop Mastery." He's also author of Photoshop 7 Studio Techniques. Check out the free Photoshop tips and tutorials at Ben's Web site, [www.digitalmastery.com](http://www.digitalmastery.com).



Create a Solid Color layer set to Color Burn.