



Photoshop Mastery

Taking Photoshop to the next level

■ BY BEN WILLMORE

Putting the Flow Back in Workflow

Do you sharpen before or after retouching? Color-correct before or after cropping your image? Does it really matter? The answers to these questions can dramatically affect the quality of your work. Let me share with you the workflow that I use when manipulating an image in Photoshop.

First, straighten the image to make sure horizon lines are truly horizontal. If you need to crop something out of the image, do it now so that you optimize the contrast for the areas you'll be using. When cropping images, think only of the composition and not the final print format. You can always make a more precise crop after adjusting the image and you can always change your mind, because you didn't commit to a particular size or width/height proportion. To maintain as much information as possible, click the Clear button in the Options Bar before cropping an image.

Adjustments

The first adjustment I apply is color correction because it will often radically change the contrast and brightness of the image. If the contrast change is too great, then use the Color blend mode to prevent the color correction from messing with the brightness of the image (Edit>Fade; or in the Layers palette for an Adjustment Layer).

Next, we'll adjust the overall tonality of the image using Curves. If you don't want to shift the colors in the image, use the Luminosity blend mode. If you find that you can't nail the look you want with a single Curves adjustment, make additional adjustments using selections and masks.

After the overall color and tonality are where they should be, move on to adjusting Hue/Saturation.

Retouching

When using one of the retouching tools, I create an empty layer on top of the layer stack and then turn on the Use All

Layers checkbox in the Options Bar. Now, the tool can copy from the entire image (regardless of what layer it's on) and place the retouched result on the active, empty layer.

Your image should be looking pretty good by now, so start to think about and apply any creative effects (filters, drop shadows, etc.). When you're happy with the results, it's time to save your layered image in .psd format so as to retain as much information as possible. I archive this file and think of it as my "master project file."

Post-archive workflow

Now we'll duplicate the image (Image>Duplicate) and start creating files that are specific to different sizes and output devices. We're finished with the production and creative changes to the file and we've archived the layered version, so let's flatten the layers now (Layer>Flatten Image). Everything from this point on will go faster because now we'll be working with a smaller file size.

Flattening the image will often produce a better-looking end result because the act of combining layers is performed in RGB mode, which is a much simpler mode mathematically than CMYK mode. If the image is to be printed on a commercial printing press, however, we need to convert the image to CMYK mode (Image>Mode>CMYK Color) at this stage.

After duplicating the image, let's return to the Crop tool (C). In the Options Bar, enter the Width and Height print size of the image and specify the optimal Resolution setting for the specific output device you plan to use. Only after resiz-

ing will I sharpen the image for a specific type of output. If there's any color shift on the edge of objects after sharpening the image, choose Edit>Fade Unsharp Mask and select Luminosity from the Mode pop-up menu.

Save flat file for print or Internet

For print, I'll save a non-layered image as a TIFF file to give to someone else for output or use. If you need to send an image to someone via email, however, skip the second crop step and instead zoom in (or out) on the image until it's the size you want. Next, choose Image>Image Size, change the Width pop-up menu to percent, and turn on the Resample Image checkbox. Now enter the percentage that shows up at the bottom-left corner of your image.

Before saving the image, choose Image>Mode>Convert to Profile, set the Profile pop-up menu to sRGB, and click OK. This will ensure that the colors in the image will look similar in both Photoshop and most image viewers (email or Web browser).

Finally, save the image as a JPEG file using File>Save for Web.

With this workflow, you'll end up with one master file that you can always return to if you need to make changes to the image, and multiple TIFF and JPEG files set up for specific sizes and output devices. ■

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