

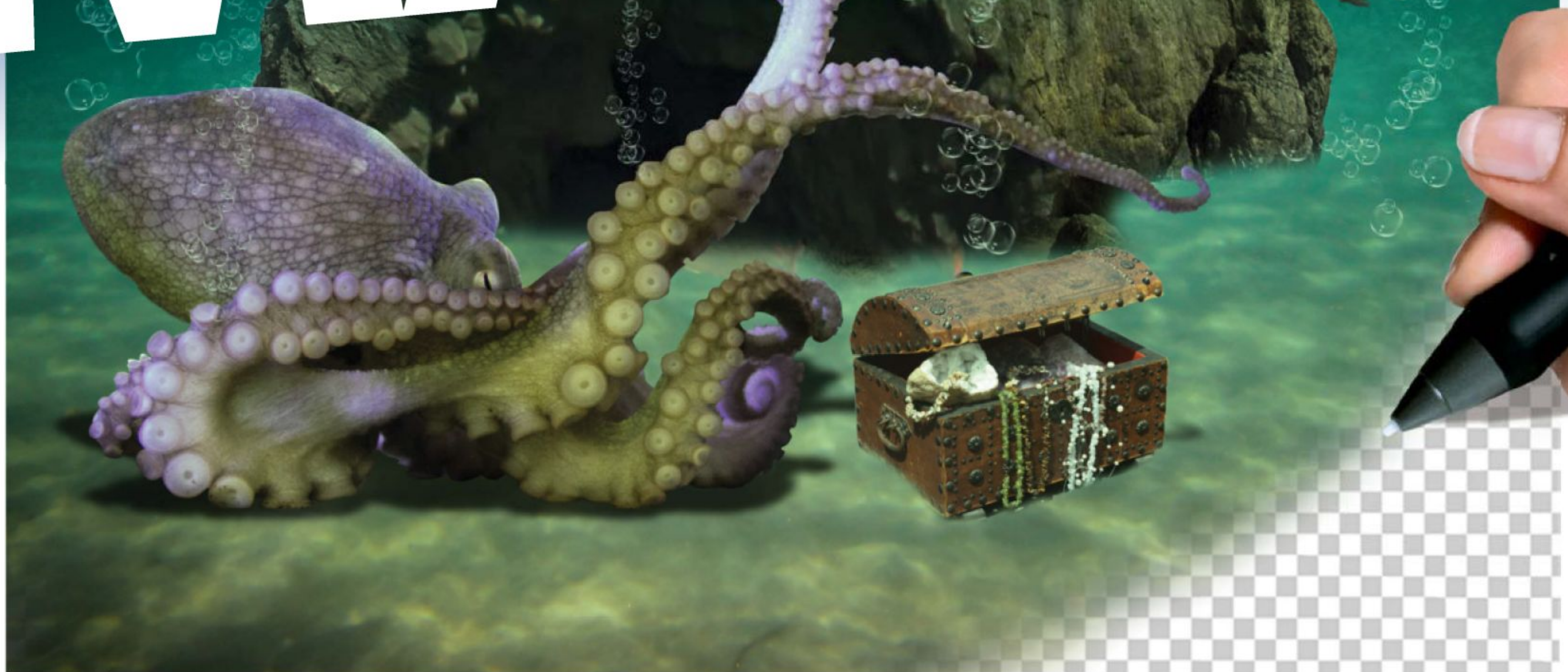
Genius Guide



A comprehensive masterclass in becoming an instant expert



THE POWER OF MASKS





Welcome



Want to take your Photoshop skills to the next level? Then you've come to the right place! This Genius Guide will show you just how powerful masks are and why we simply cannot live without them. If you think you know it all, think again! First, we'll show you

how even the most complex-looking pieces of art are actually very easy to achieve thanks to masks, and reveal tricks on how you can get the most out of them. Then check out the step-by-step guides and start creating your own masterpieces, from grunge portraits and fantasy landscapes to abstract art and underwater cities. We've got it all covered here. Also, make sure you visit blog.photoshopcreative.co.uk/tutorial-files and click on the drop-down menu to access the free resources that go with the tutorials.

Sarah Banks

Sarah Banks **Deputy Editor**
sarah.banks@imagine-publishing.co.uk





Contents

Make art easy with masks

Discover how masks can transform ordinary images

Create a grunge portrait

See how masks can work in harmony with selections

Build a fantasy flying island

Combine masks with layers and distortions

Craft abstract silhouettes

Use clipping masks with adjustment layers for fun effects

Learn to edit out of bounds

Manipulate masks to make objects jump from the page

Make cool graffiti art

Merge photos, paint effects and add 3D text

Creatively frame a portrait

Learn how to take clipping masks to the next level

Apply mystical smoke effects

Combine masks with custom brushes and blend modes

Make an underwater city

Discover the true power of layer masks



MAKE ART EASY WITH MASKS

Discover how even the most complex-looking pieces of art are actually very simple – all thanks to masks

It may sound like an overstatement, but the truth is that layer masks are essential for editing cleanly in Photoshop. Almost any project you can think of will benefit from you using them, as they help keep your layers neat, pictures realistic, selections accurate and adjustments subtle.

The best thing about masks, though, is that they're extremely easy to use. All they do is add a black-and-white layer to your existing layer. White pixels are visible, the black pixels are not. In essence, masks control what you see on each layer; if you're going to cut out a subject, they're useful for keeping the edges believable, or if you're looking to add a layer adjustment, the mask can focus it to a specific point in the picture.

Because masks are so simple and user-friendly, they're sometimes taken for granted in amazing pieces of artwork. Often, the most basic features of Photoshop are the most powerful, and masks are what make artwork believable; you need them when adding adjustment layers, crafting compositions or even tidying the edges of your brush strokes. Get the most out of your masks, and you'll get even more out of your artwork.

Like so many simple tools, masks can be used in wildly creative ways, as well as for sensible photo-editing projects. Once you've grasped the basics, there's limitless possibility for the artwork you can create. Just click on the Mask icon within the Layers panel, and delve into a world of creative and non-destructive editing.

ADJUSTMENT LAYERS

Use masks with adjustment layers to keep them subtle, or bring out their effects in a specific place on your picture.

GROUPS

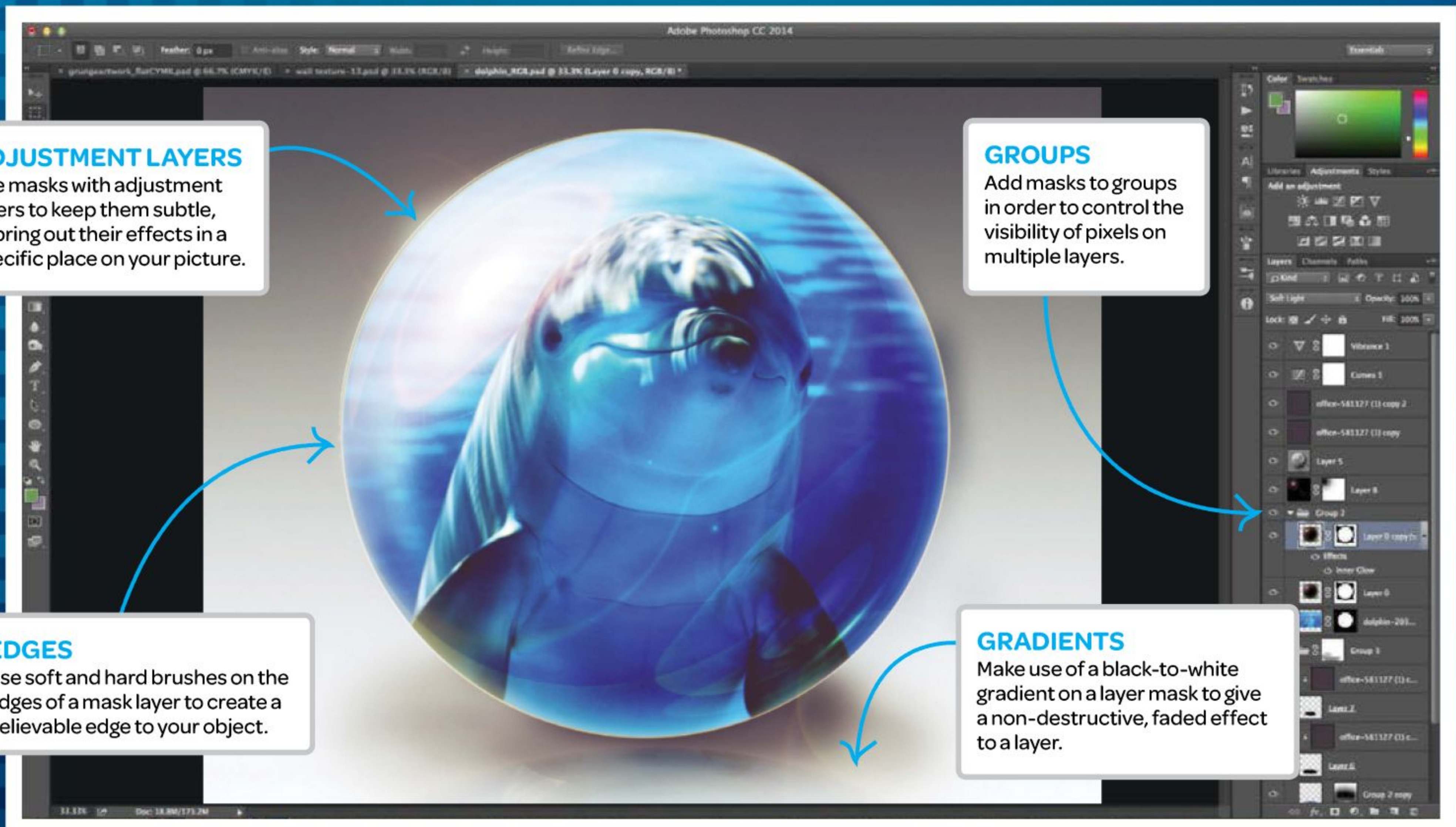
Add masks to groups in order to control the visibility of pixels on multiple layers.

EDGES

Use soft and hard brushes on the edges of a mask layer to create a believable edge to your object.

GRADIENTS

Make use of a black-to-white gradient on a layer mask to give a non-destructive, faded effect to a layer.



PORTRAITS

Forging any spectacular imagery would always be quite challenging without masks. They come into play at just about every stage of image creation. Masks allow you to dictate what's visible or hidden on a given layer. Now this sounds rather elementary, but masks really open up endless possibilities. Seamlessly merge multiple photos, selectively apply adjustments, limit Smart Filters... masks let you do it all. And, they're non-destructive, meaning that you can continually fine-tune.

Start
image



LIMIT SMART FILTERS

Back in the dark ages before Smart Filters, you would keep a backup of layers when testing filters. If one didn't work, you'd delete the layer, make a copy of the backup, and trudge on. With Smart Filters, you have a non-destructive way to apply filters: just apply them to Smart Objects. You get a mask above the filters you've added. Simply introduce black in the mask to reduce the effect.

ADJUSTMENT LAYERS

Adjustment layers affect all layers underneath, allowing for sweeping edits. You'll often need to reduce or remove an adjustment in a particular area. Cue the masks. Adjustment layers come with a layer mask already attached. Just paint black in the mask where you want to cut back on the adjustment. Here we've used some Color Fill layers to introduce bright colour to the composition.

BLEND WITH LAYER MASKS

Masks really shine when you're blending multiple photos. You may have tried using the Eraser tool to shave off the edges of photos to get a seamless look. There's a problem: what happens when you've removed too much? By using a layer mask instead (apply with the Add Layer Mask button in the Layers palette), you can paint with black on the mask to hide, and paint back with white to restore when needed.

LANDSCAPES

Landscapes hold so many different elements that they are the perfect subject for masks. You can use them to combine photographs, enhance, add in new features or create whole new scenes. The three main types of mask (raster, vector and clipping) can all be combined to make powerful new images – the sky's the limit!



COMBINE WITH MASKS

Layer masks can be used in a photocomposite to ensure separate images merge realistically.

CREATE FANTASY LANDSCAPES



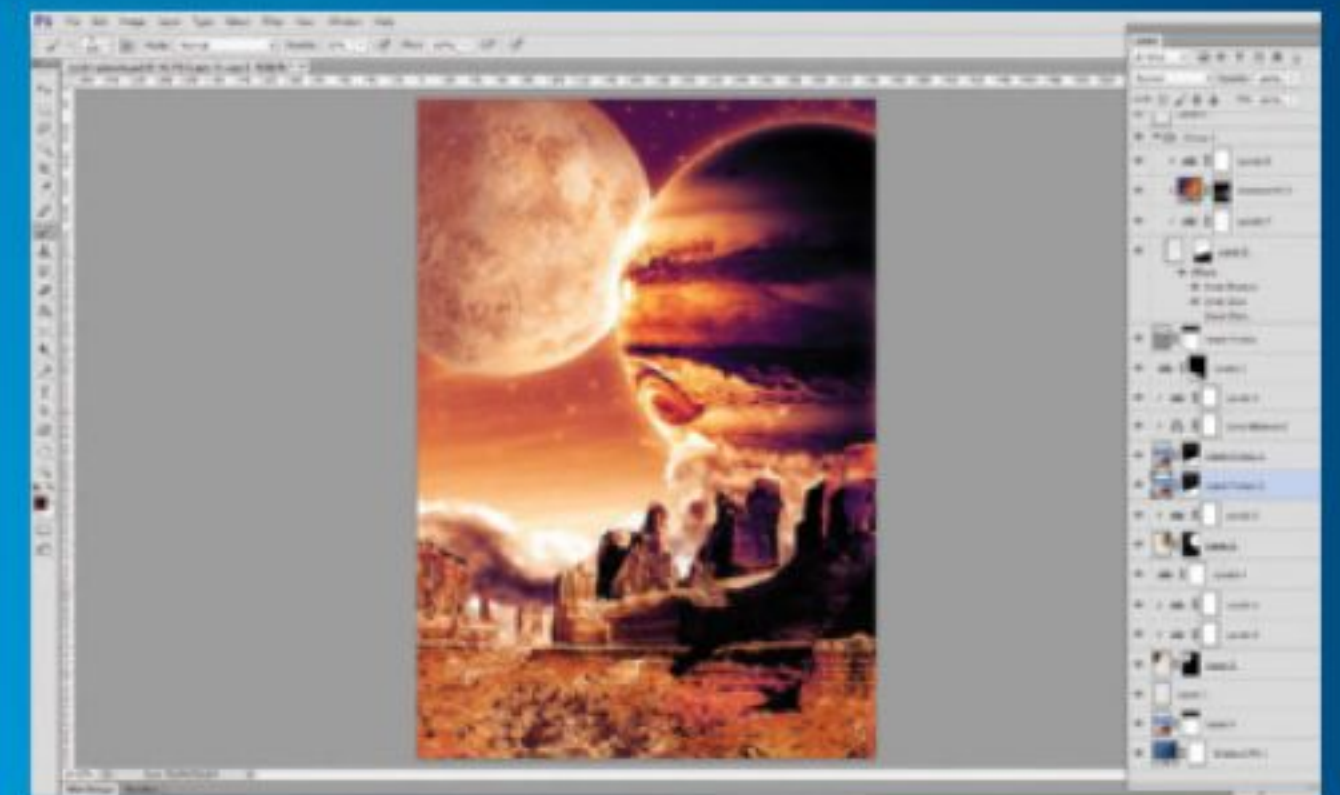
Cut out your elements

01 Pick the most suitable method for creating your mask. For example, here circular planets are cut out using the Elliptical Marquee tool. Use the Pen tool to cut out more complex objects, for example, to isolate the rock tops.



Bring them together

02 When everything is cut out, bring the new elements onto your canvas. Use your masks to integrate them into your scene by keeping some foreground elements in front. Use tools such as Feather and Refine Edge to edit masks.



Add some adjustments

03 Once the masks are perfect on each object, you can add adjustment layers. Use masks here to keep adjustments specific to certain areas of the composition. Using the Gradient tool with masks can create a smooth effect transition.

CLIPS AND MASKS

Combine clipping masks with layer masks. Set up a mask for one layer, and simply clip any other layers to it, which saves having to redo!

ADJUSTMENT MASKS

By default, adjustments are created with a mask. Isolate the bits you want using black to conceal and white to reveal.

CLIPPING MASKS

Clipping masks are quick and easy, yet effective. Place your layer above the layer you want it to clip to. Right-click and select Clipping Mask.



MASK A REFLECTION

DUPLICATE AND FLIP

The reflection is simply a duplicate of reality. Flip a copy of the original image, and use a layer mask to soften the edge for a watery effect.



MAKE MOTION WITH MASKS

ADDING THE FILTER

The filter is applied to an object completely removed from its background, which prevents extra colours or scenery being blurred.



USING THE MASKS

The elements slot together using a detailed layer mask on the top layer, creating the illusion that it is in front of the moving object.

Start image



CUT OUT WITH VECTOR MASKS

When you're dealing with shapes with a lot of straight lines, a regular raster mask might not cut it. A vector mask is drawn with the Pen tool, shapes or any other method of creating paths, and appears as a second mask to the right of the raster. The main benefit of vector masks is that the edges are crisper than a raster selection. Here, a vector mask was used with the Pen to cut out the buildings, before using a raster mask to touch up where the buildings meet the cup.

Start image



MASKS WITH TEXTURES

Turning a normal scene into one filled with decay is easier than it looks when you use masks. Place on your stock images, especially grungy textures and cracks, set the blend modes to Multiply or Overlay and use a layer mask with a soft brush to blend them in to the scene. You can even combine textures, layering one on top of the other and using brushes of varying opacity on the mask to merge their appearances.



SURREALISM

One of the major benefits of using masks is that they enable you to combine images that normally aren't seen together. This makes masks perfect for creating surreal images, which is what we will look at here. First we'll create a surreal scene with the help of the Calculation command. Then we'll use the Quick Mask mode to make quick selections and create a night and day composition. The layer mask will help us to create a fantastic room adding beautiful effects. Finally, we'll take a look at how to use Refine Edge to fine-tune a selection and create a mask.

CREATE AN ALPHA CHANNEL MASK

An alpha channel is an additional channel used to create masks or store selections. As with many other Photoshop features, you can create a channel mask in different ways. For example, grab one of the selection tools, such as the Lasso or the Magic Wand tool, and then create a selection around the image. When happy with the selection, go to Select>Save Selection. If you look in the Channels panel, you will see the selection as an alpha channel. You can also create a mask by duplicating a colour channel and then editing the channel using painting tools and filters. Last but not least, you can use the Calculations command (Image>Calculations) to combine two channels and change the blending mode to create a mask.

EDIT CHANNEL MASKS

To edit an alpha channel, grab a painting tool and paint with black to hide unwanted areas or with white to show the selection.

HIGH CONTRAST CHANNEL

When duplicating a channel you must look for the channel with the most contrast (black and white) between the foreground and background.

USE QUICK MASK

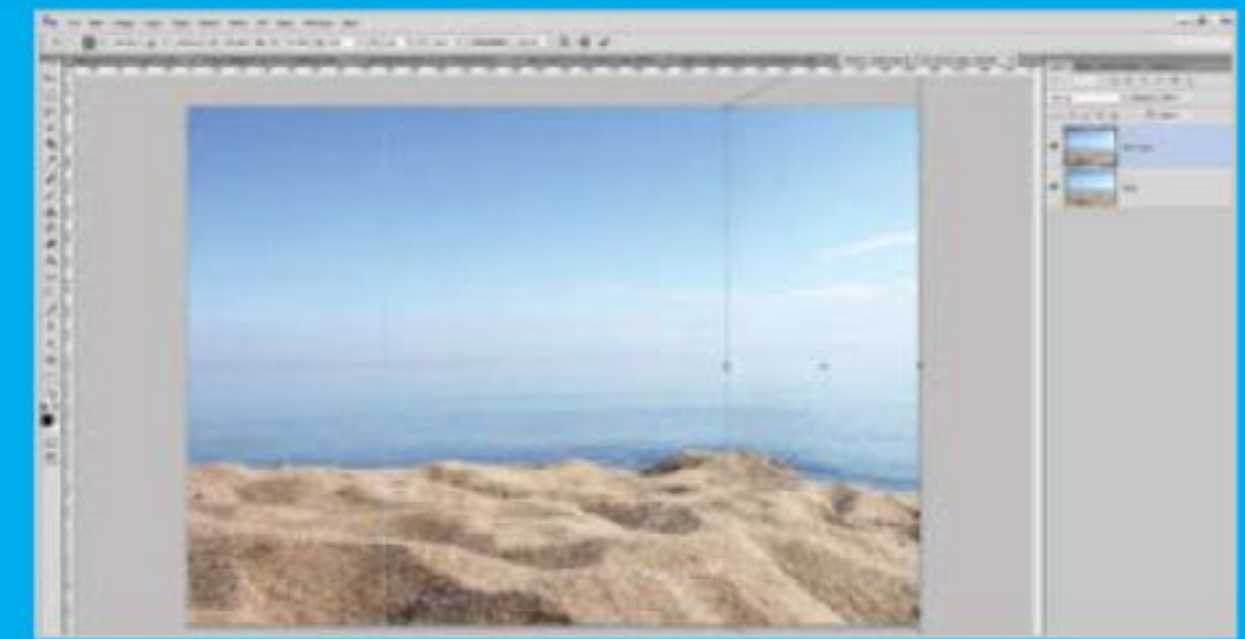
In Quick Mask mode you create a temporary, semi-transparent overlay mask, which allows you to see your image while you're working. Start by using a selection tool to select the element you want in your image and then click the Quick Mask mode button in the tool bar or press Q. A red colour overlay covers the area outside the selection. Now refine the selection using the Brush tool by painting with black to add to the mask or white to remove areas from the mask. Exit the Quick Mask by pressing 'Q' and then go to Layer>Layer Mask>Reveal Selection.

QUICK SELECTION TOOL

The Quick Selection tool looks for similar textures in the image, making it easier to detect the edges. You can select the areas by painting over them.



LAYER MASKS



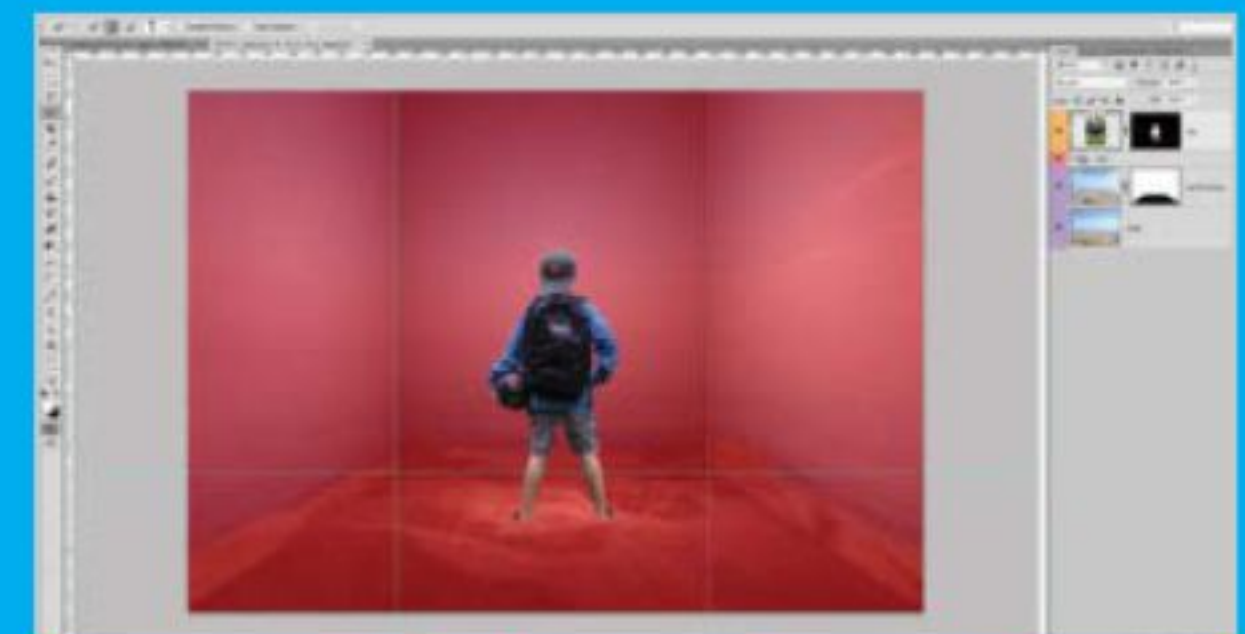
Create perspective

01 Open the image 'Sand.jpg' and duplicate it. Grab the Rectangular Marquee tool and create a selection covering a third of the image. Now hit Cmd/Ctrl+T or go to Edit>Transform>Perspective, and drag the corners to create a perspective.



Add a layer mask

02 Grab the Polygonal Lasso and select around the floor. Invert the selection and go to Layer>Layer Mask>Reveal Selection. Create a new layer and select each 'wall'. Change the blending to Multiply and apply the radial gradient to add textures.



Enter Quick Mask mode

03 Place 'Kid.jpg'. Grab the Quick Selection tool and create a selection. Hit 'Q' to enter the Quick Mask Mode. Use the Brush tool to fine-tune the selection. Press 'Q' again to exit and then go to Layer>Layer Mask>Reveal Selection.



Place images

04 Place the 'Frame.jpg'. Adjust the size and perspective (Cmd/Ctrl+T). Place the 'Kid1.jpg' image over the Frame layer. Select it using the Quick Selection tool. Enter the Quick Mask mode, refine the selection and create a layer mask.

FREE TRANSFORM

Hit Cmd/Ctrl+T to open Free Transform. Hold Cmd/Ctrl and drag the corners to adjust the angle.



USE REFINE EDGE

You can use the Refine Edge command to fine-tune the selection and create a layer mask. Grab the Pen tool and create a path around the image you want to select. Now click Make: Selection from the tool option bar. On the Make Selection dialog box, check Anti-aliased, Operation: New Selection and click OK. With the image selected go to Select>Refine Edge. Check Smart Radius, adjust the settings until you're happy with the results and change Output To: New Layer with Layer Mask and hit OK. Now you can move the image around and create a stunning surreal scene.

Start image

MAKE ART EASY WITH MASKS

ADJUSTMENT LAYERS
Use the adjustment layers to adjust the tones, make colour corrections or add colour effects. This will enhance the composition.

CLIPPING MASKS
Clipping masks mean adjustments only affect the layer below. To create a clipping mask go to Layer>Create Clipping Masks.

UNDERWATER EFFECTS

You can create amazing underwater effects using simple masking techniques. Once you understand the basic principles of using layer masks you'll use them in virtually every layer. Masks are so versatile because they allow you to manipulate the image without permanently changing the original. You can easily open the Properties panel to access controls to manipulate or fine-tune the layer mask. Masks are ideal for creating semi-transparent layers, which is perfect for creating surreal sub-aquatic worlds or to combine two or more images to create amazing creatures. There are so many things you can do using masks.



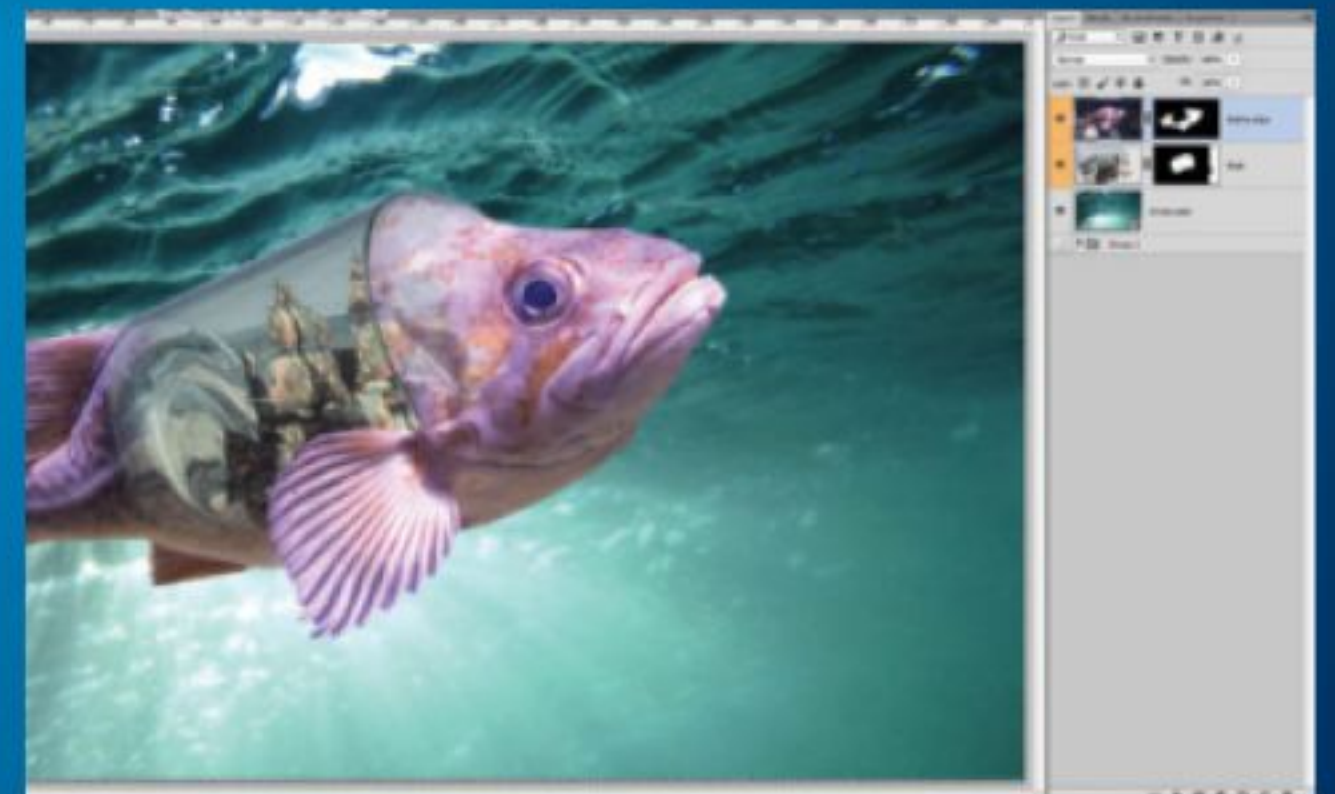
HOW TO APPLY LAYER MASKS



Place images
01 Place 'Underwater.jpg' and 'Fish.jpg'. Grab the Quick Selection tool and select the fish. Go to Layer>Layer Mask>Reveal Selection. Now click on the layer mask thumbnail and go to Windows>Properties. Set Feather to 2 pixels.



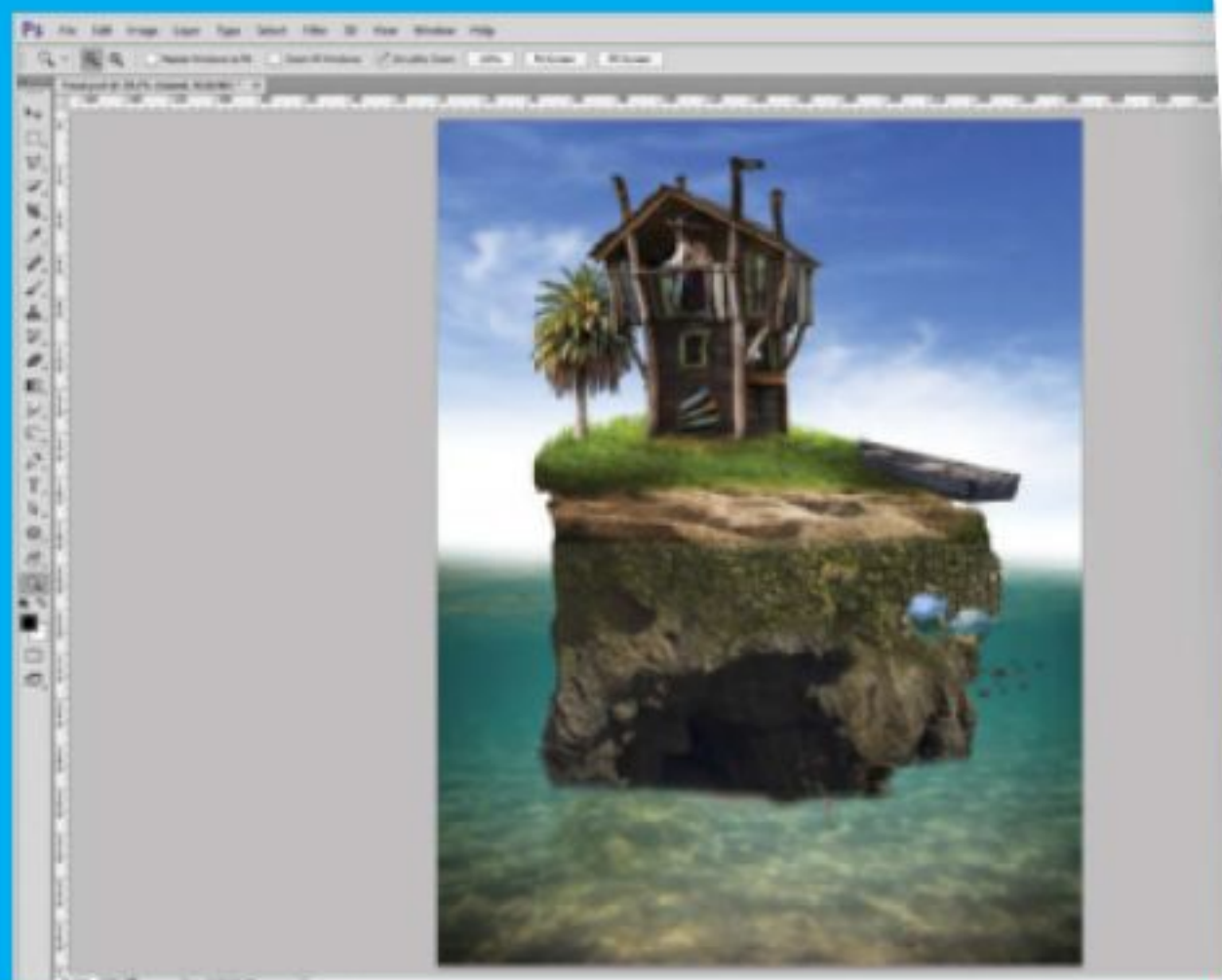
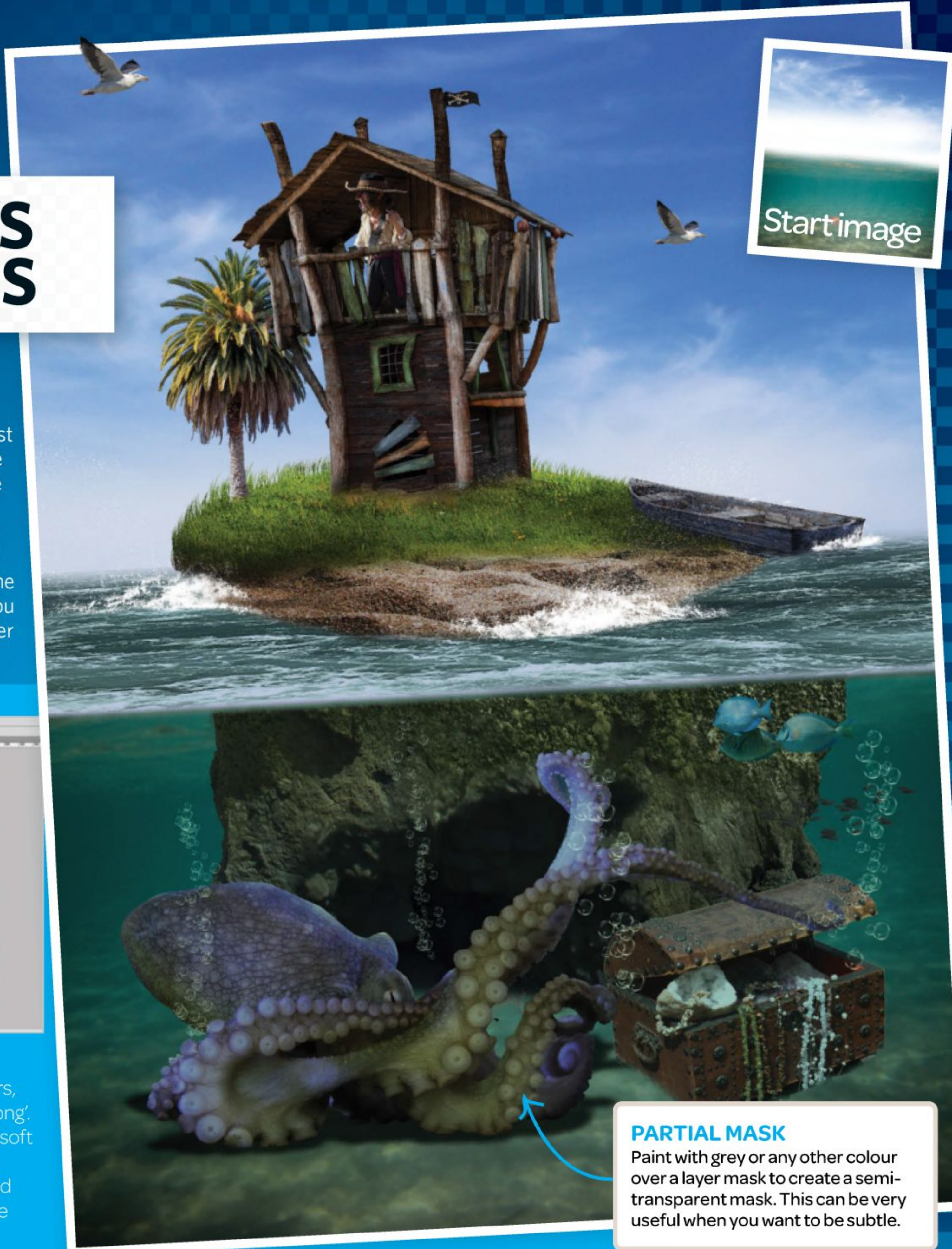
Create a path
02 Place 'Boat.jpg'. Grab the Pen tool and then create a path around the bottle. Click Make: Selection from the tool option bar. Now go to Layer>Layer Mask>Reveal Selection. Adjust the size to fit in the fish's body.



Paint over the mask
03 Move the Boat layer under the Fish layer. Grab a soft tip brush, set the Foreground colour to black and paint over the mask to hide the body. Lower the brush Opacity to create a semi-transparent area over the head.

MAKE MASKS & SELECTIONS

The 'hardest' part about creating a mask is making the initial selection, but Photoshop has so many selection tools and friendly editing commands that once you get the first attempt under your belt, it becomes a piece of cake. Use the Pen tool to create a precise selection and then transform it in a layer mask or vector mask. Another great tool to select images is the Color Range command and of course, the Quick Selection tool or the Magic Wand are very easy to master. As you can see, making selections and creating layer masks can result in fantastic images.



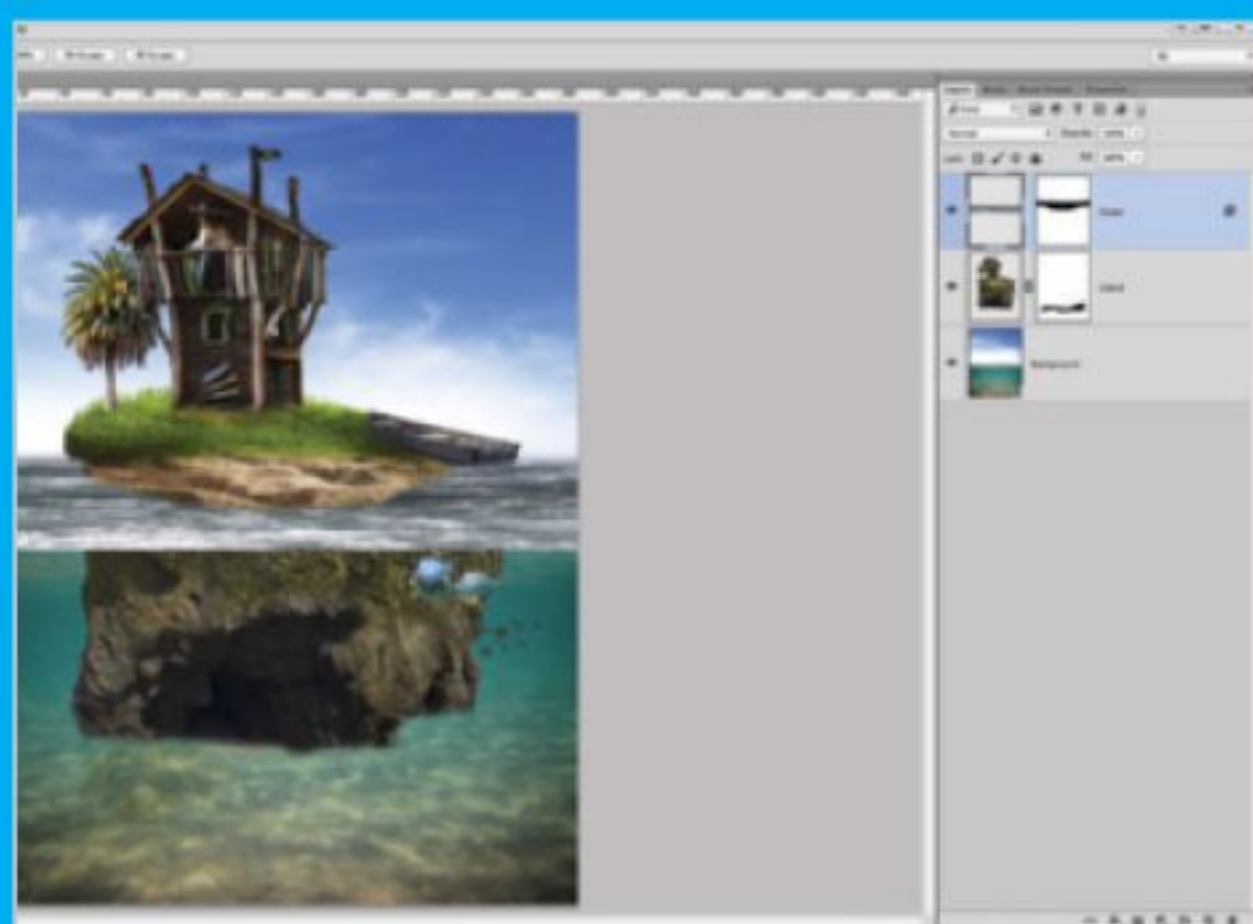
Place images

01 Find your chosen image. If using ours, place 'Background.jpg' and 'Island.png'. Go to Layer>Layer Mask>Reveal All. Grab a soft tip brush, hit D on your keyboard to set the default Foreground/Background colour and paint the bottom of the image to soften the hard edges.



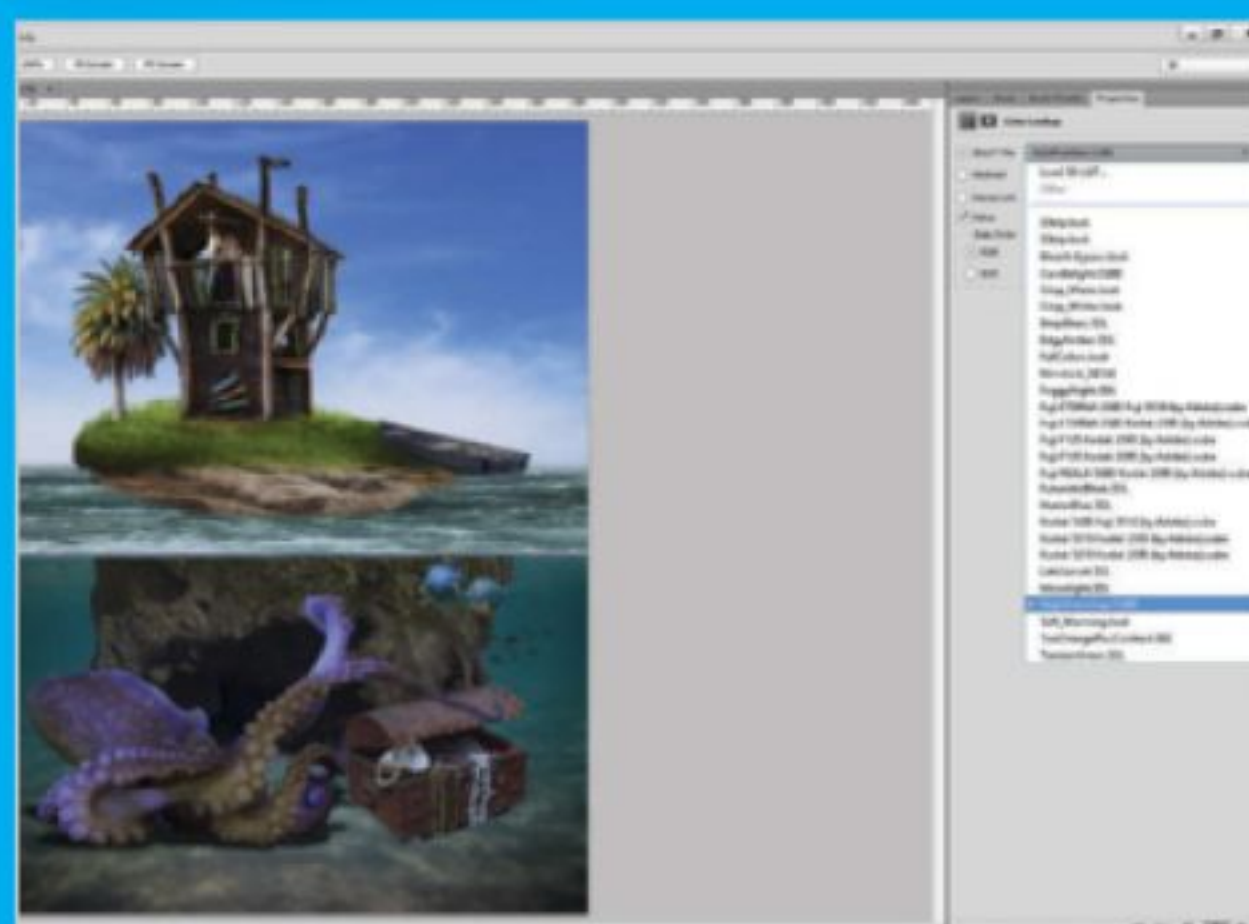
PARTIAL MASK

Paint with grey or any other colour over a layer mask to create a semi-transparent mask. This can be very useful when you want to be subtle.



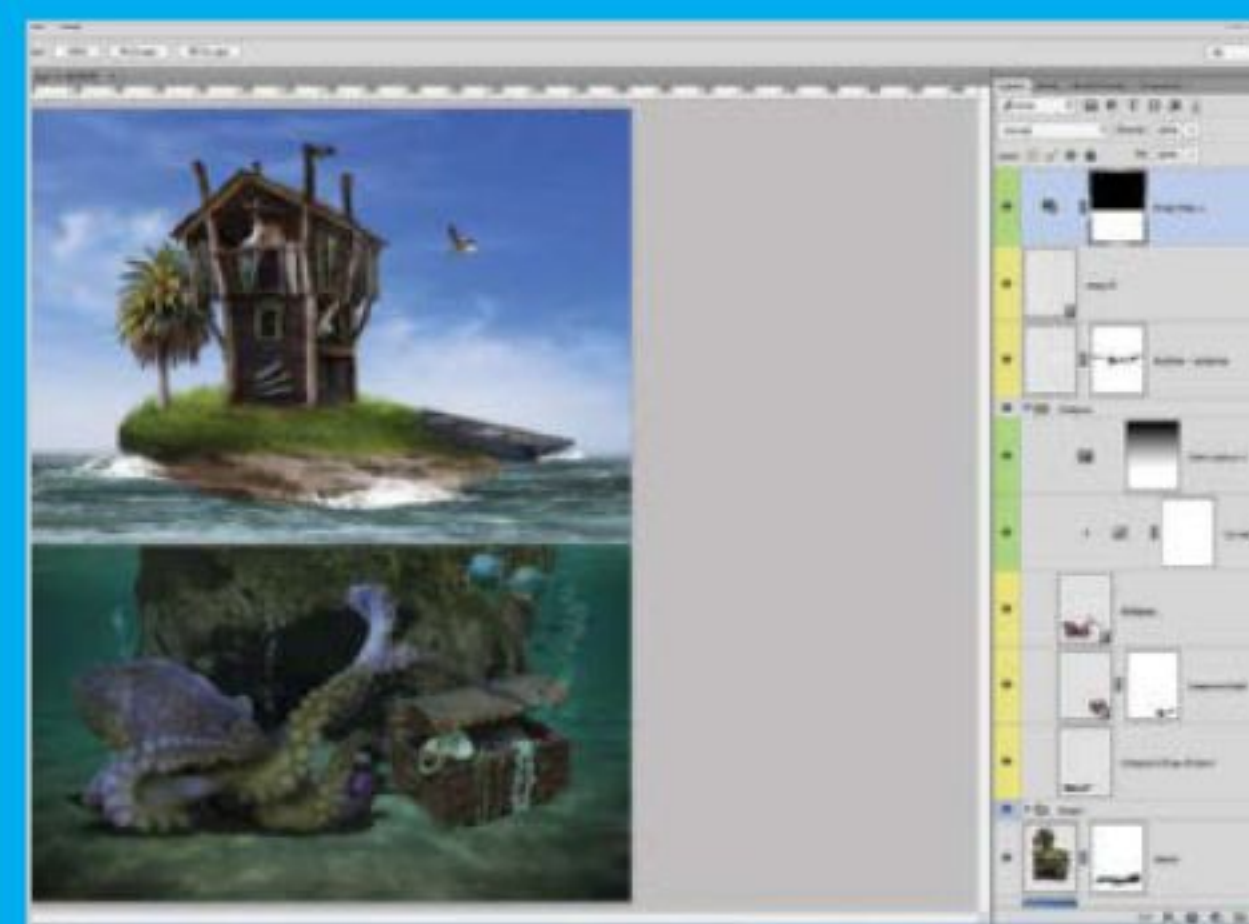
Add depth

02 Place 'Ocean.jpg'. Drag the corners to adjust the perspective and then hit Return/Enter. Create a layer mask as before and with a soft tip brush, using black as the colour, start painting around the island to create a sense of depth.



Use Color Lookup

03 Place the octopus and treasure chest images. Go to Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Color Lookup. Check 2DLUT File and choose NightFromDay.CUBE. Click on the Color Lookup Mask. Grab the Gradient tool and drag over the mask to create a gradual transition.



Add final touches

04 Place the seagull image and create the splash effect using custom brushes. Add adjustment layers to improve the contrast and colours. Use the layer masks to hide unwanted areas and don't forget to clip the layers for more control.

DISPLACEMENT EFFECTS

Even though Photoshop has augmented its array of capabilities with 3D features in the past several versions, a lot of the imagery we work with on a day-to-day basis is firmly in the 2D realm. This flat nature sets us at a disadvantage when seeking to create visuals with depth.

The Displace filter helps even the odds. It analyses a map and uses its luminous values to determine how to alter an image. A 50% grey is baseline, with brighter and darker tones pushing in different directions. The result is a more convincing blend of imagery.

FLIP TO REFLECT

A quick copy, paste and flip is all that's needed to turn any image into a convincing reflection.

Start image



MASK TO FADE

Reflections are soft at the edges, and a black-to-white gradient applied to a mask helps to emulate this.

FILTERS AND DISPLACEMENT

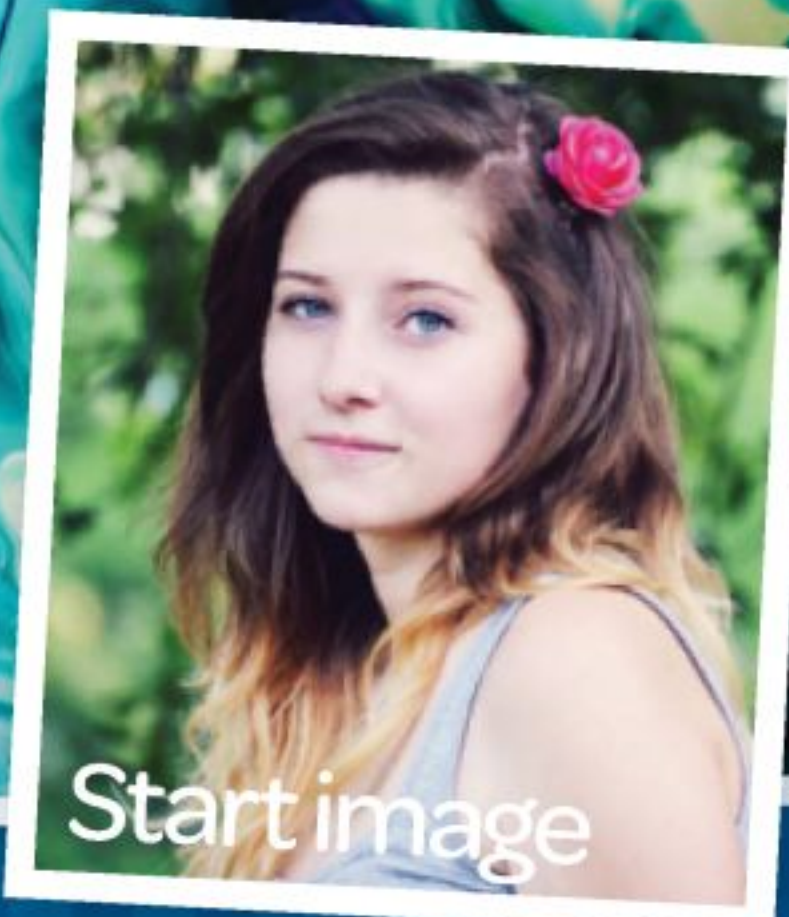
We start our rippled texture (see above) by applying Filter>Render>Fibers to a white layer (using default colours). We then Free Transform, rotating 90 degrees and alter the Perspective. A layer mask is added, and a black-to-white gradient is applied to fade the edge. We make a duplicate of the PSD to create the map, convert to Grayscale, and add some Gaussian Blur. Back in the main PSD, we duplicate the water lilies layer, and flip and move down, starting the reflection. We apply the Displace filter, point to the map, and the reflection flows with the texture.

SMART FILTER MASK

Applying the Displace filter to a Smart Object is very smart. This keeps things non-destructive, allowing you to edit or completely remove the effect while leaving the original layer unscathed. One side benefit you may have missed is the ultra-convenient Smart Filter mask. This appears above any Smart Filters you've applied to the Smart Object. Adding black to the mask removes the effects of the filters. Here we've merged a portrait atop a flowing paint background via the Displace filter. The eyes became too distorted, so we painted black in the mask to delete the displacement effect.



Start image



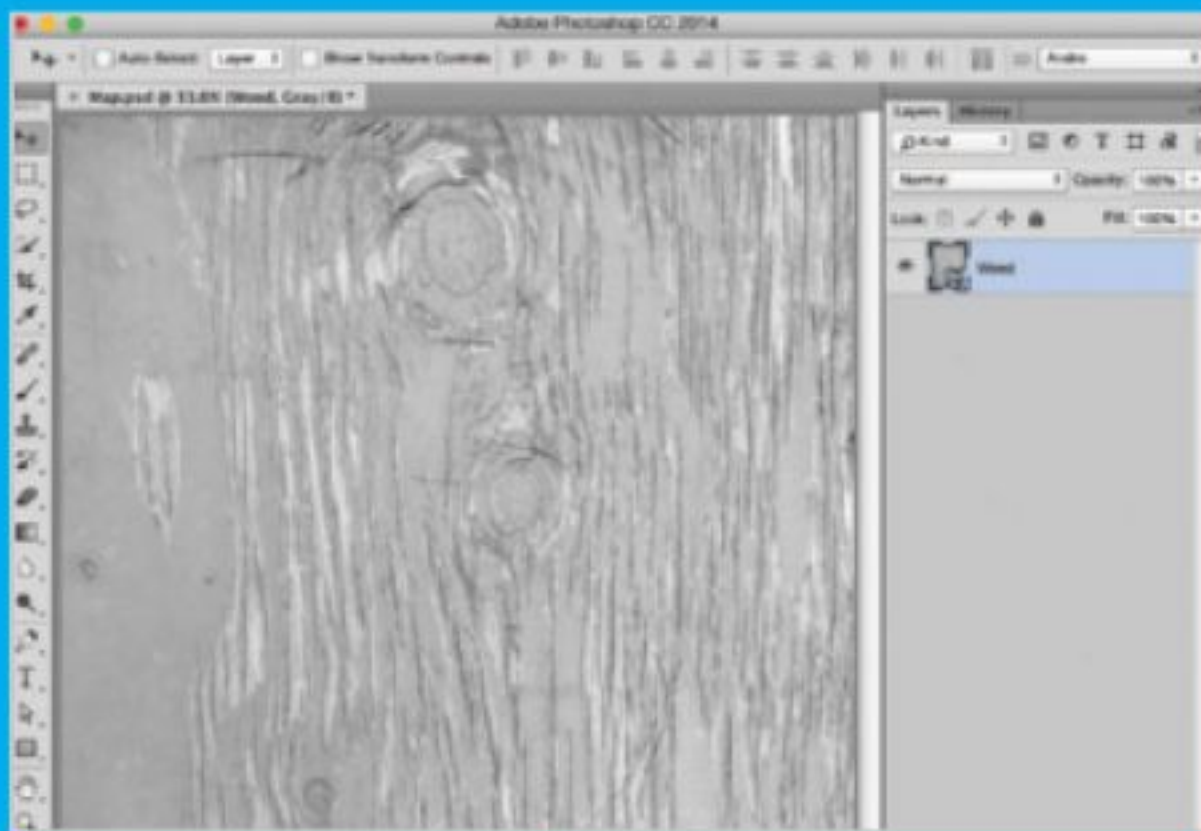
LAYER MASKS

Here we've employed a mock-up shirt courtesy of graphicburger.com. We created a map of the shirt as a PSD. Back in the main document, we placed and positioned the design atop the shirt, then went to Filter>Distort>Displace, pointing to the map we created. To get it ingrained, we set the layer to Linear Burn. It darkened too much in some spots, so we duplicated the design, changed to Lighten, applied a layer mask and selectively applied white to brighten.



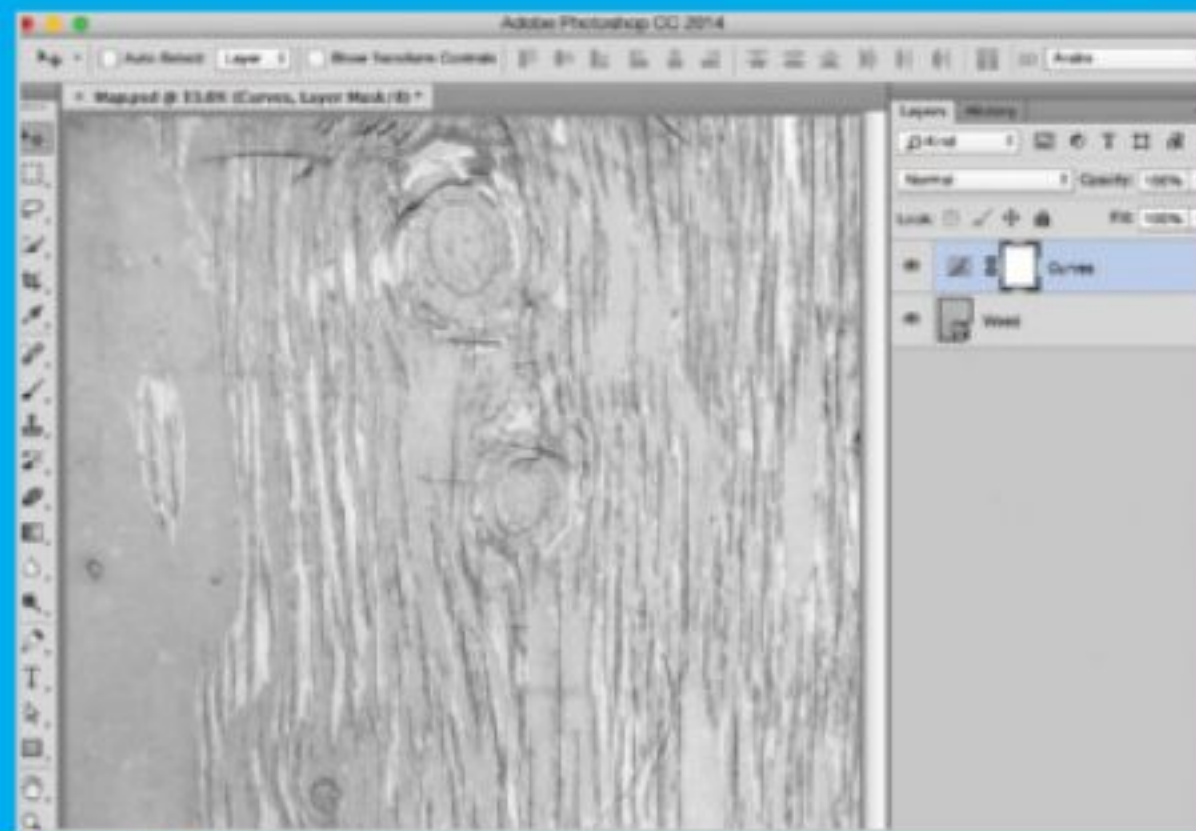
DIGITAL IRON-ON

The design was placed, then displaced using a map of the shirt. The blend mode was changed to Linear Burn.



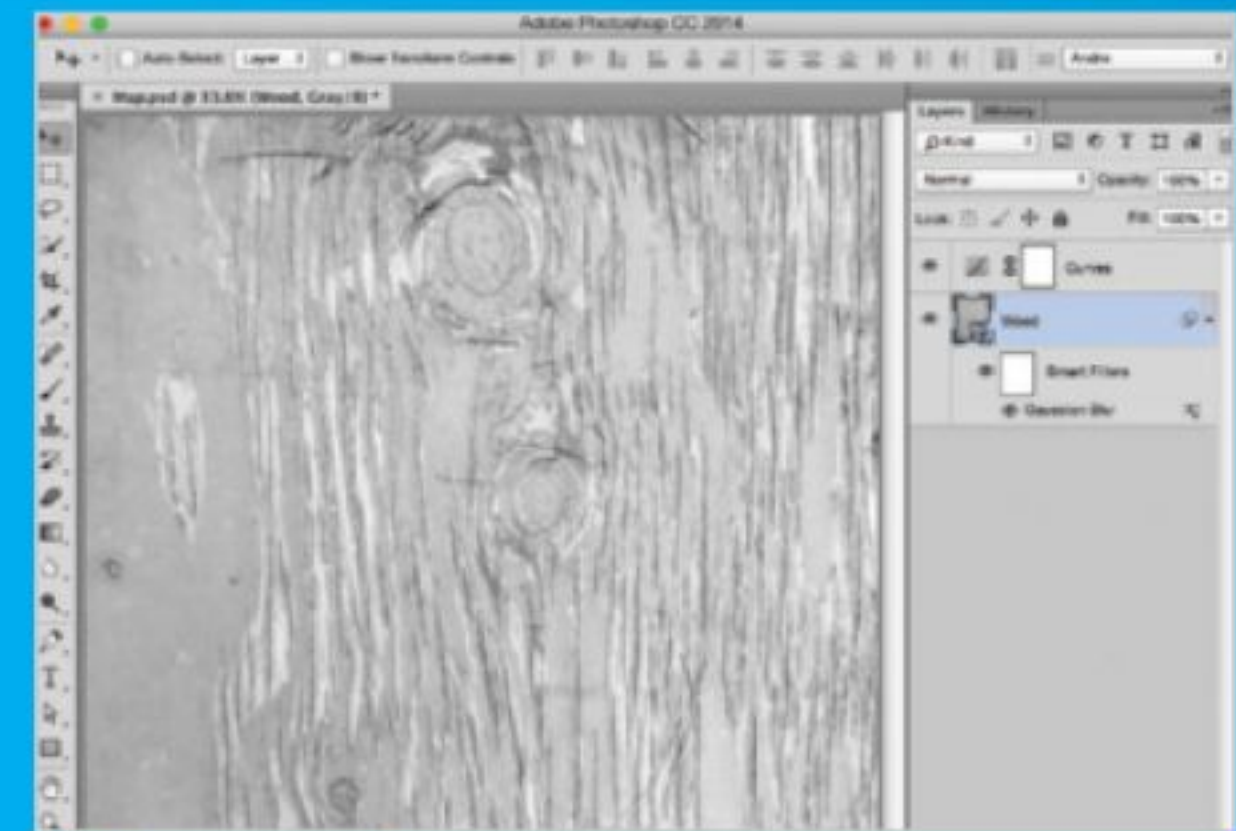
Create new document

01 Create a separate document with the image you want to use as a displacement map. If it's not already grayscale, go to Image>Mode>Grayscale. The Displace filter ignores colour information, so this will help you more accurately gauge the map.



Add contrast

02 For a stronger map, push the contrast. Apply a Curves adjustment layer. Place a point at the centre to lock down. Start with a slight S curve. Carefully increase if needed. If things go too far, paint black in the mask to reduce the effect.



Blur and save

03 To reduce any jarring transitions, blur a bit. Go to Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur and use a low setting (you may want to apply as a Smart Filter so you can experiment). Save the map as a different name to that of the main document.

SMART OBJECT

When applying the Displace filter to text, first convert the text to a Smart Object. This prevents it from being rasterized, allowing you to edit.

BLEND MODE

Even after applying a displacement map, you might still need a little help blending it in. Here we set the text to Overlay.



DISPLACE TEXT

DESATURATE BACKGROUND

If you need helping getting the text to stand out, try desaturating the background. Use a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer, and slide Saturation to the left.



Essentials

Works with



Photoshop CS and above and Photoshop CC

What you'll learn

Perfect selections, layer masks, transform tools and layer styles

 **Time taken**
3 hours

Expert

Charis Webster



"Layer masks are essential to non-destructive editing. Learn to select an array of different objects and use layer masks to create perfect compositions that can be easily edited. As the former editor of Photoshop Creative I love creating simple tutorials for digital artwork fans."

Create a grunge portrait

Learn how to use masks and selections in perfect harmony in order to create layered, grunge-style artwork

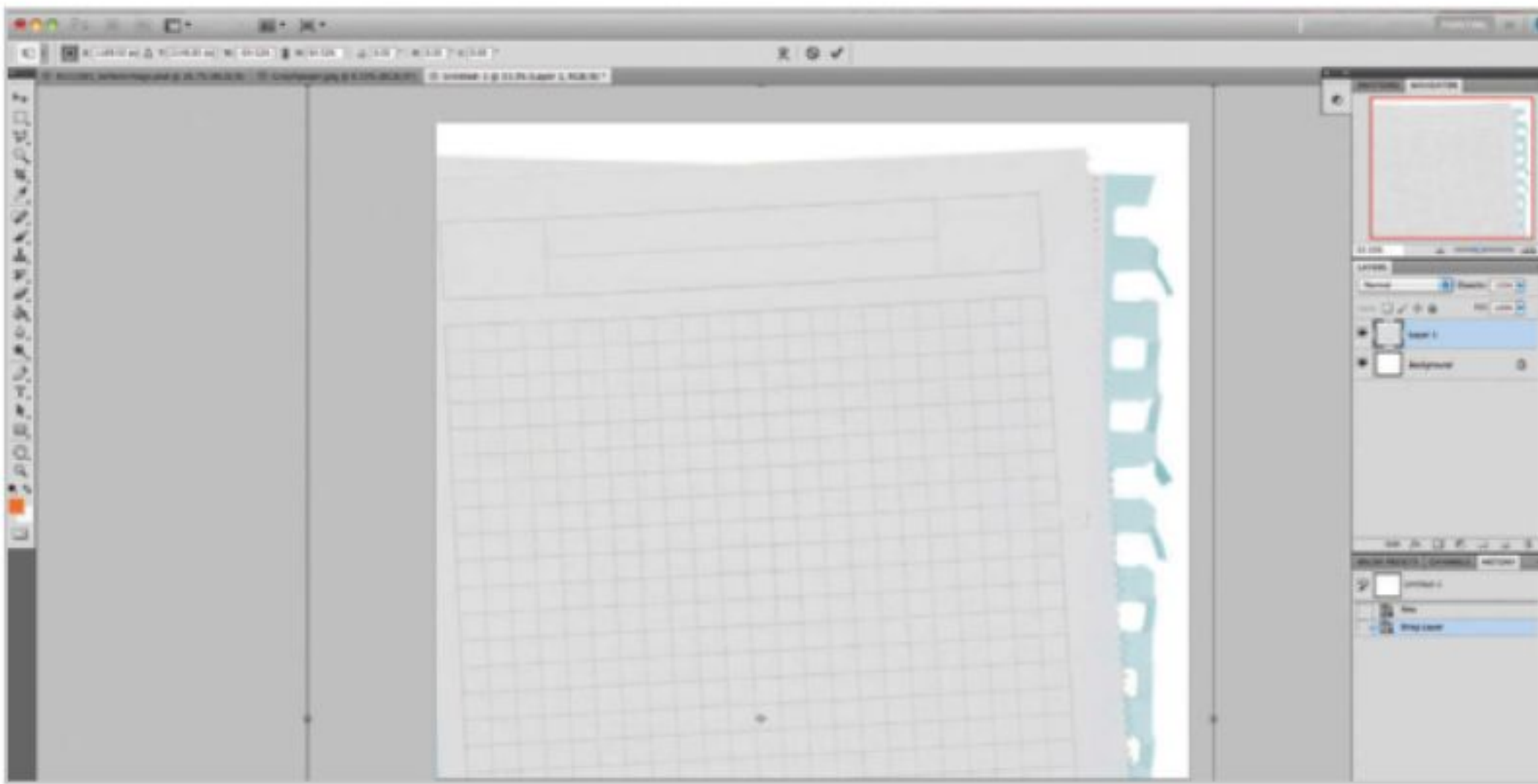
Making selections isn't just about cutting round objects perfectly - it's about what happens next. Here you'll learn an array of selection techniques, from using Lasso tools and Marquees to letting blend modes do the selection for you. You'll also learn how to edit your selections so that you don't have to select from scratch - simply add to it, make it bigger, warp it and so on. You will be shown how to retouch your selections, like painting in hair and removing outer glows. Next, you'll learn to master the layer mask. Paint

away pixels to form the perfectly constructed masterpiece, while doing it non-destructively, so that you can edit your work later. All this wouldn't be achievable without Photoshop's Transform tools. Get the most out of each tool by using them continuously throughout this project. Remember, you can download the same files we used here, use your own pictures, or create words that mean something to you with the typewriter letters. Like any Photoshop project, the possibilities are endless once you know how.



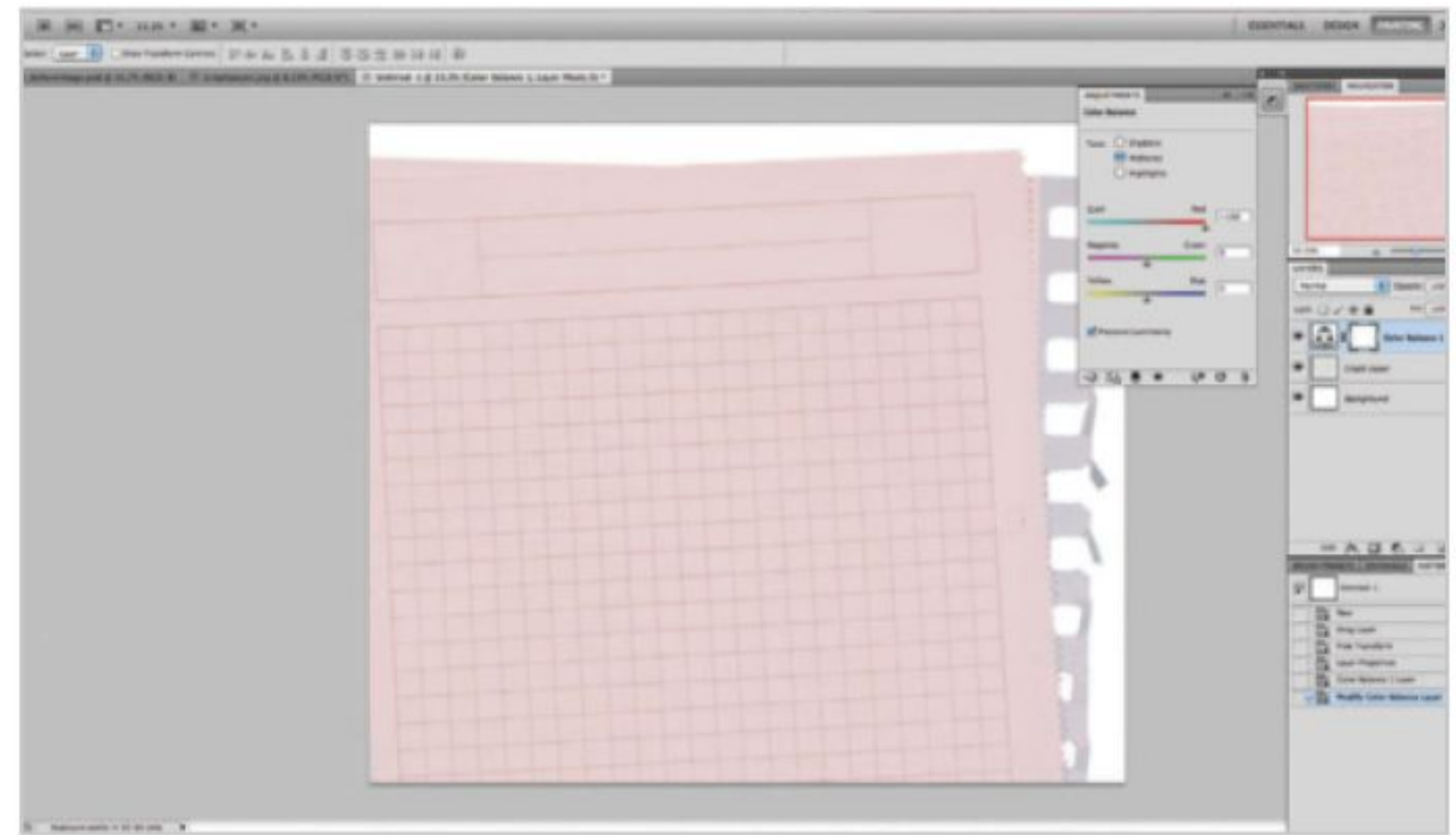


Create a grunge portrait



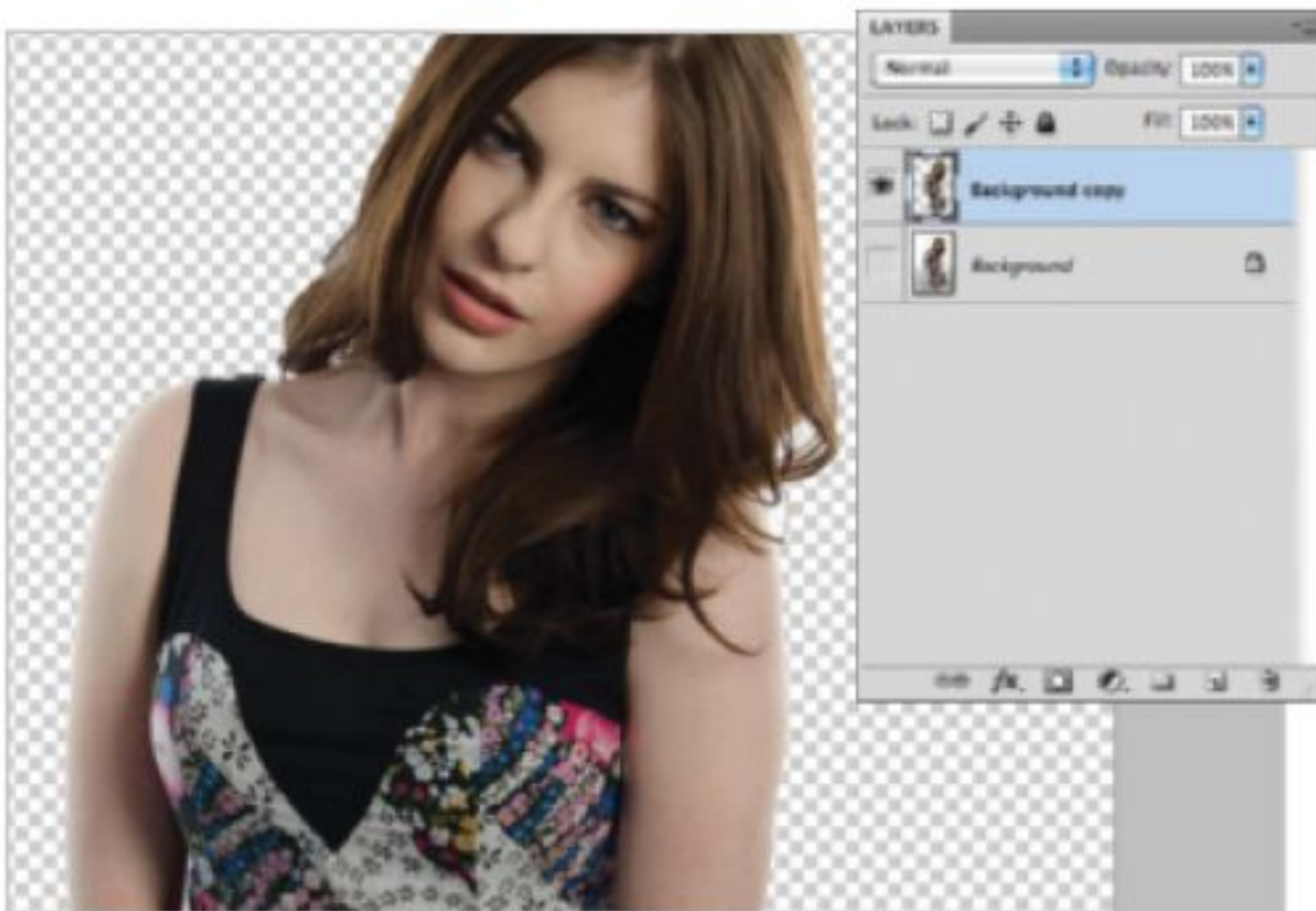
Create your background

01 Create a new document with the Height set to 200mm, the Width set to 230mm and at 300ppi. Name this 'maindoc.psd'. Now drag 'Graphpaper.jpg' from the supplied resources onto the 'maindoc.psd'. The Transform tools will already be loaded, so use them to scale the paper to the preferred size and hit return.



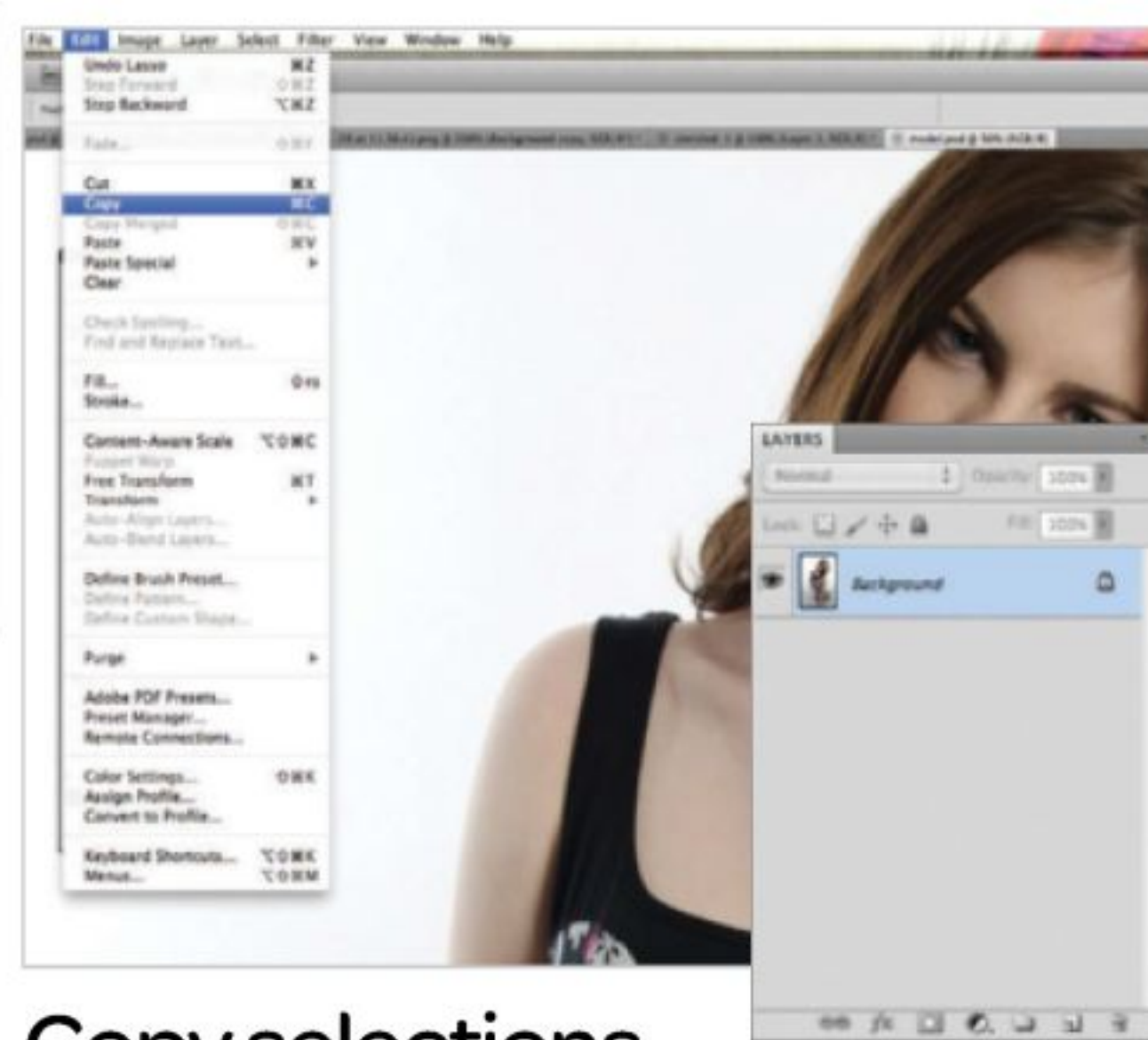
Add your first adjustment

02 Add a Color Balance adjustment layer from the Layers palette. Clip it to the graph paper layer so it doesn't affect any future layers you make. Hold down Opt/Alt and Cmd/Ctrl and click the line between the adjustment layer and the layer itself. Then tweak the sliders to get your desired colour.



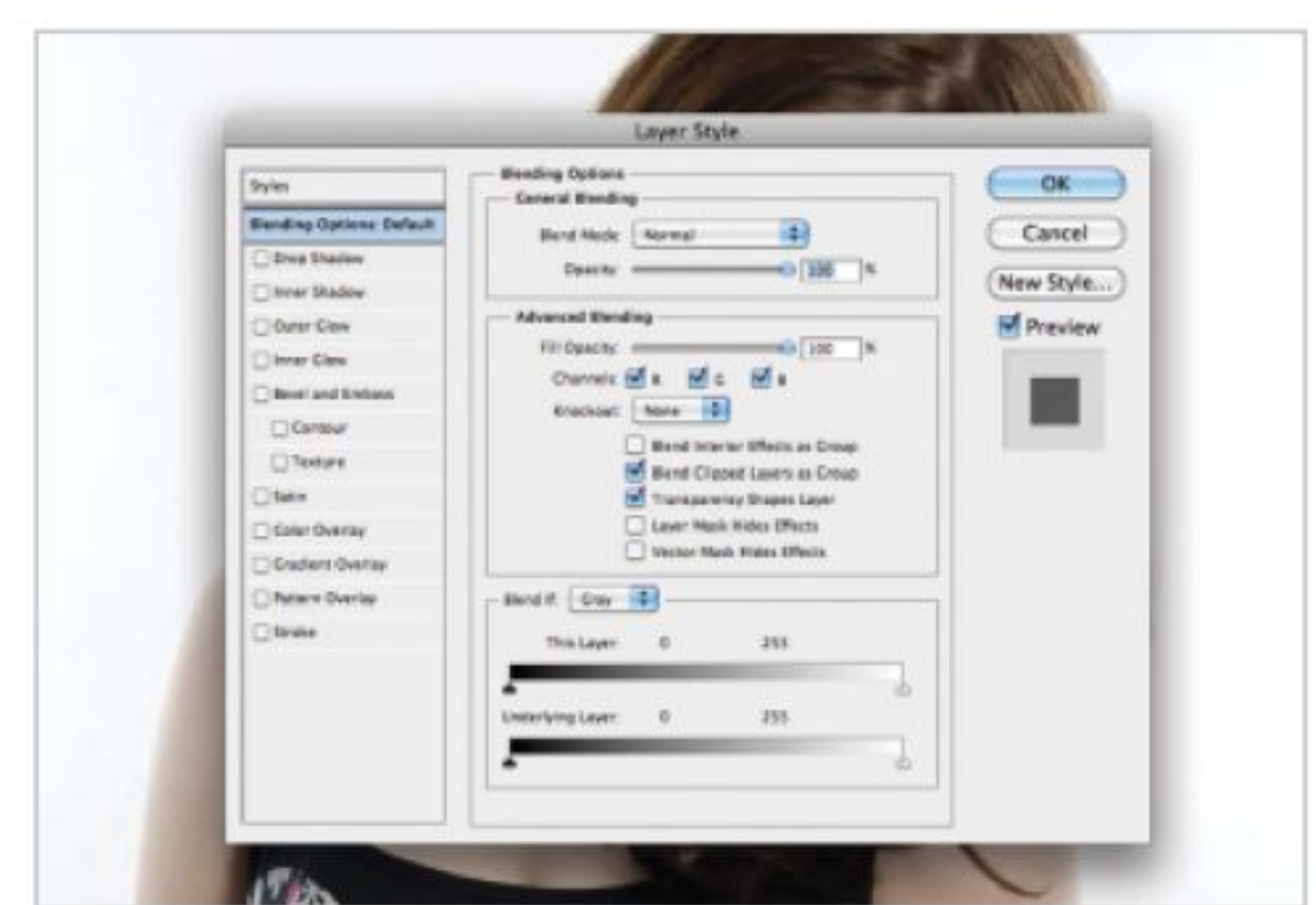
Cut out your model

03 Open 'model.psd'. Thankfully, the Quick Selection tool suffices here. Select the background and keep on clicking round, using the 'Add To Selection' and 'Subtract From Selection' options to continue picking up the background, zooming in and out using Cmd/Ctrl and the + and - keys for accurate selecting.



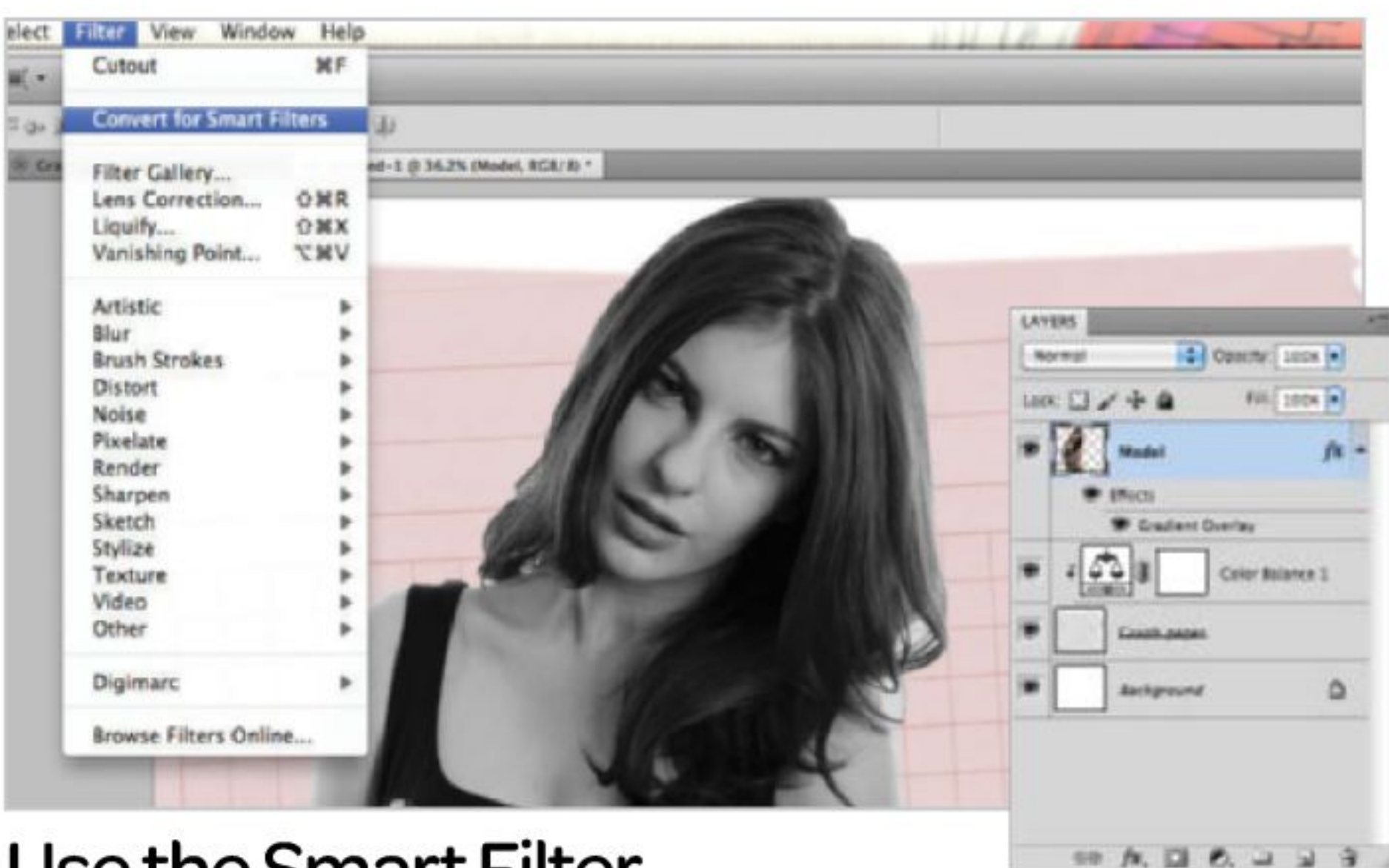
Copy selections

04 Invert your selection so that you've got the model, not the background, by hitting Cmd/Ctrl+Shift+I. Then simply use Cmd/Ctrl+C to copy and Cmd/Ctrl+V to paste, then paste your selection onto the main document.



Polish selections

05 Remove the glow around the model. Double-click the model layer to load Layer Styles. Now move the white arrow down to 200, or until you see the glare disappear. Highlight Gradient Overlay in the Layers Styles menu and change the blend mode to Saturate, choosing a black and white gradient.



Use the Smart Filter

06 By converting an image to a smart filter, you can adjust, remove, or even hide your filter later in the project. Using them in this way means that they are non-destructive. With the model layer selected, head to Filter>Convert for Smart Filters to begin.



Filter the model

07 Now head to Filter>Artistic and choose Cutout (one of the more basic but instantly effective filters in the set). Alter the Number of Levels to 8, the Edge Simplicity to 1 and the Edge Fidelity to 1. The settings may vary dependent on your model image, so just experiment until you get the right look.

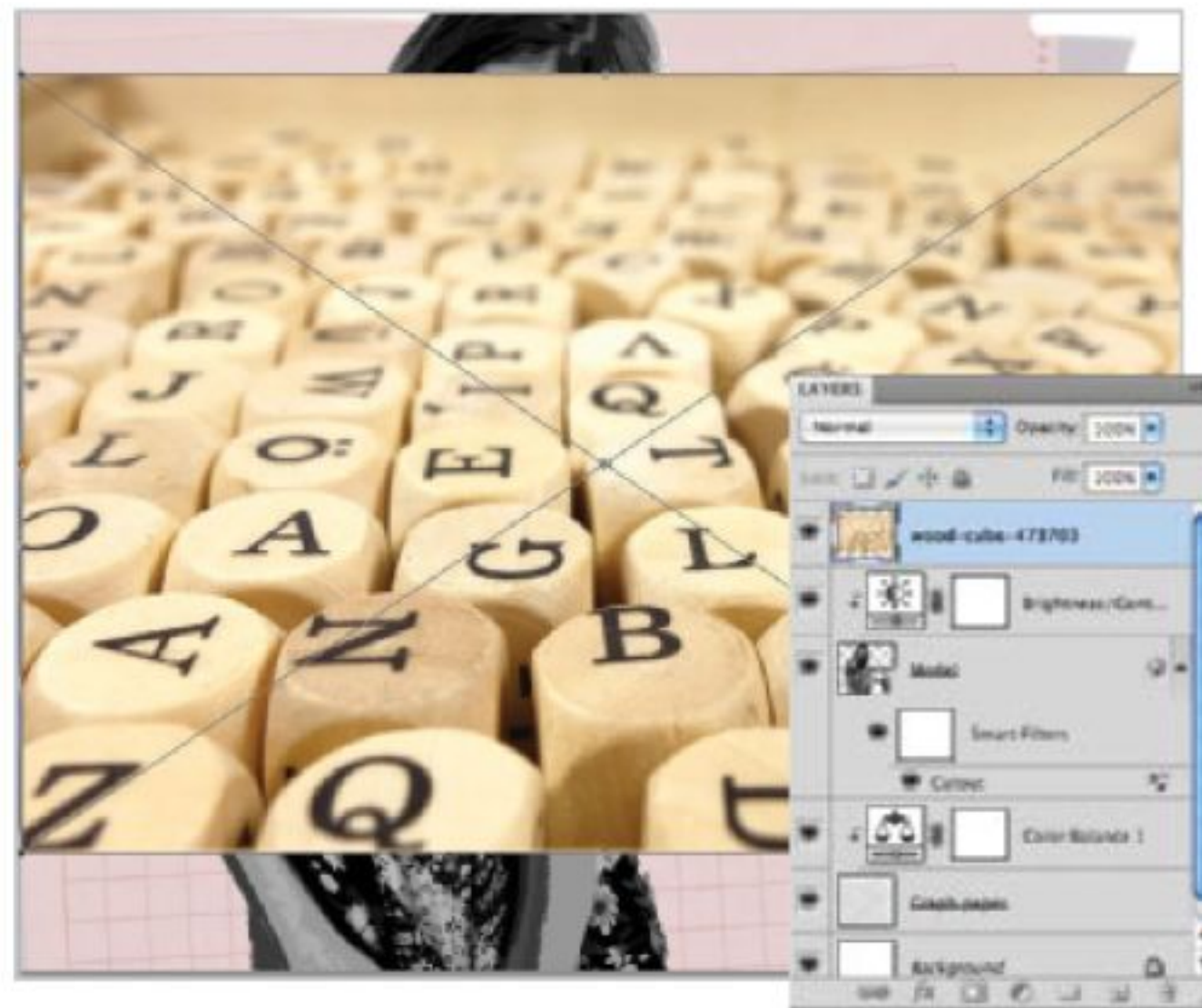


Expert tip



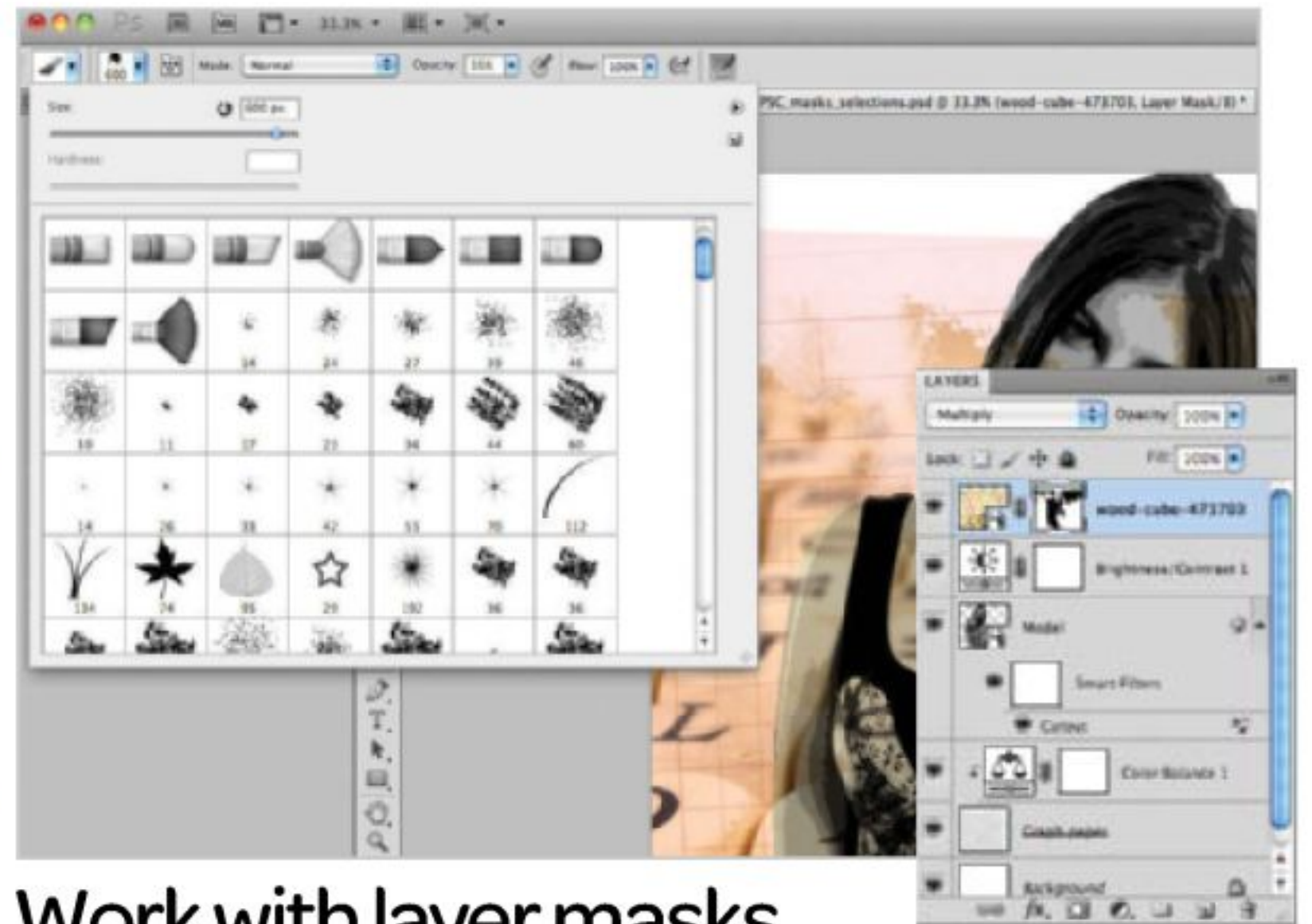
Faking fur (and hair!)

When selecting things, particularly models with hair or pets with fur, the thought of cutting round such fine outlines can be daunting. It is often the case that painting the hair back in is easier than trying to select each wispy strand. Simply create your selection as best as you can then, when it's pasted into its new composition, use the Blur tool to drag out strands of colour to recreate the feathery edges. This will give a natural and more realistic look to your image.



Bring in other elements

08 Now build your composition. Drag 'cubes.jpg' onto the composition. Use the already active Transform tools to scale to size or click Cmd/Ctrl+T to load them. Hit return when you're happy and then change the blend mode to Multiply.



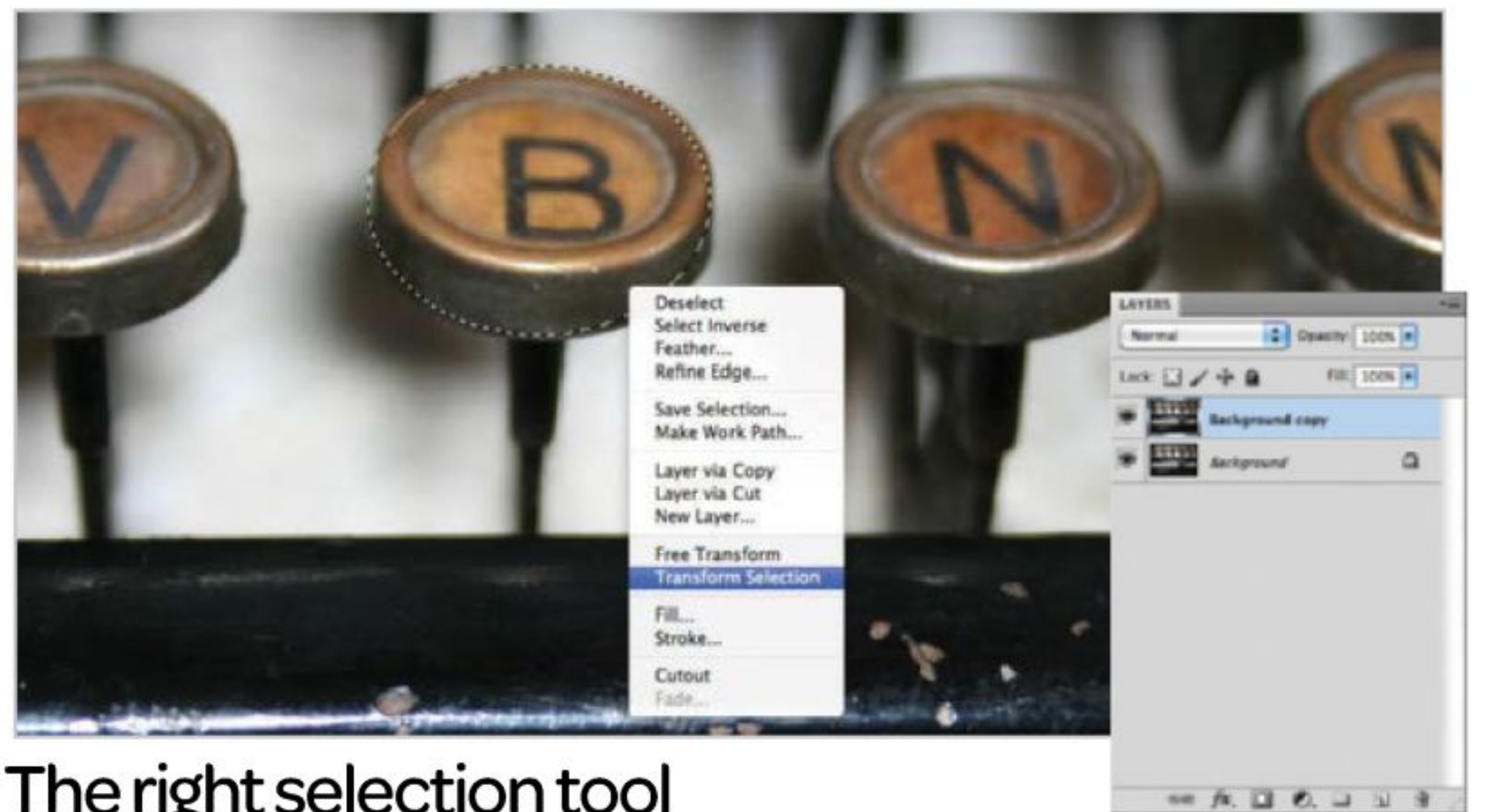
Work with layer masks

09 Apply a Layer Mask using the button at the bottom of the Layers palette. This allows you to non-destructively delete parts of a layer using a brush. You can paint back in layer pixels if you mess up. With the mask selected, simply paint with black to delete or white to paint back in.



Bring in the letter

10 For more interest and texture, drag 'letter.jpg' into your main document and set the layer's blend mode to Overlay. Using the same method as the last two steps, rescale and layer mask the bits you want to delete – here that's the right half of the letter leaving a few parts showing through.



The right selection tool

11 Open 'typewriter.jpg' into a new document and practice your selecting skills using an Elliptical Marquee tool. Draw a circle roughly matching one of the keys, then right-click to bring up a drop-down menu. Choose Transform Selection to allow you to move, skew and warp your selection to fit the key much better.



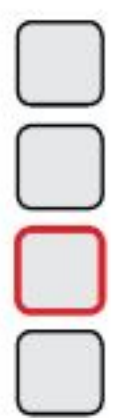
Place your keys

12 With the key cut out successfully, simply drag it to your main document and scale it to size. Go back to your typewriter document and follow the same selecting procedure to cut out several different letters, dragging them to your main document on separate well-labelled layers each time.

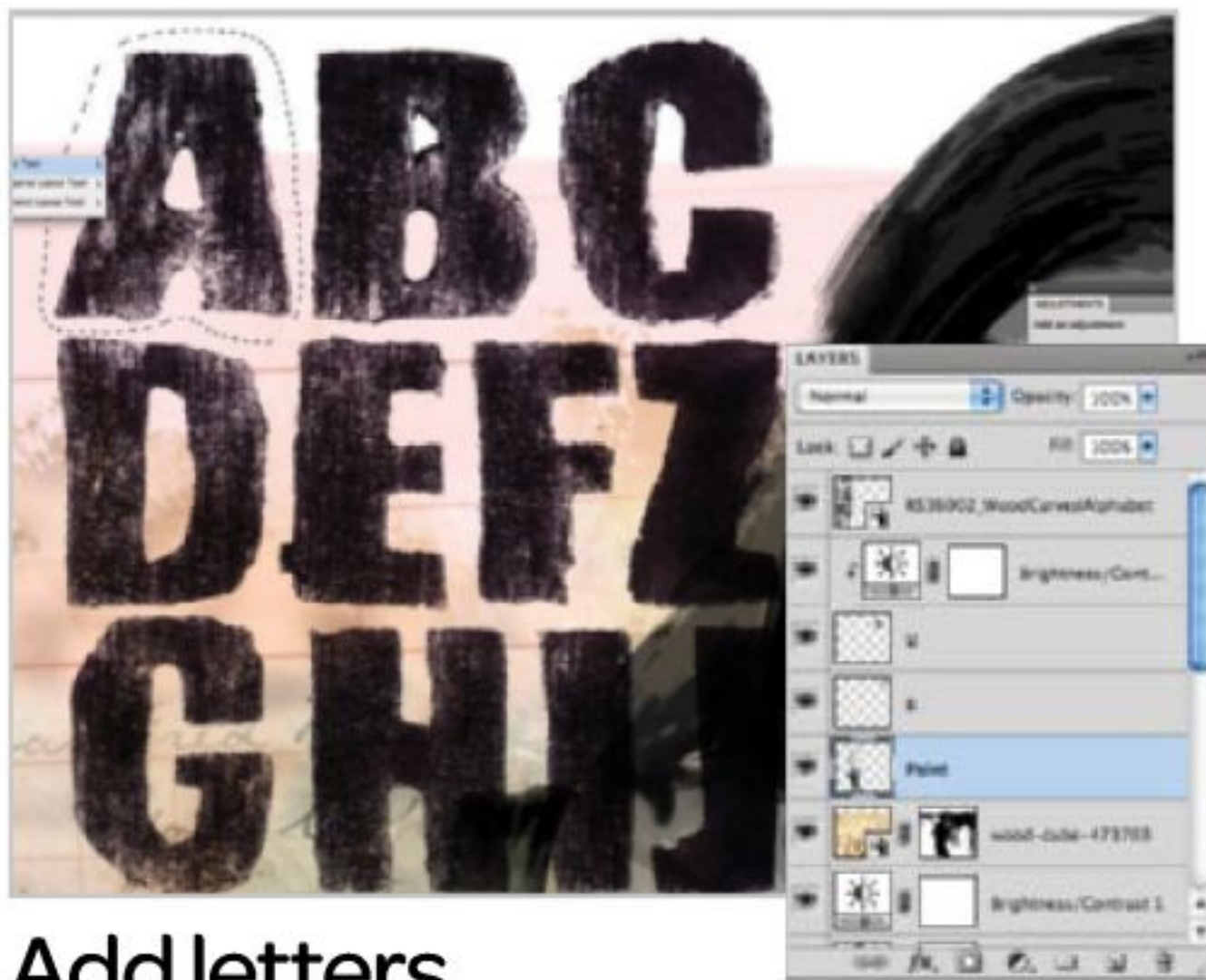


The importance of blend modes

13 For each new typewriter key's layer, experiment with the blend modes. Overlay gives a subtle blended effect, while Darken punches up the layer's colour for a more grungy effect. Use Transform to skew the angles and size of each key to give a more random effect.



Create a grunge portrait



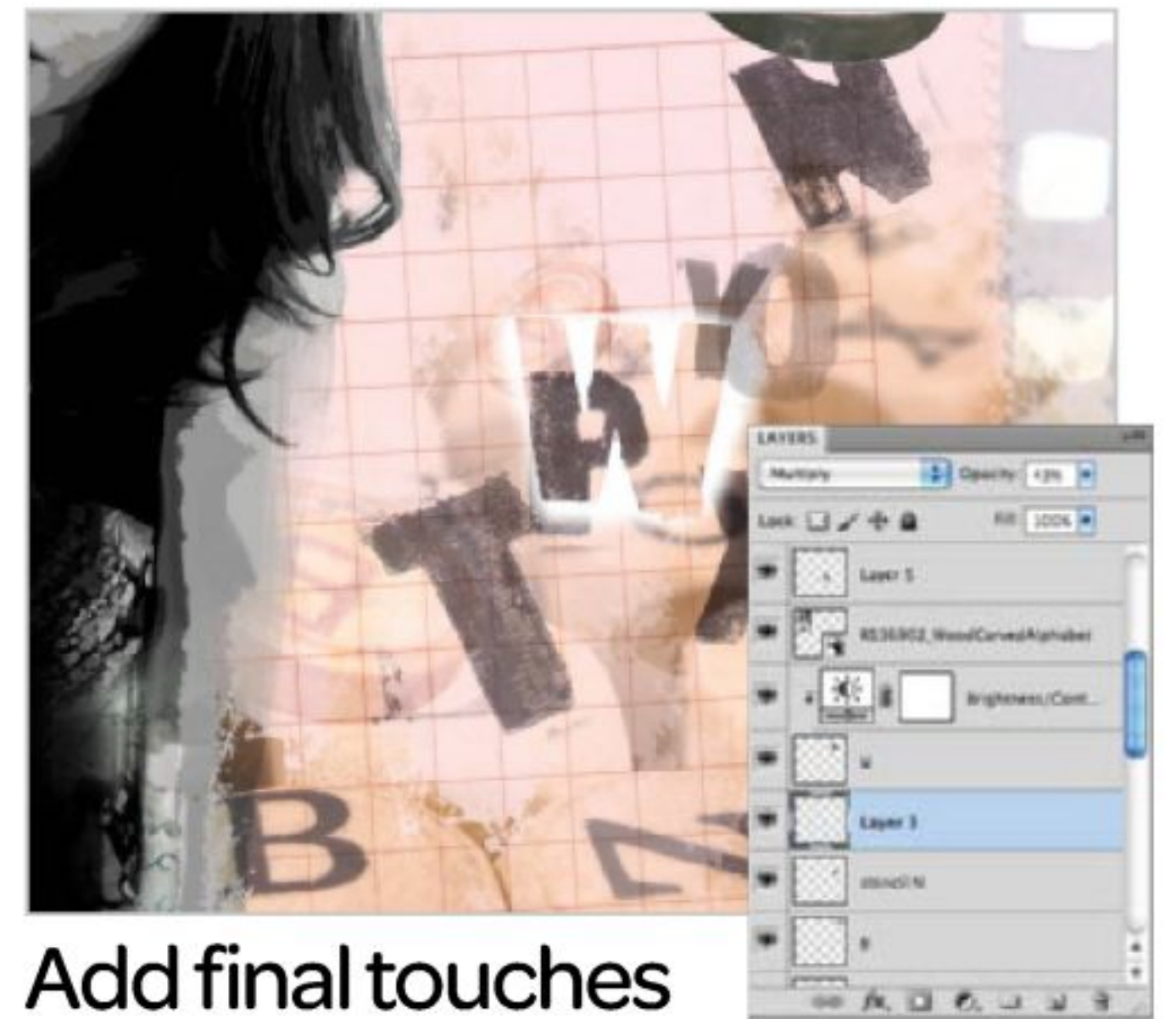
Add letters

14 Load 'Stenciled_letters.jpg' into your main document. Set the layer to Multiply to initially exclude all of the white. Now use the Lasso tool to randomly draw around a letter, and cut it using Cmd/Ctrl+C to copy the letter and paste it using Cmd/Ctrl+V into where the typewriter keys are.



Randomise the effect

15 In a similar way to the typewriter letters, Randomize each letter with the Transform tools. Try the Lighter blend mode to get an instant stencil effect. Go for Darken to burn in colours and ensure you vary the layers' opacities too.



Add final touches

16 For a final important flourish, create a new layer to paint retouches onto. Use the Brush tool with different grungy tips to paint away some of the details on the dress. Use the Eyedropper tool to select the existing colours to use as your colour palette.



Fix your filter

17 Looking at the whole piece gives you clues as to where and what needs retouching. Here, the Cutout filter has done a very harsh job on the model's face and features. So simply use this final layer to smooth off some of the grey gradiented areas by painting in colour.



Erase for detail

18 Now zoom out to view the whole composition and choose the Eraser tool. Choose a spray paint brush to erase and lower the Opacity to around 30%. Dab around your composition to remove harsh colour and add some grungy flair.

TRANSFORM TOOLS
Essential tools to rescale, reposition and warp placed images, perfect your compositions with the Transform tool kit.

SELECTING
Finding the best selection tool is fundamental. Some require standard marquees while others can require a little more refining.

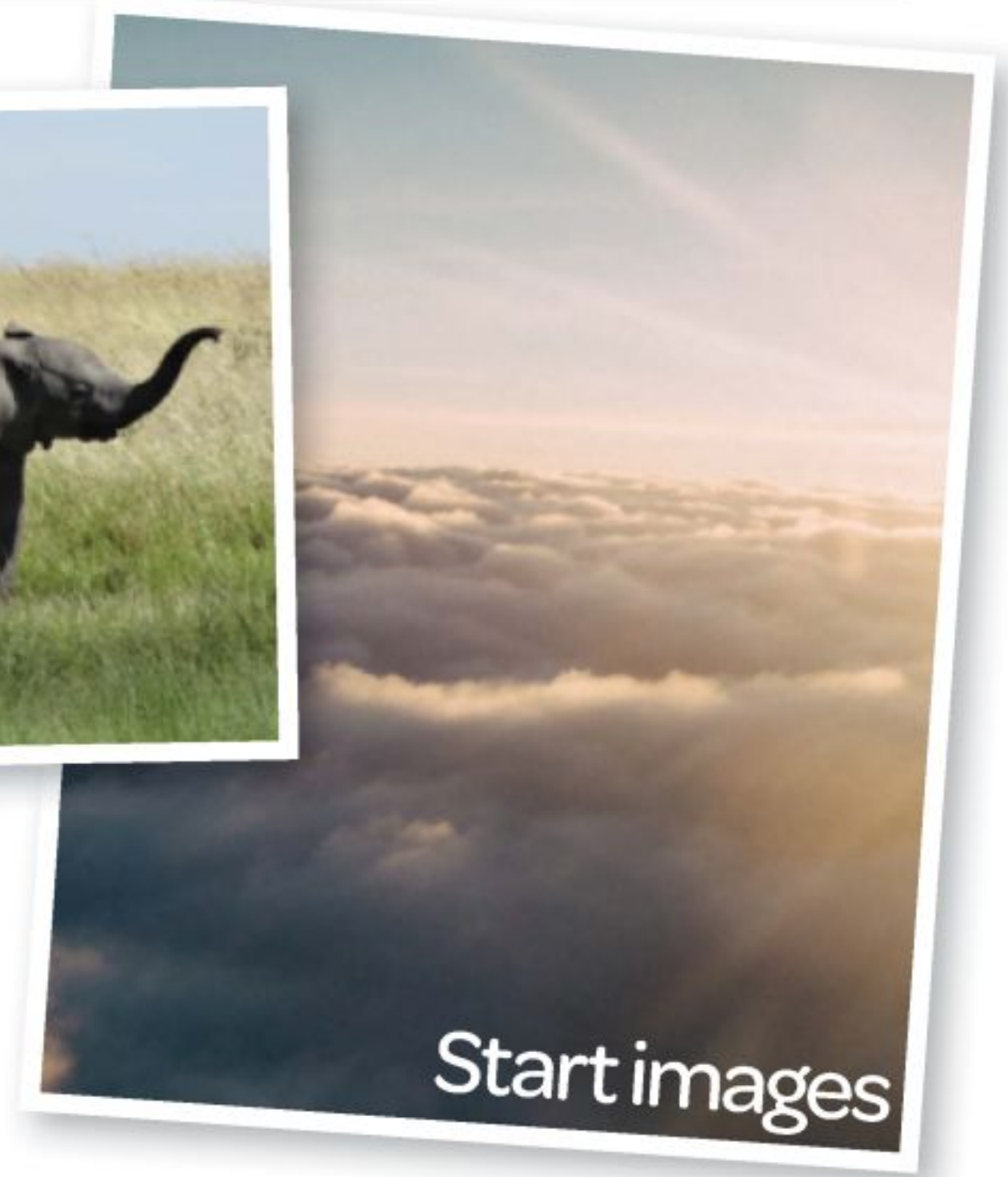
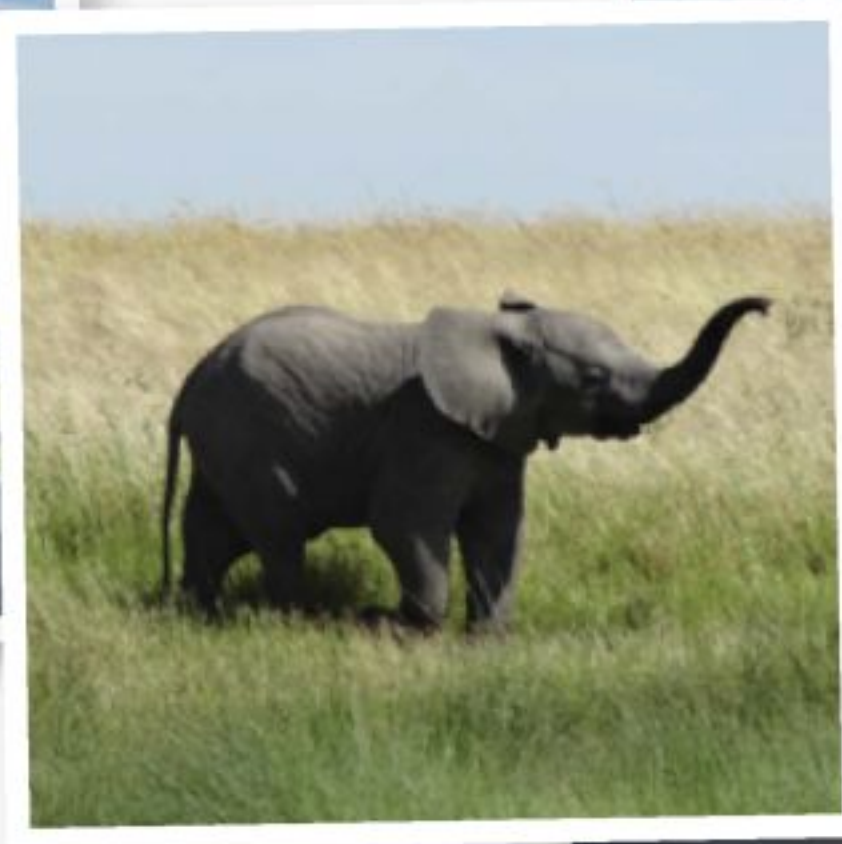
Closer look Tools of the trade
Add effects with tools

LAYER MASKS
Delete parts of layers to see the layers underneath, but do it cleverly! Using layer masks lets you avoid the risk.

BLEND MODES
Experiment with blend modes to give you a range of different effects, from grungy and vibrant to stunning black and white.

Genius Guide





Start images

Essentials

Works with



What you'll learn

How to use layers, masks and distortion tools for surreal landscapes

Time taken
3 hours

Expert



Mark White

"I love starting with a blank canvas, using existing pictures and a little imagination to create an original composition that looks magical. Spectacular compositions are the ones that grab our attention, and often these striking pictures are easier to create than they look. I've been experimenting in Photoshop as a hobby for years, and understand the importance of having fun while you edit."

Build a fantasy flying island

Bring the surreal to life and use layers, masks and distortion to build a beautiful floating rock in the sky

Learning and honing basic Photoshop skills is vital to improving as an artist, but the most fun you can ever have in Photoshop is just letting your creativity run wild.

Even the most complicated pictures rely on the simplest techniques, and creating a fantasy island is no different. Only the rainbow on this particular island is created from scratch (you can even be original with your rainbow and choose exotic or bizarre colours) - everything else in this picture is just an existing image that has been warped or masked into place.

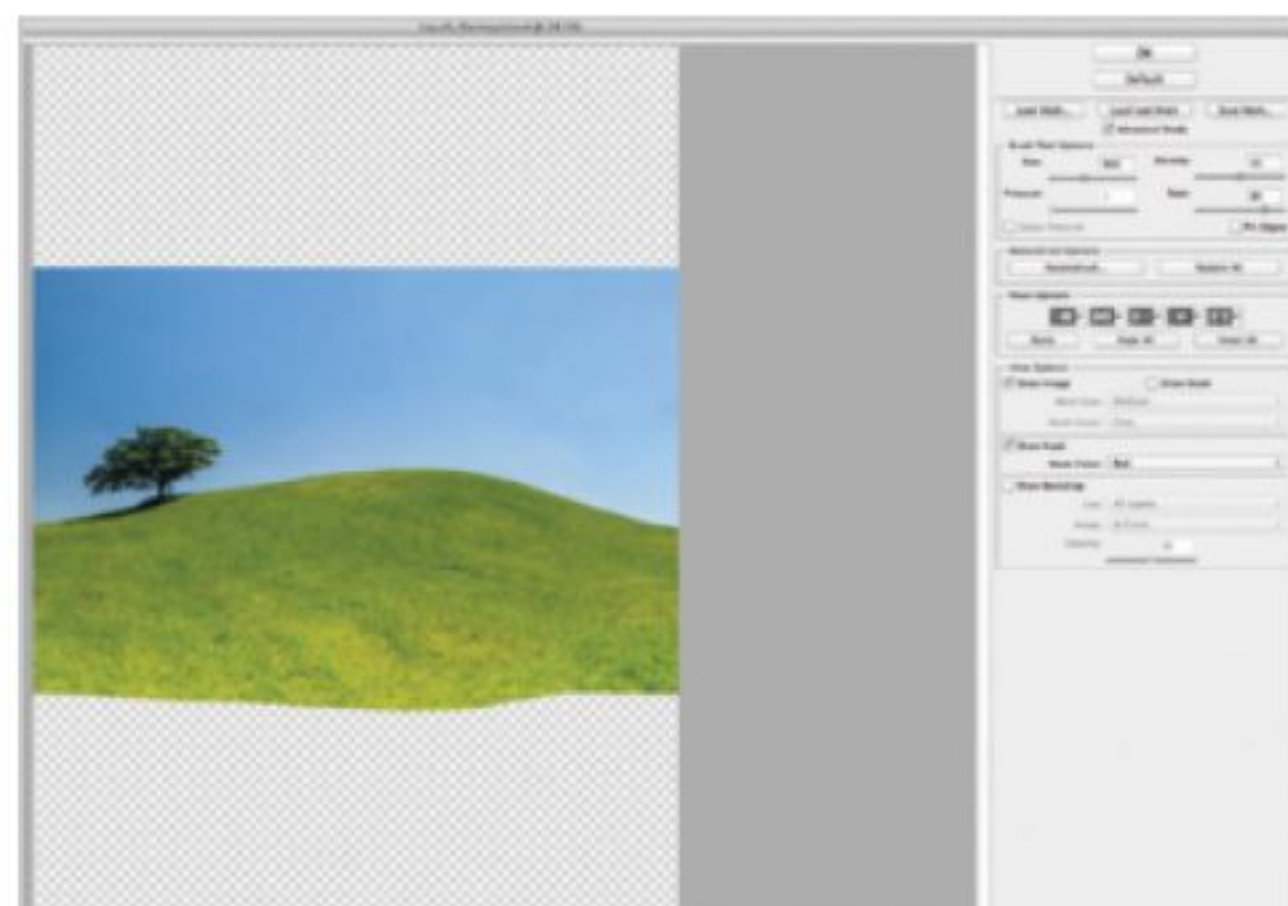
Once you learn the basics of what makes a fantasy island, the rest is up to you. This is where creativity can become so important: the only requirements are that you create a rock floating through the sky, but you can edit anything on there. You can use beaches instead of cliff-tops, picnicking families instead an elephant, or you can even place an entire city on the top of your island.

The potential is infinite for this project, but first let's delve into what makes this particular fantasy island. Even the most complex compositions are constructed with simple techniques.



Create a basic island

01 Open the start pictures and place the rock. Rotate it upside down and go to Select>Color Range. Use the plus eyedropper to select all of the colours on the rock and press OK. With your selection made, Ctrl/right-click, pick Refine Edge, and click the mask icon.



Add the hill

02 Mask out the top of your newly created island, and place your hill. Head to Filter>Liquify and use the Pucker and Bloat tools to shape the hill. Click OK and use Color Range to choose only the green in the picture, and again, mask.



Place the castle

03 Insert your castle and use Color Range to mask out the sky, as with the previous images. Place this layer behind the hill layer. Place the dead tree, mask with Color Range, and use these branches as roots sticking out the sides of the island.

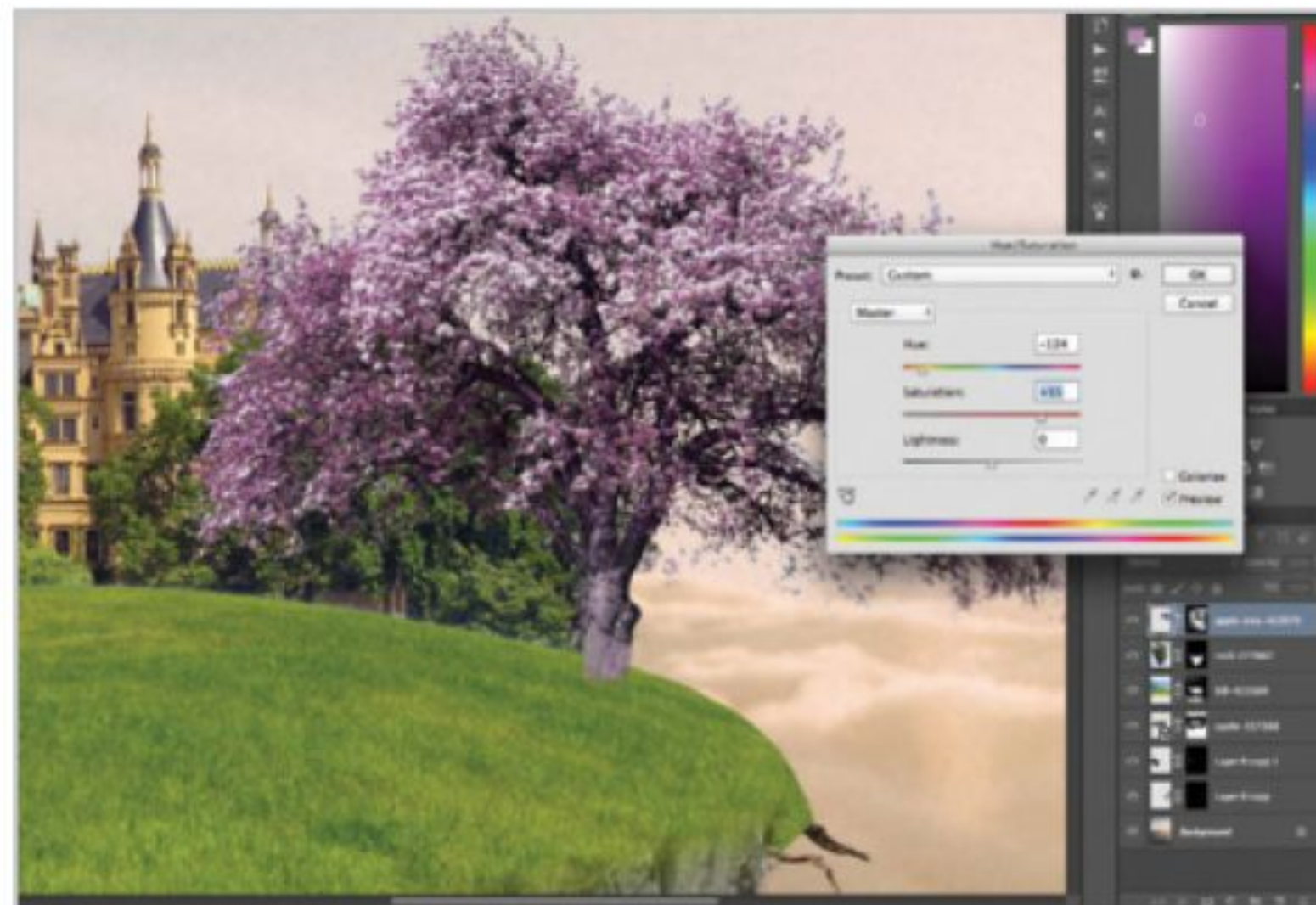


Expert tip



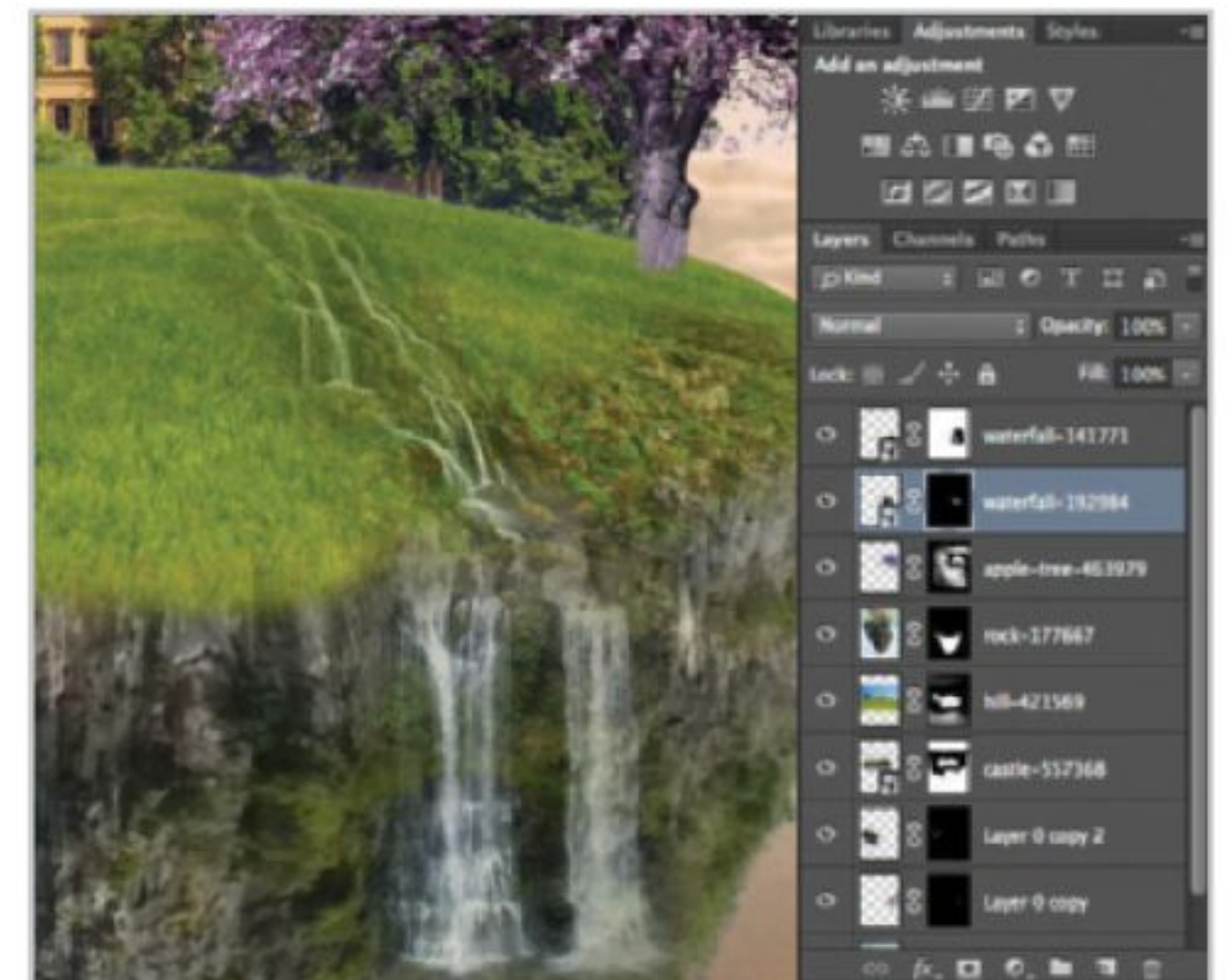
Comp the right images

A composition is only as good as the start images it is made up from. It's therefore imperative to choose the right pictures to include, otherwise you'll leave yourself with a lot of work to do when you're editing. Also look at how objects can be used differently, for example, dead trees look like great roots when you turn them upside down, and cliffs can make great rocks. The better the start images, the more impressive your fantasy island will be.



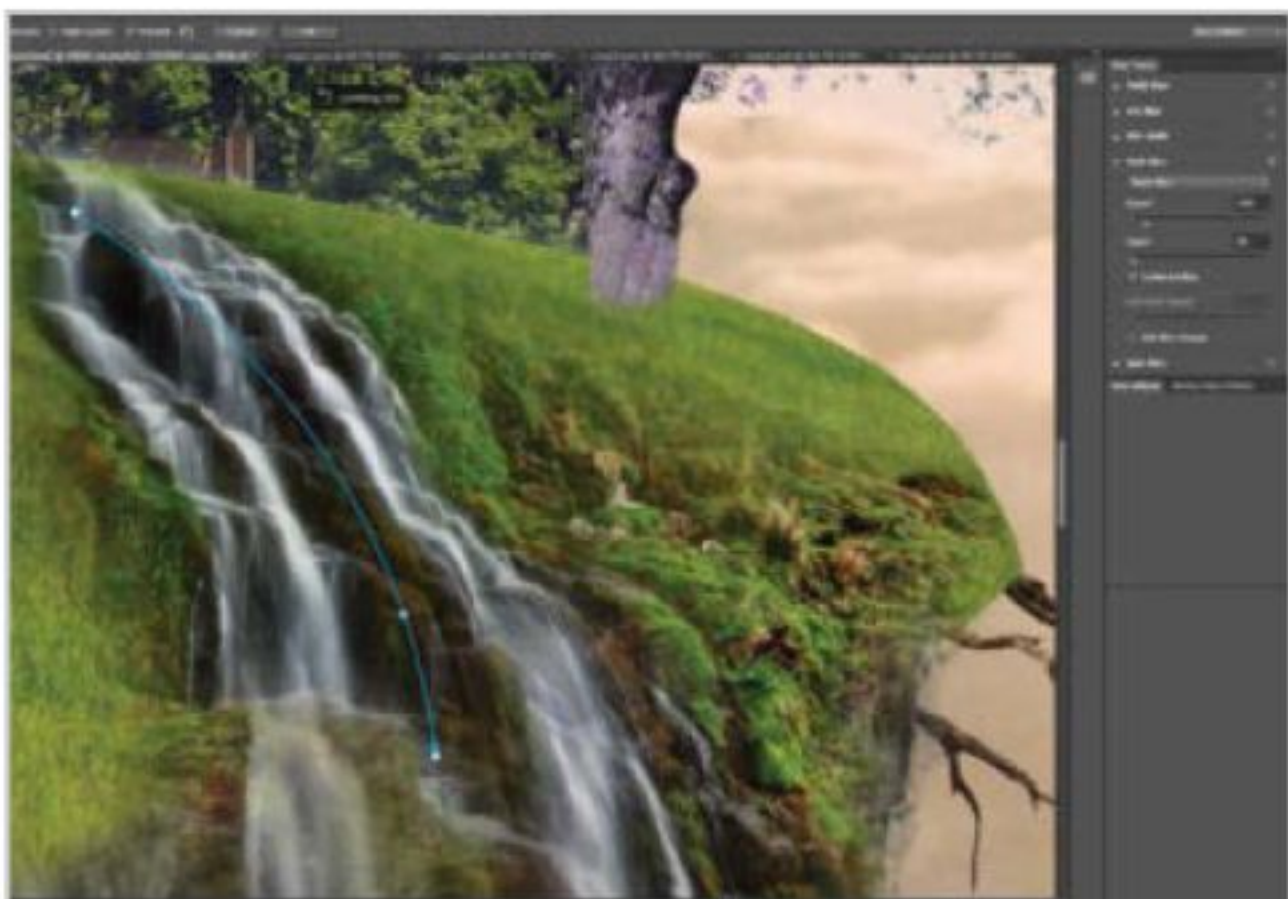
Create a focal tree

04 Place your other tree picture and again, use the Color Range tool to mask. Press Cmd/Ctrl+U and change the Hue of the tree to around -120 and the Saturation to +50. This will turn the tree pink, like a cherry blossom, to help break up all the green in the composition.



Bring the water in

05 Liquid material is more difficult to mask than solid material. Insert waterfall images wherever they will look best – you can even Liquify them into place – create a mask for each layer, and use a soft, white brush at 20% Opacity to fade it in.



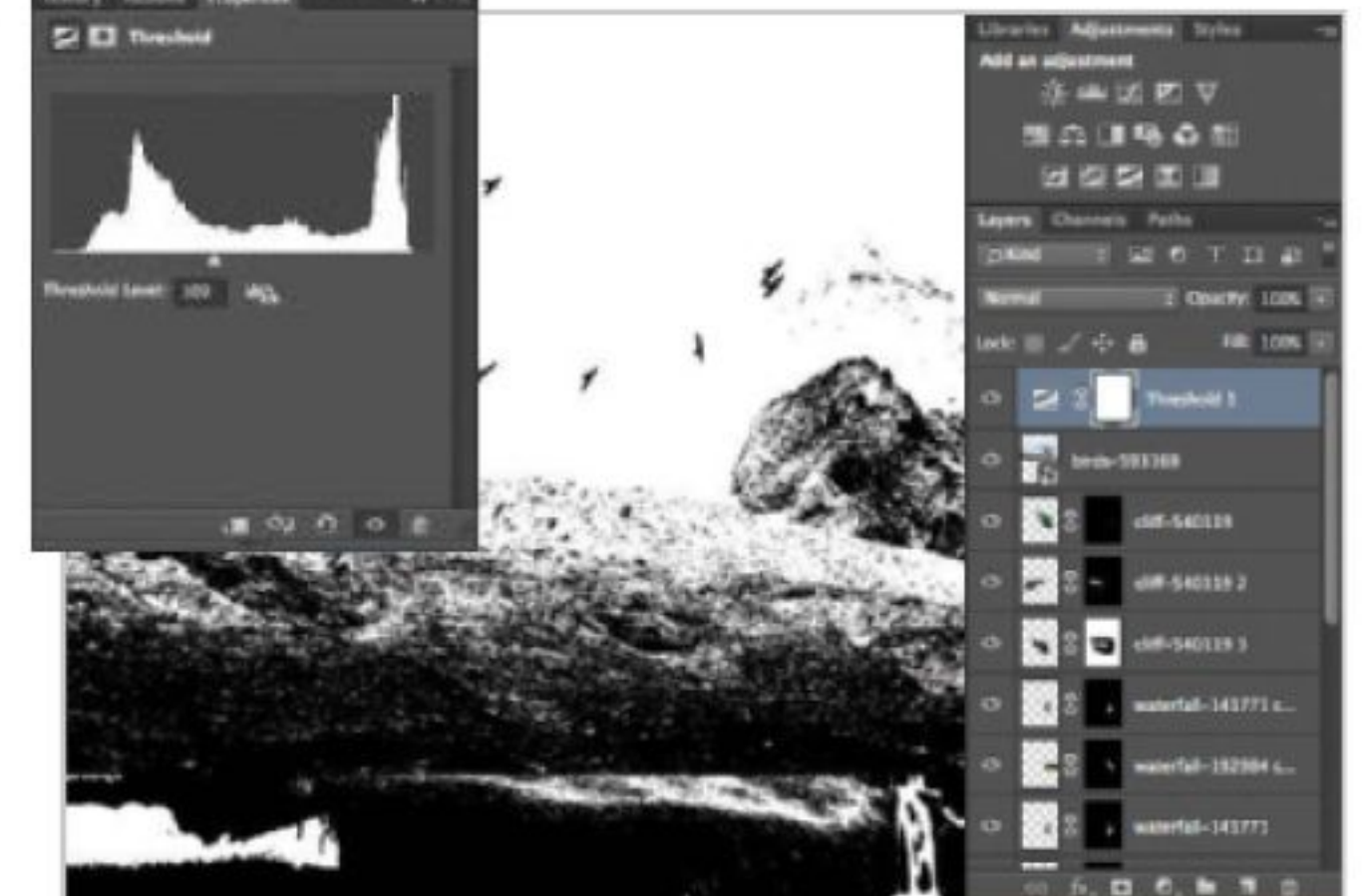
Blur the water

06 To give the effect that the water is flowing, duplicate your waterfall layers and go to Filter>Blur Gallery>Path Blur. The Path Blur gives the effect of motion, but has an advantage over the Motion Blur in that it can travel in multiple directions. Set these layers to 50% Opacity.



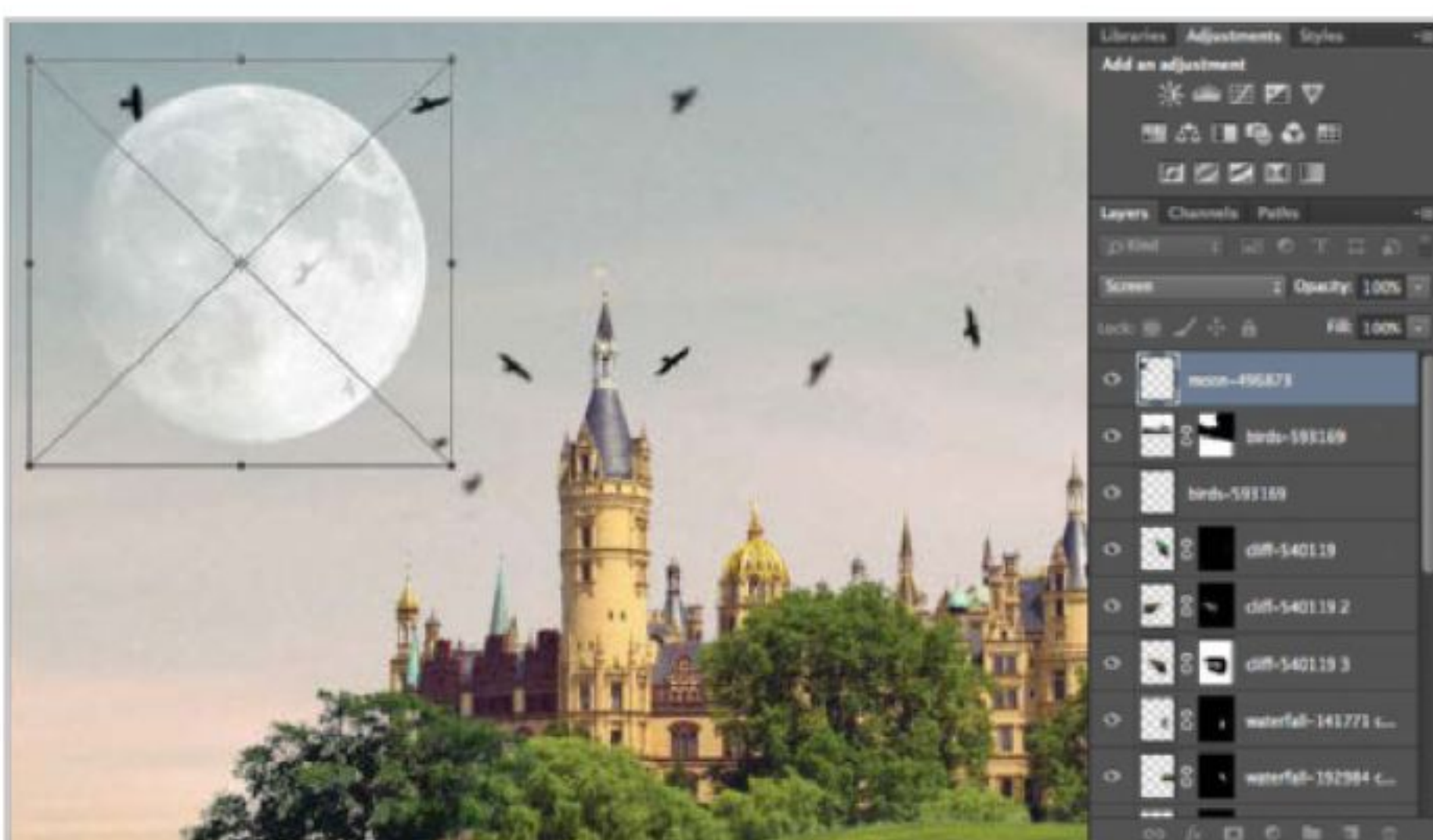
Line the cliffs

07 To connect the grass to the rock, insert your cliff image and mask out everything, except the longest edge of the cliff. Use the same masking technique as the water to capture the texture, and use the Forward Wrap tool in Liquify to reshape if need be.



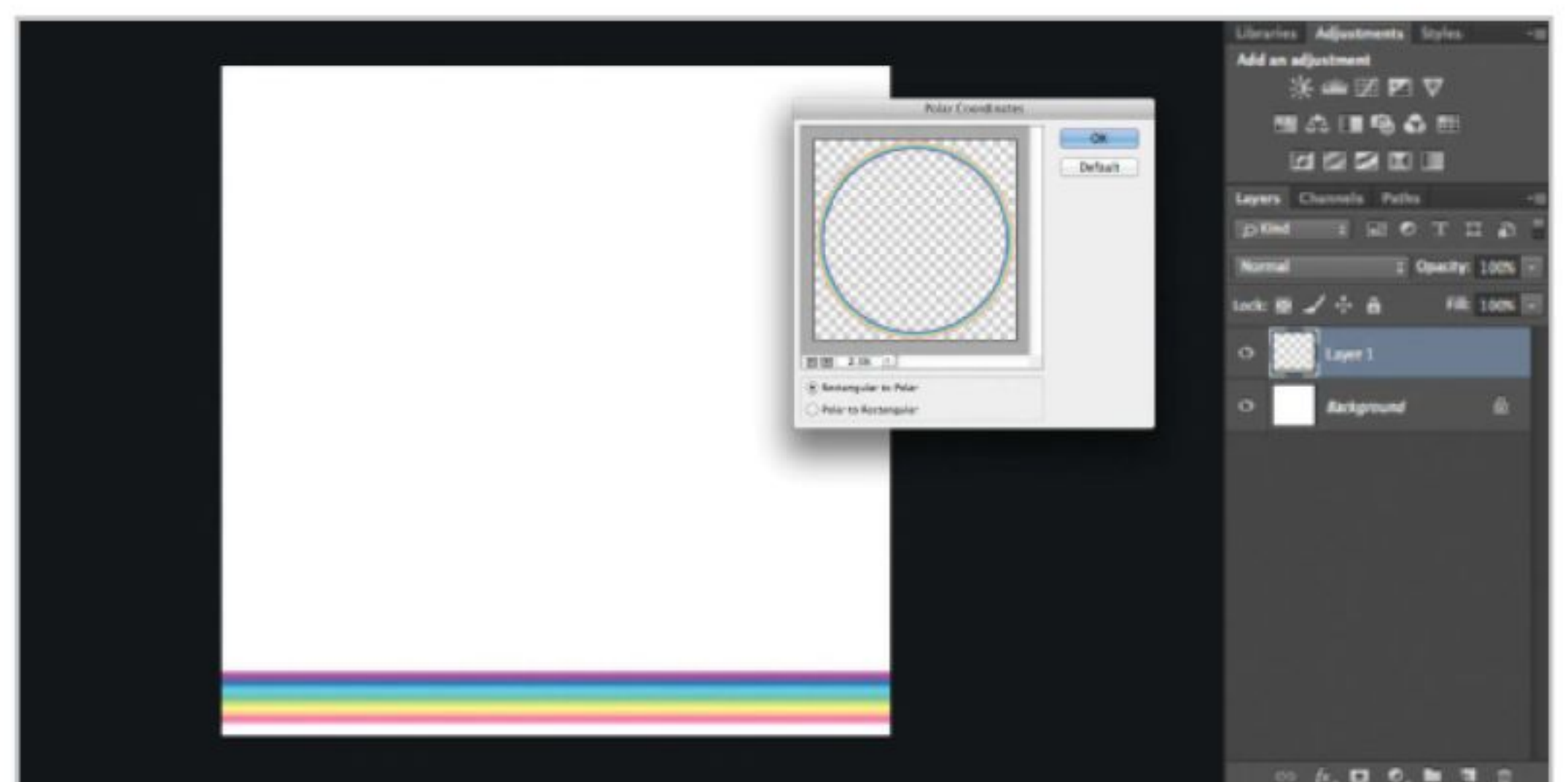
Add some birds

08 Once you've duplicated your cliff and repeated the masking process along the island, add some birds to give your composition a real cliff-top feel. Insert the birds, and use the Threshold to isolate them, as you only need their silhouettes. Blur the occasional one with the Blur tool.



Add a moon

09 With your bird layer set to Multiply, place a moon picture into the composition. Resize it to make it smaller and set the blend mode to Screen; this will automatically create a realistic-looking moon. Set the Opacity of the layer to 80%.



Create a rainbow

10 Create a 9000x9000 document to be big enough, and create a new layer. Add a rainbow gradient on this layer, close to the bottom of the document as we have here. Go to Filter>Distort>Polar Coordinates. Copy this curved rainbow into your picture, set Opacity to 40% and set to Screen.

Build a fantasy flying island



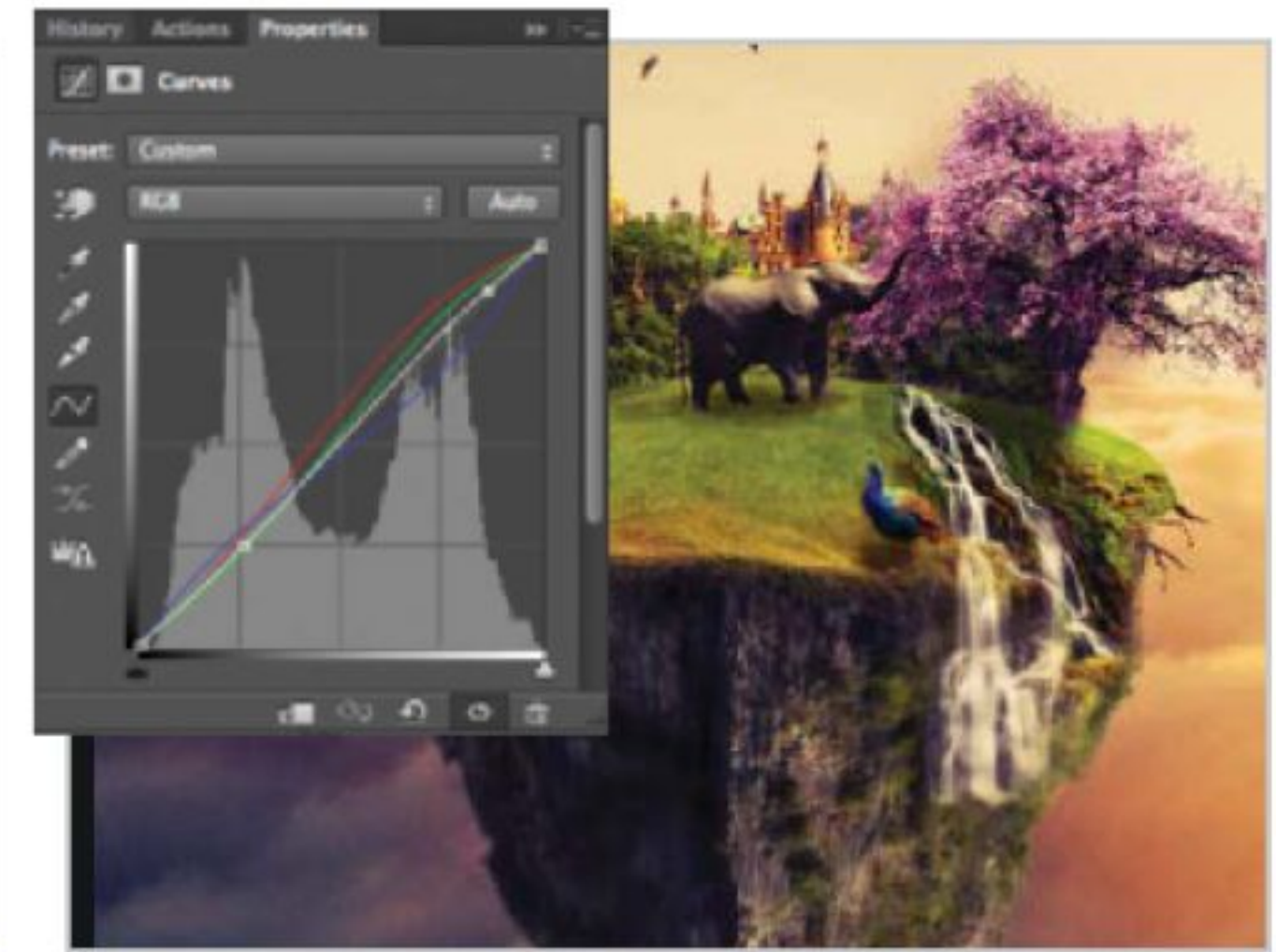
Add animals

11 Place the elephant and peacocks into the composition and use the Quick Selection to select them, before masking out. Use a soft, black brush on the feathery peacock tails to give translucence, and mask the end of the elephant trunk to suggest it's foraging in the tree.



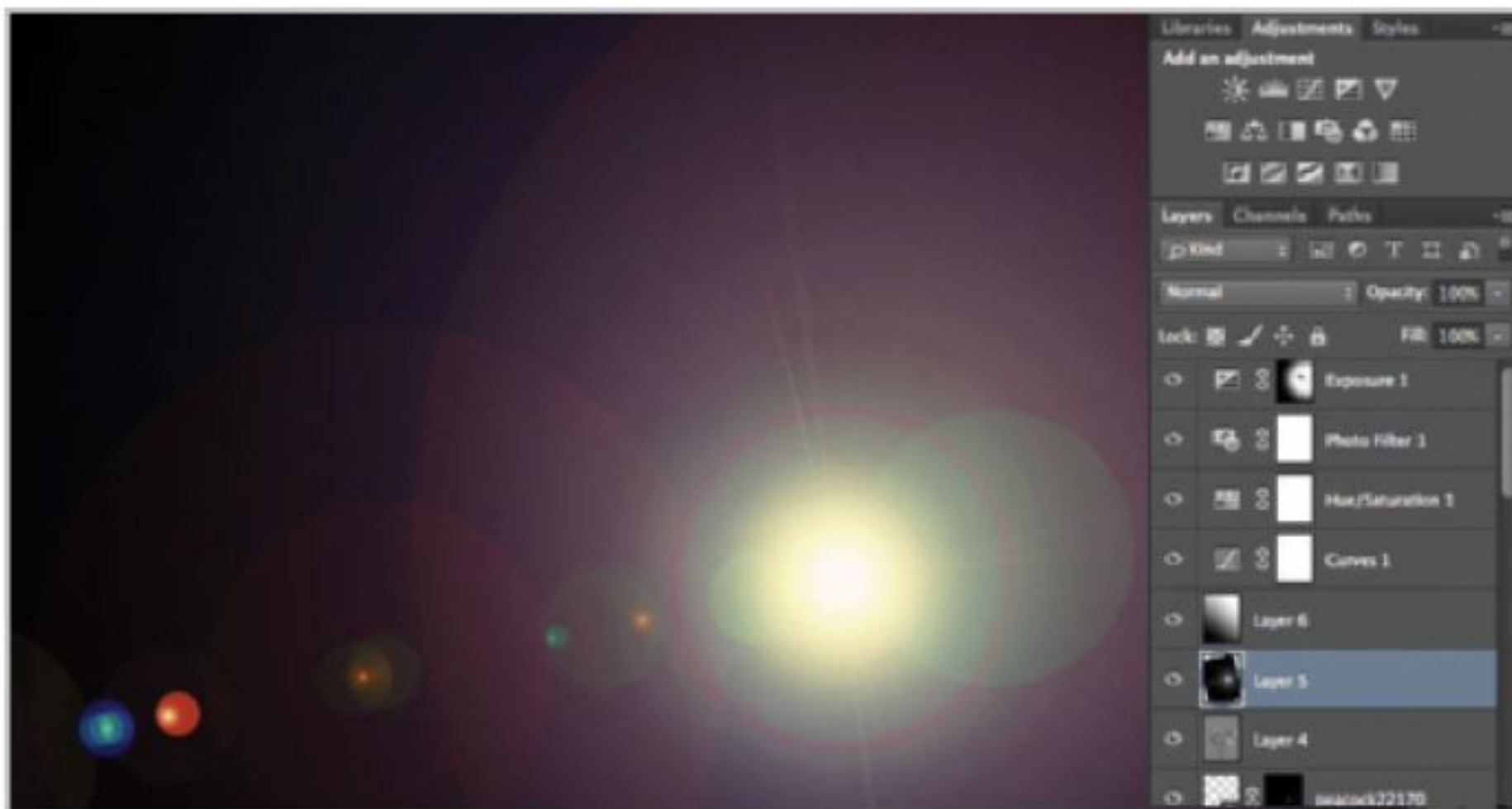
Shade, dodge and burn

12 Add a 50% opaque layer to the top of the stack, fill with neutral grey (#808080) and set to Overlay. Use the Dodge and Burn tools to add highlights and shading. Add layers beneath the subjects and the trees, set to 20% Opacity and shade with a soft black brush.



Add colour adjustments

13 Now we're going to add colour adjustments to give the effect of sunrise. Add a Curves layer, and tweak the individual channels as shown. Up the Saturation to +20 with Hue/Saturation and then add a subtle Photo Filter (Warming Filter 85, Density: 20%).



Make lighting adjustments

14 Brighten up the picture with an Exposure adjustment (+0.38), a black-to-white gradient layer (set to Soft Light) and then add a new black layer. Create a Lens Flare, set this layer to Screen, and position so the flare hits the water. Set each of these to 60% Opacity.



Add finishing touches

15 Complete your picture with some subtle touches. Add a light leak set to Soft Light and 25% Opacity, cut one of the birds to a new layer, move it behind the rainbow, and then Perspective Transform (Ctrl/right-click, Free Transform) the rainbow to make it wider at the bottom.

What you'll learn

Combine composition techniques

WARP

Go to Filter>Liquify and then you can reshape anything in your picture that needs it. Make sure you warp before you mask, though, as the mask won't warp with the layer on its own.

MASK

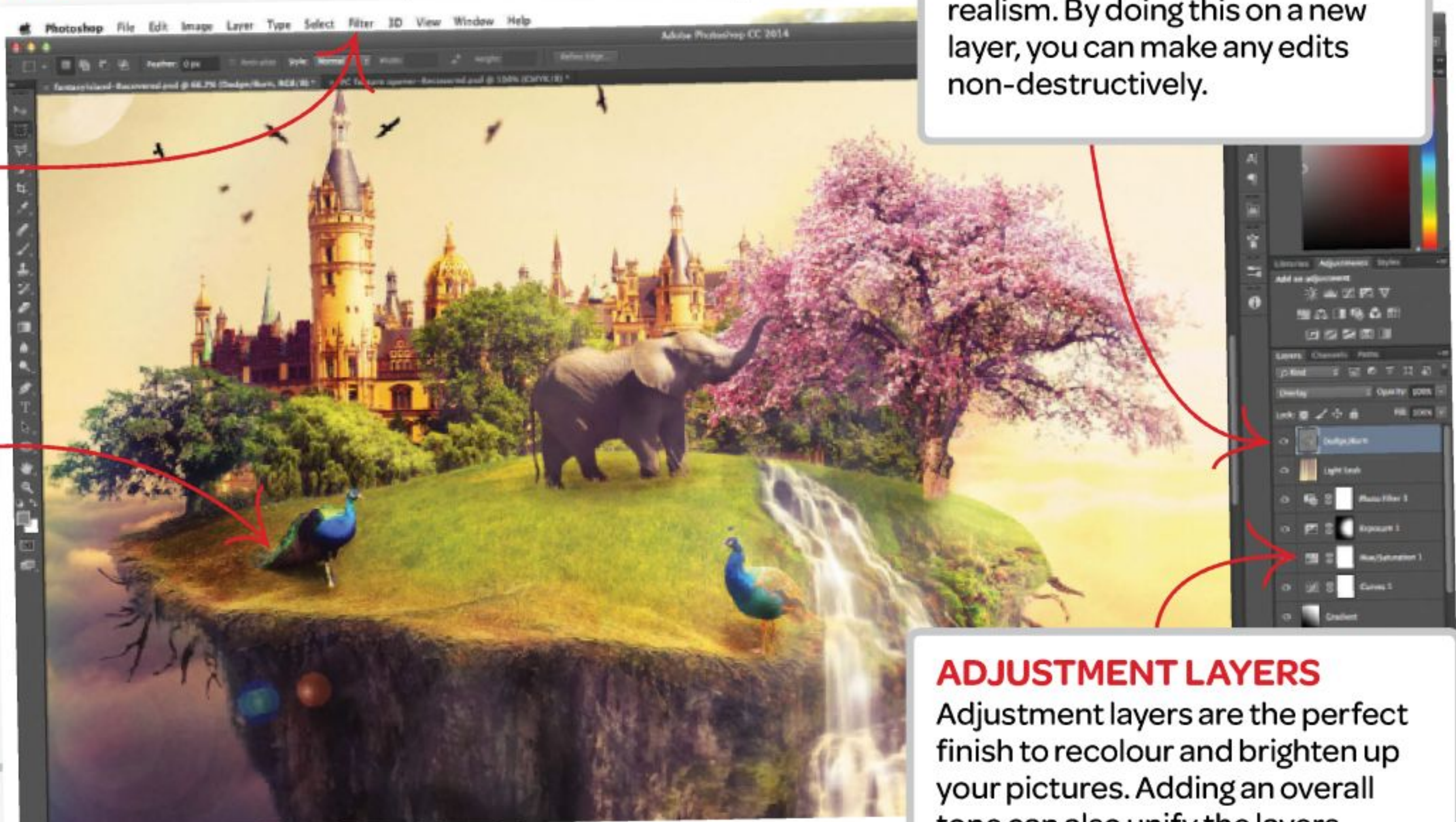
Use various selection techniques to isolate your subjects. Soften edges with the Refine Edge tool to blur them, and even mask manually with a soft, black brush.

DODGE AND BURN

Add lighting and shading to your composition to enhance the realism. By doing this on a new layer, you can make any edits non-destructively.

ADJUSTMENT LAYERS

Adjustment layers are the perfect finish to recolour and brighten up your pictures. Adding an overall tone can also unify the layers.





Essentials

Works with



Works with Photoshop CC, CS4+ and Elements 11+

What you'll learn

Use a clipping mask to contain multiple images and adjustment layers

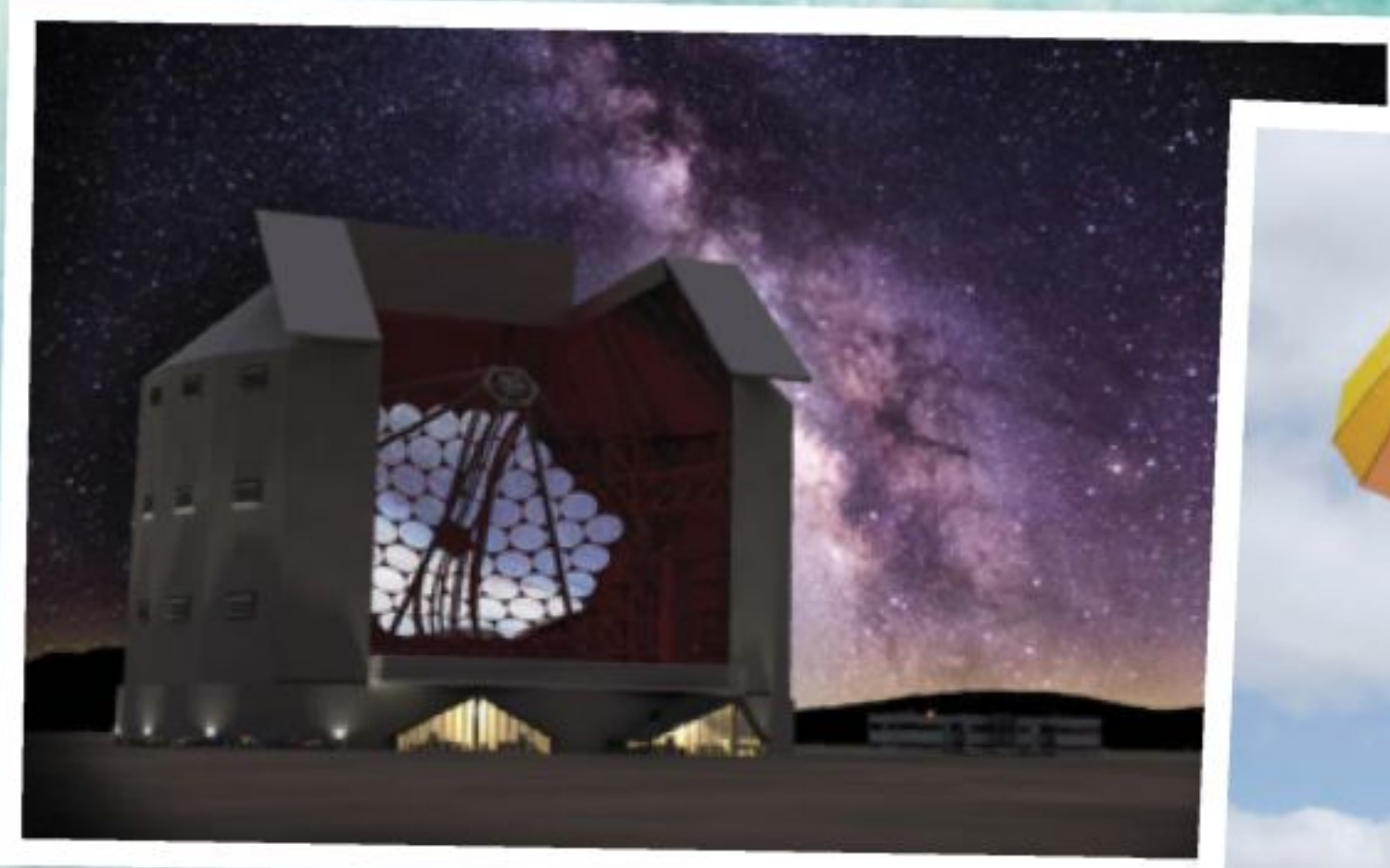
 **Time taken**
1.5 hours

Expert

Andre Villanueva



"Clipping masks play a big part in both my personal and commercial work. I first discovered Photoshop in the early 2000s while in school for Web Design. After graduation, I taught for several years in the Media Arts department. I'm now Art Director for a tech company, soothing my inner instructor by sharing techniques."



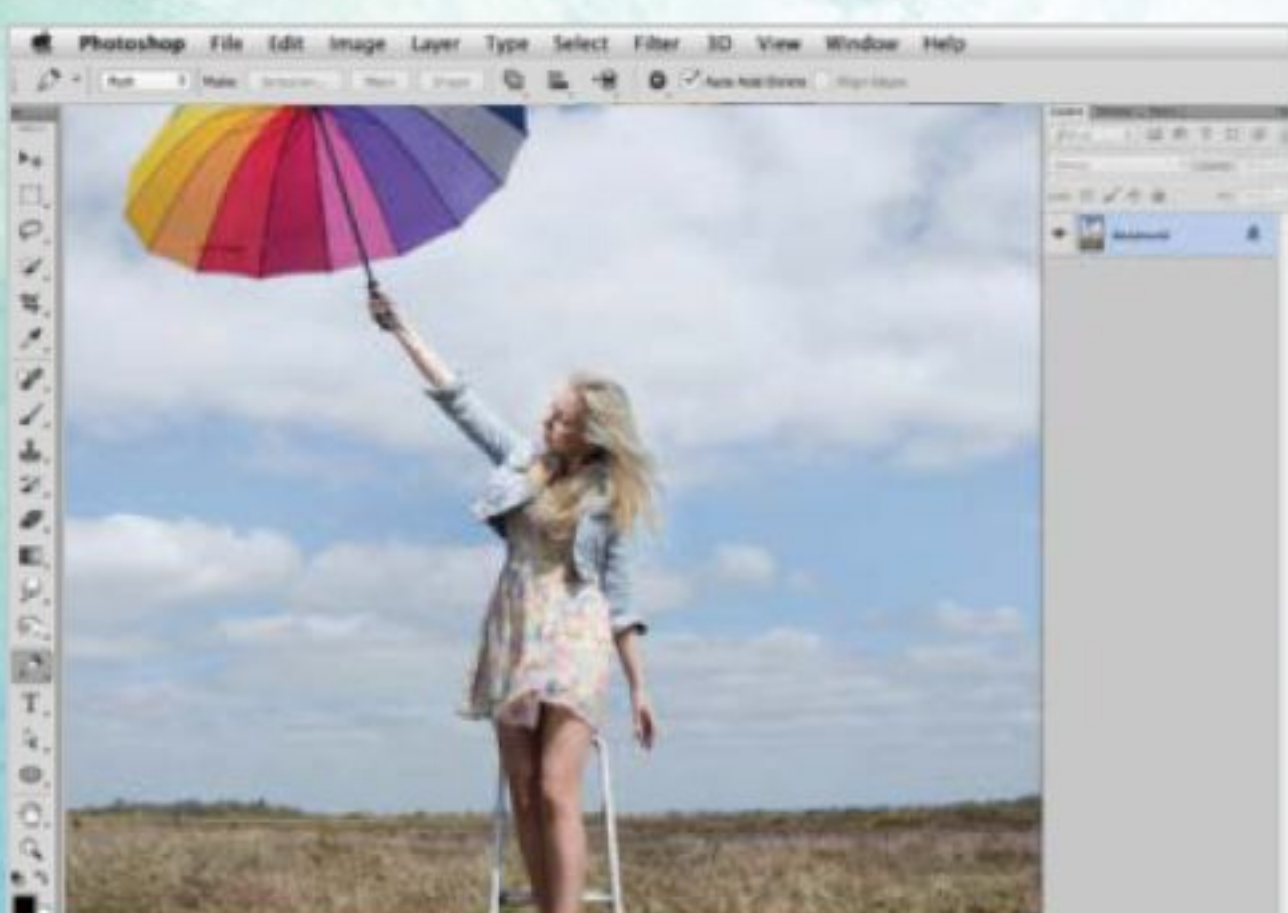
Craft abstract silhouettes

Use a clipping mask to contain dazzling stars and colour all within a simple silhouette

Clipping masks are one of the secret weapons of Photoshop. While not as glamorous as the Brush tool or as sophisticated as 3D, they nevertheless deserve to belong in all users' repertoires. Clipping masks consist of a base layer and successive clipped layers above. The base layer defines the visible boundaries of the layers in the group. For example, you could use text like 'summer' as the base, then clip an image of a sunny scene so it's contained in the letters.

Here we'll be using a shape based on an umbrella-wielding model. We'll trace each part with the Pen tool, and convert each path into a selection, which we'll fill with black. If you don't have the Pen tool, use a combination of selection tools, like the Quick Selection and Lasso tools. Skip all instructions concerning paths if you do so.

We'll merge the pieces into a complete silhouette and place atop a dreamy cloudscape. We'll then fill the silhouette by clipping a wondrous array of stars, colour, and adjustments.



Start tracing

01 Open 'Model.jpg'. Create a new layer. Activate the Pen tool and set to Path in the options bar. Start plotting points to outline. Click to create a corner, click and drag to create a smooth point. The farther you drag out, the wider the path's curvature.



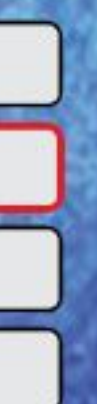
Exaggerate and refine

02 You can trace the model closely, or exaggerate and refine areas. Your goal is to get a complete shape by returning to the origin point. Here we focused on the head. You can use the Direct Selection tool to adjust the points and path segments.

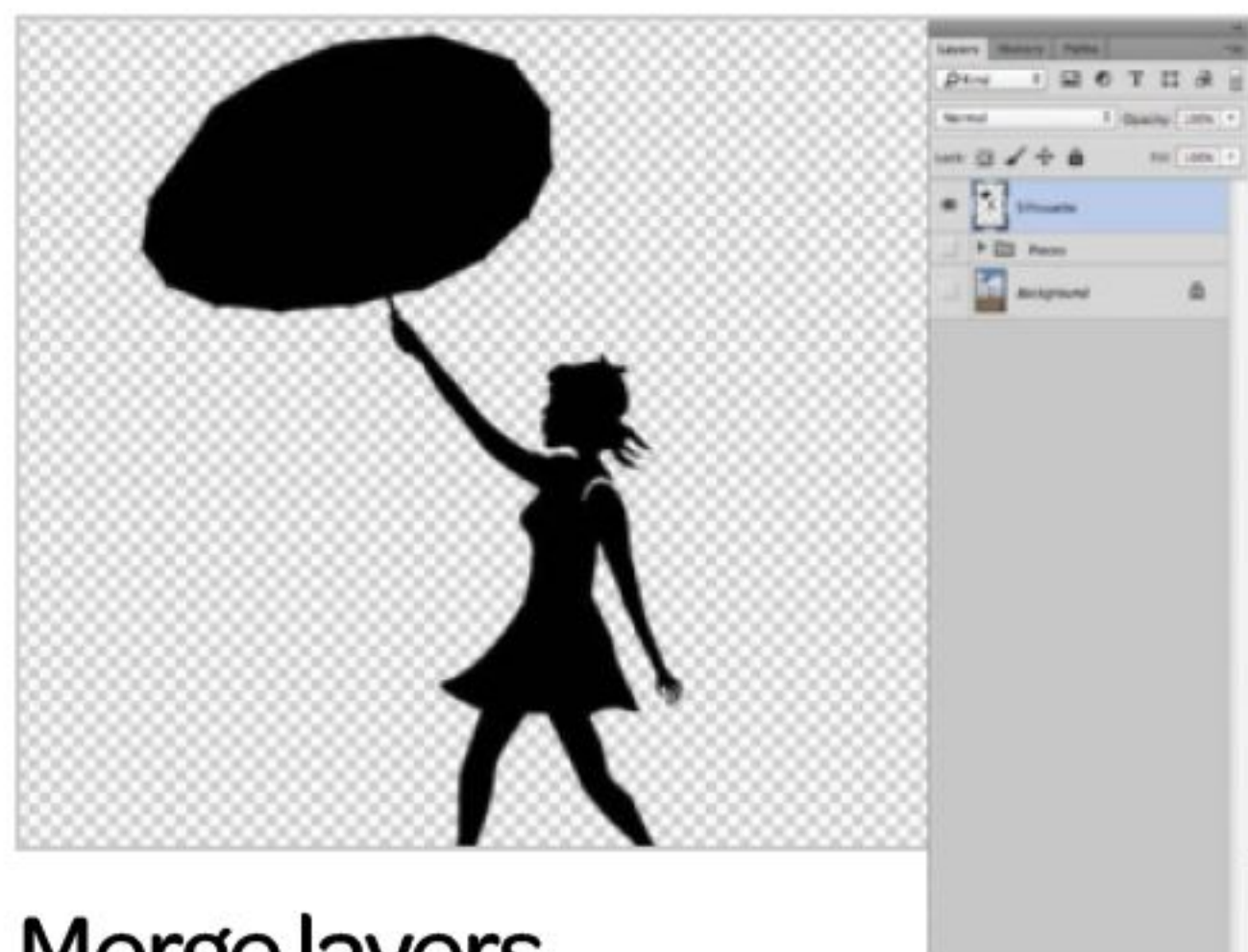


Make selection and fill

03 Press Cmd/Ctrl+Return/Enter to convert the path into a selection. Invert it if needed (Cmd/Ctrl+Shift+I). Go to Edit>Fill, use black. Click OK. Deselect (Cmd/Ctrl+D). Continue adding new layers, outlining parts, converting to selections, and filling with black to complete the silhouette.

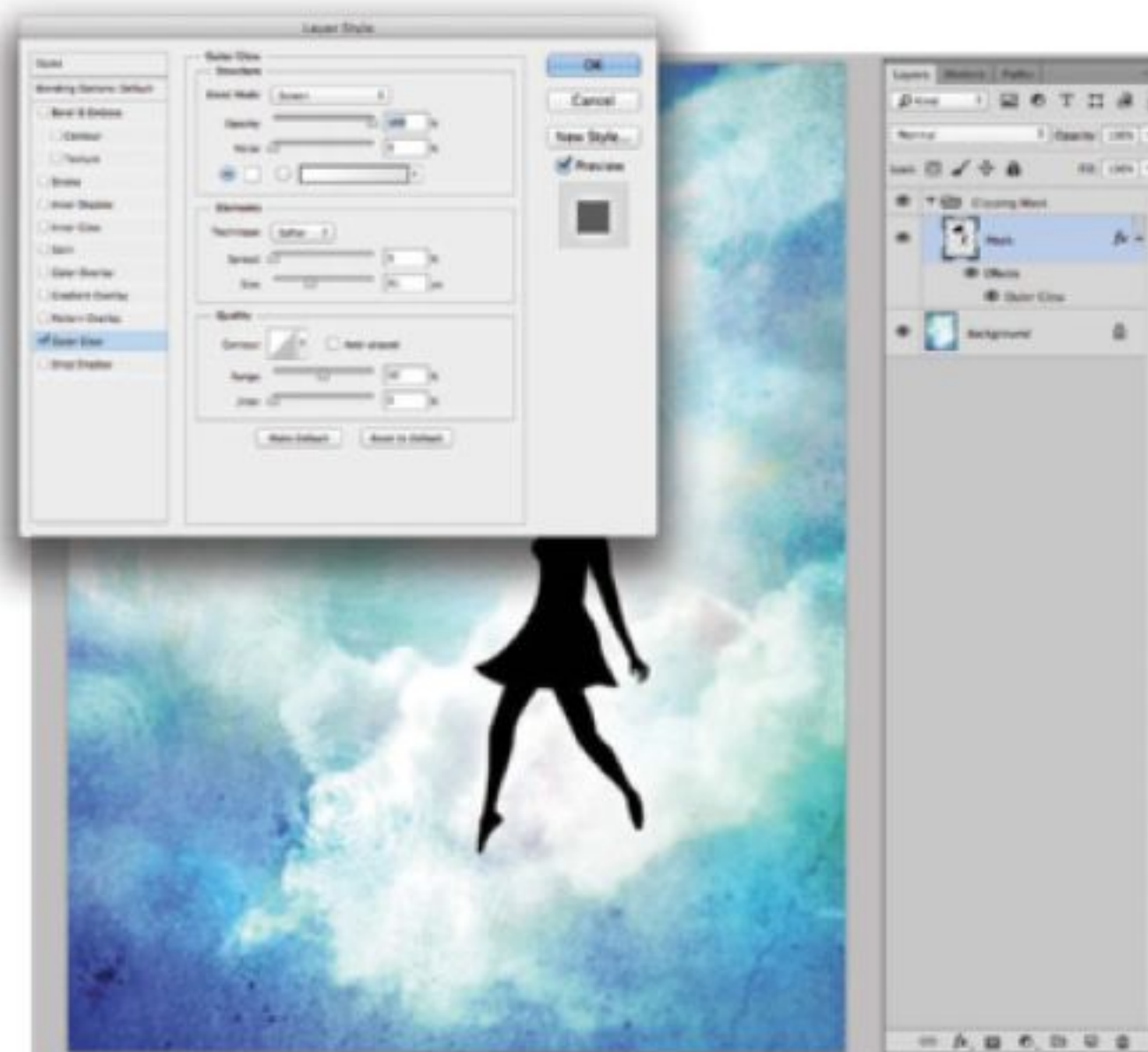


Genius Guide



Merge layers

04 We'll now unify the separate pieces of the silhouette. Click the eye beside the Background layer to hide. With the top layer selected, press **Cmd/Ctrl+Option/Alt+Shift+E**. All the layers should now be merged at the top. Press **Cmd/Ctrl+A** then **Cmd/Ctrl+C** to select all and copy.



Transplant silhouette

05 Open 'Start.psd'. Press **Cmd/Ctrl+V** to paste the silhouette. Position with the Move tool. Apply an Outer Glow with the fx button in the Layers palette. Increase the Opacity and Size of the glow.



Clipping mask

06 Unless otherwise noted, you will need to apply the clipping mask to each of the remaining steps. In the Layers palette, hover over the line between the current layer and the one before. When the cursor changes, **Option/Alt-click** and the layer will be clipped.



Add umbrella

07 Go to **File>Place**, choose 'Model.jpg'. After adding to the clipping mask, position it so the umbrella lines up. Scale if needed using **Free Transform (Cmd/Ctrl+T)**. Apply a layer mask using the icon in the Layers palette. Paint using black to hide the model.



Add sky

08 Go to **File>Place**, choose 'Stars.jpg'. After adding to the clipping mask, scale and position it using **Free Transform (Cmd/Ctrl+T)** so only the sky portion fills the silhouette. Apply a layer mask and paint black at 40% Opacity to show a bit of umbrella.



Add lower colour

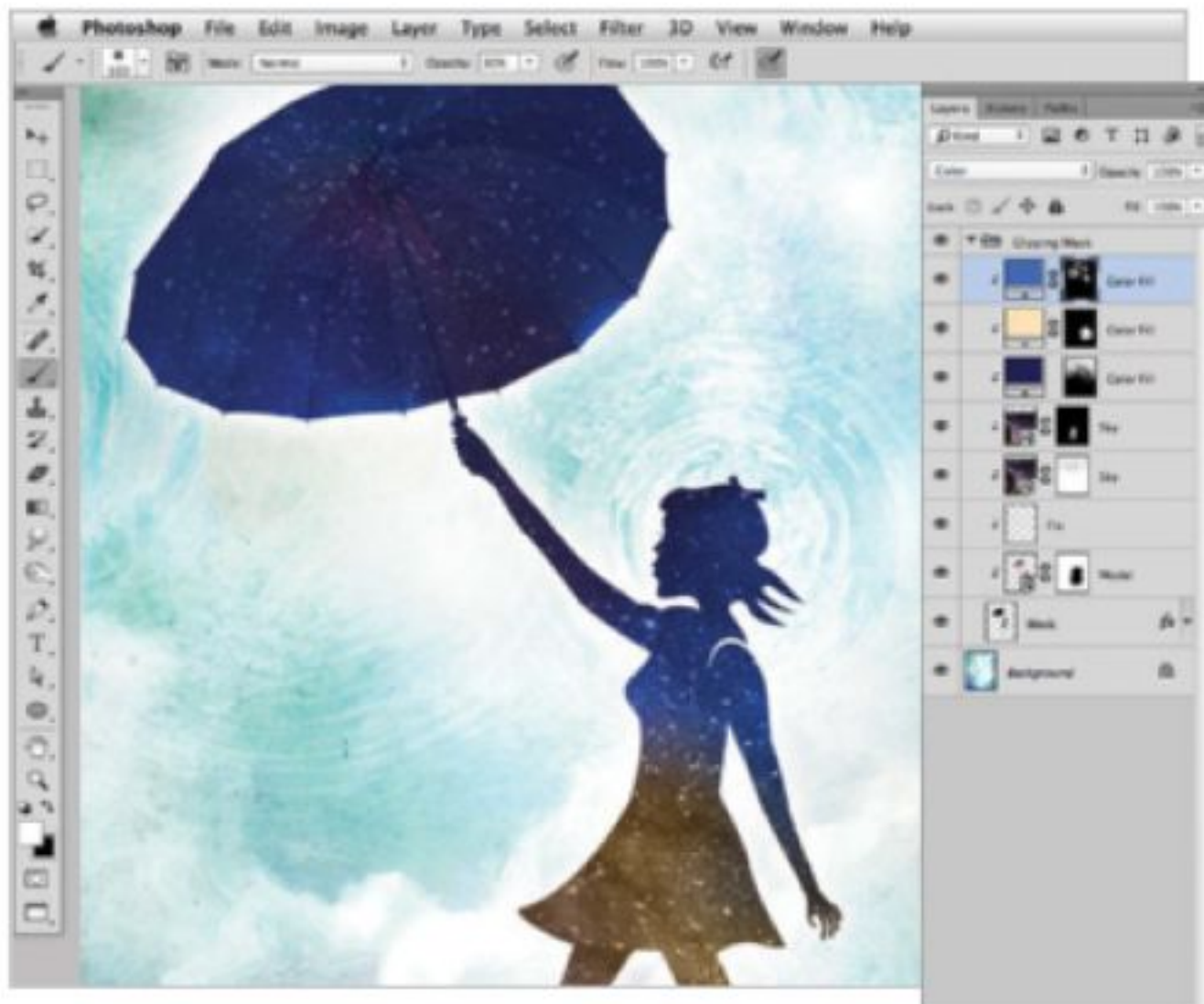
10 Click the **Create New Fill/adjustment Layer** button in the Layers palette, choose **Solid Color**. Pick **#ffe4b3**. Set blend mode to **Color**. Click on the **Color Fill's** mask and press **Cmd/Ctrl+I** to invert. Paint with white at 80% to add colour in the lower portion of the silhouette.

Add base colour

09 Click the **Create New Fill/adjustment Layer** button in the Layers palette, choose **Solid Color**. Pick **#1d1d54**. With a soft, round brush at 80% Opacity, paint black in the **Color Fill's** mask to fade the colour at the bottom of the figure.



Craft abstract silhouettes



Add upper colour

11 Add another Color Fill layer. Pick # 125fff. Set blend mode to Color. Click on the Color Fill's mask and press Cmd/Ctrl+I to invert. Paint with white at 80% Opacity to add colour in the upper portion of the silhouette.



Add bright colour

12 Add another Color Fill layer. Pick # ff0090. Set blend mode to Color. Invert the mask. Paint with white starting at 20% Opacity to add the bright colour throughout. Add smaller, more intense areas at higher opacities.



Burn with Overlay

13 Create a new layer. Go to Edit>Fill. Use 50% Gray, click OK. Set the blend mode to Overlay. Paint with black at 50% Opacity to burn (darken) areas of the silhouette. Adjust opacity as needed.



Dodge with Overlay

14 Now let's dodge (lighten) areas. Paint with white at 50% opacity. Adjust opacity as needed. If you need to restore any parts back to neutral, paint with 50% gray (#808080).



Apply Levels

15 Now we'll lighten the figure up a bit. Click the Create New Fill/adjustment Layer button in the Layers palette, choose Levels. Drag the highlight slider inward until sufficiently lightened.



Add stars

16 Place 'Stars.png'. Move, scale, and rotate before confirming. After adding to the clipping mask, continue to tweak if needed. Place more stars and adjust. To hide parts of the stars, apply a layer mask and paint with black. You may add stars below the mask (not attached to mask).



Increase saturation

17 Select the top layer. Click the Create New Fill/adjustment Layer button in the Layers palette, choose Hue/Saturation. Drag the Saturation slider to the right until sufficiently saturated. Paint black in the mask to tone down areas if needed.

Expert tip



Moving masks

Clipping masks can be unwieldy when trying to move. You need to be sure to select all applicable layers so things don't get out of whack. If you're using Photoshop, you can make it more manageable by creating a group or Smart Object. To create a group, select the layers, then press Cmd/Ctrl+G. To create a Smart Object, select the layers, right-click, then choose Convert to Smart Object. Apply filters to the Smart Object as Smart Filters.





Essentials

Works with



Photoshop CS and above,
Photoshop CC

What you'll learn

Manipulate masks,
work with image luminosity
and Smart Filters

 **Time taken**
2 hours

Expert

Kirk Nelson



"I love to create pieces that defy expectations. The out-of-bounds genre would be difficult or impossible to create in other mediums. I'm a professional graphics artist with nearly 20 years of experience and am just your friendly neighbourhood graphics geek!"

Learn to edit out of bounds

Make a shark leap – Photoshop style – as we create a project that bursts and spills off the page

Creating an out-of-bounds style project is always a lot of fun. The subject defies reality and expectations by appearing to literally jump off the page. The core technique is simple; it's little more than an exercise in masking. But it takes more to make the image truly dynamic.

In this project we will create a shark that appears to be smashing through the screen of an iPad. It's the details of this project that really make it something special. We will walk you through the process of colour treatment, creating multiple types of masks, isolating water drops, creating

selective motion blurs, crafting realistic water splash effects, even adding subtle refraction to the drops on the tabletop!

While the basic approach to this project is fairly straightforward, the details use some more intermediate and advanced techniques of compositing and photomanipulation. The instruction is aimed at the intermediate user who is already familiar with the Photoshop interface and most of the major features. So with that, grab the files from the supplied resources and join us in an adventure with a shark who knows no bounds!



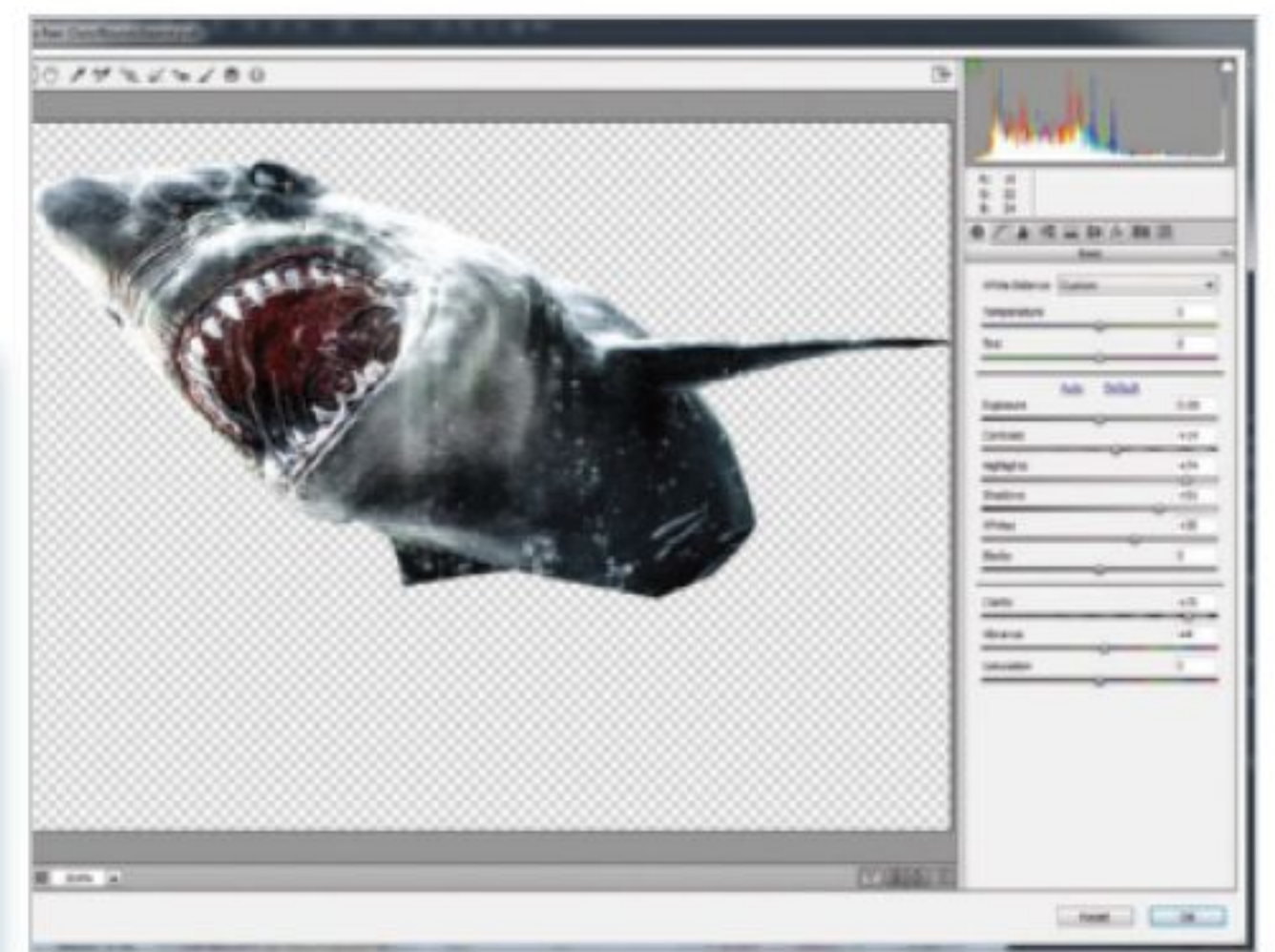
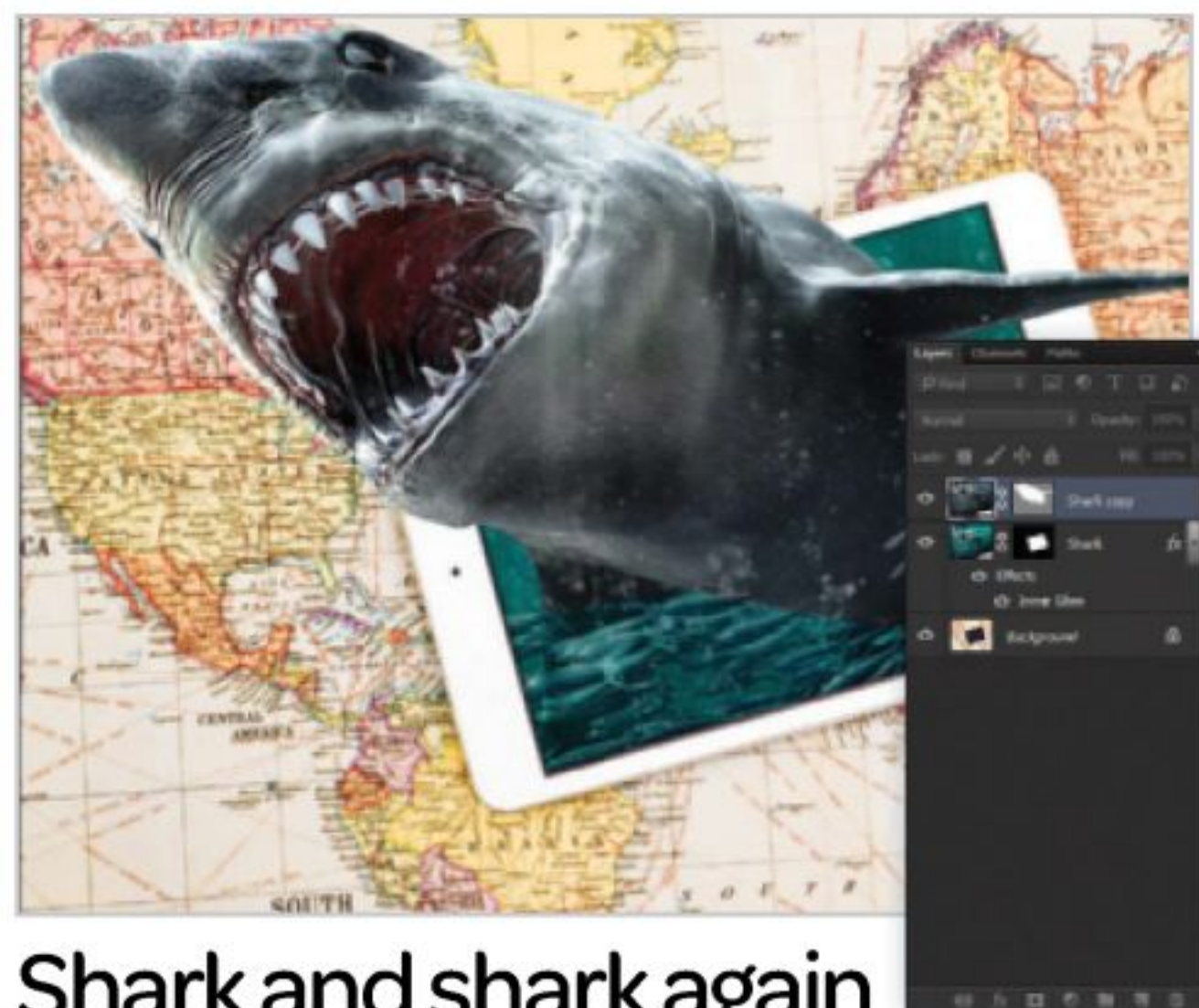
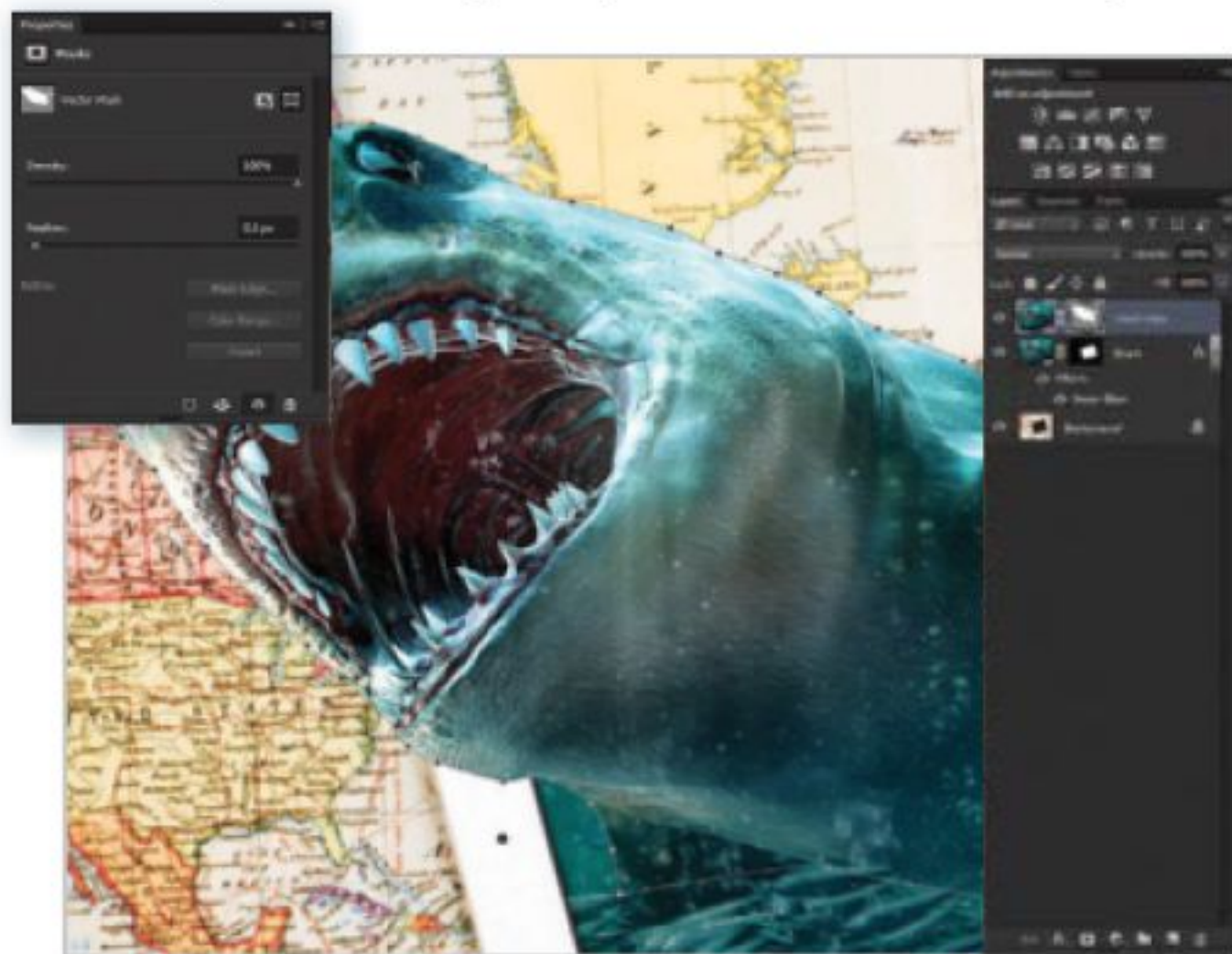


Image placement

01 Open the 'iPad.jpg' file and the 'Shark.jpg' file. Drag the shark image onto the iPad image and transform it so the shark appears to be jumping out of the iPad. It's helpful to reduce the Opacity of the layer while positioning. Duplicate the Shark layer afterwards.

Inside the box

02 Hide the duplicate Shark layer and focus on the original. Create a selection around the screen of the iPad and use as a layer mask. Add an Inner Glow layer style, but change the blend mode to Multiply and the colour to a deep grey.



Jump the paths

03 Use the Pen tool set to Path to create a tight outline around the shark on the Shark copy layer. Use that path as a vector mask to isolate the shark. Open the Properties panel and set Feather to 0.5px to slightly soften the mask edge.

Shark and shark again

04 Adjust the Hue/Saturation of the Shark copy layer, set adjustment to Cyans and set Hue to 15, Saturation to -70 and Lightness to 19. Create two duplicates of the masked shark layer, call one SharkBlur and the other SharkColour.

Increased highlights

05 Turn the SharkColour layer into a Smart Object and run the Camera Raw filter to intensify the highlights. In the Basic tab, set the Contrast to 14, Highlights to 74, Shadows to 51, Whites to 30, increase the Clarity to 76, and Vibrance to 4.



Faded effect

06 After applying the Camera Raw settings, back in Photoshop hide the SharkBlur layer and focus on the SharkColour layer. Add a layer mask and use a linear gradient from black to white to fade the highlight effect down the length of the shark.

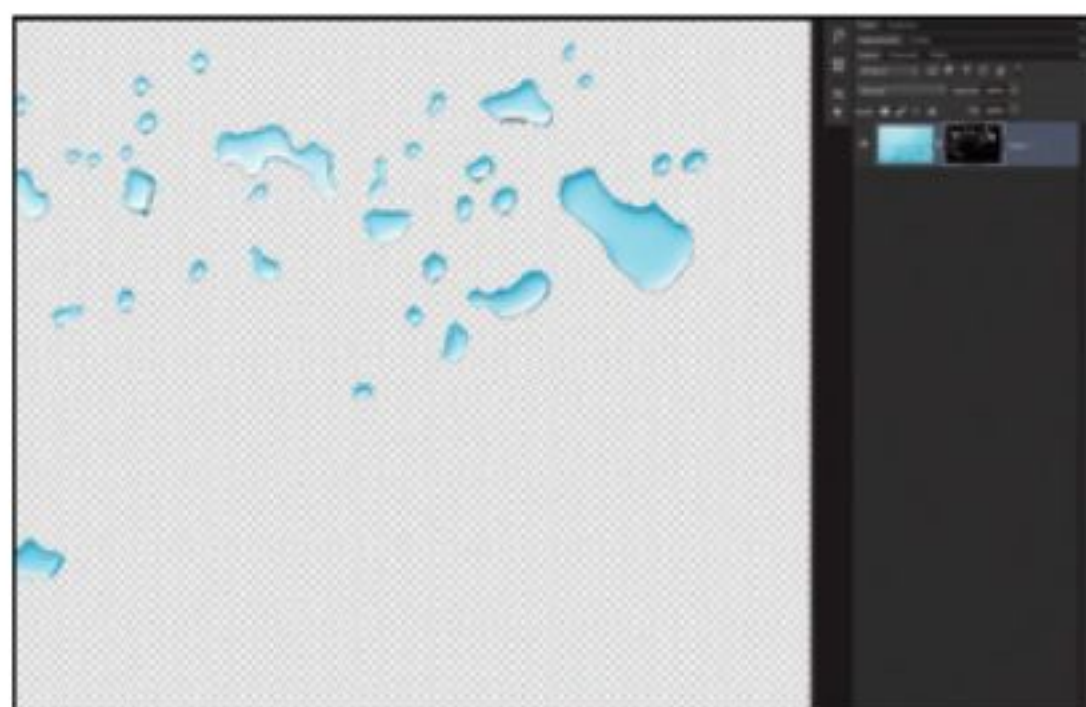
Add Motion Blur

07 Right-click the vector mask of the SharkBlur layer, choose Rasterize Vector Mask, then right-click again and choose Apply Layer Mask. Run the Motion Blur filter and set the Angle to -35 and a Distance of 142 pixels. Then use a layer mask to contain the blur towards the bottom of the shark.



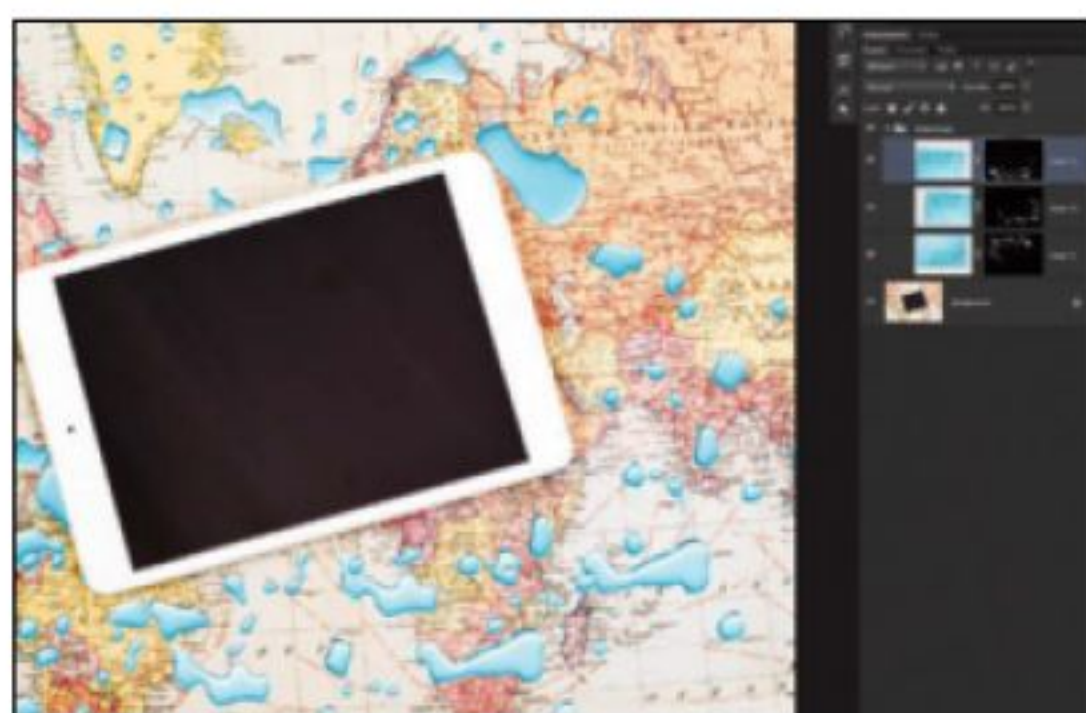
Expert edit

Make water puddles



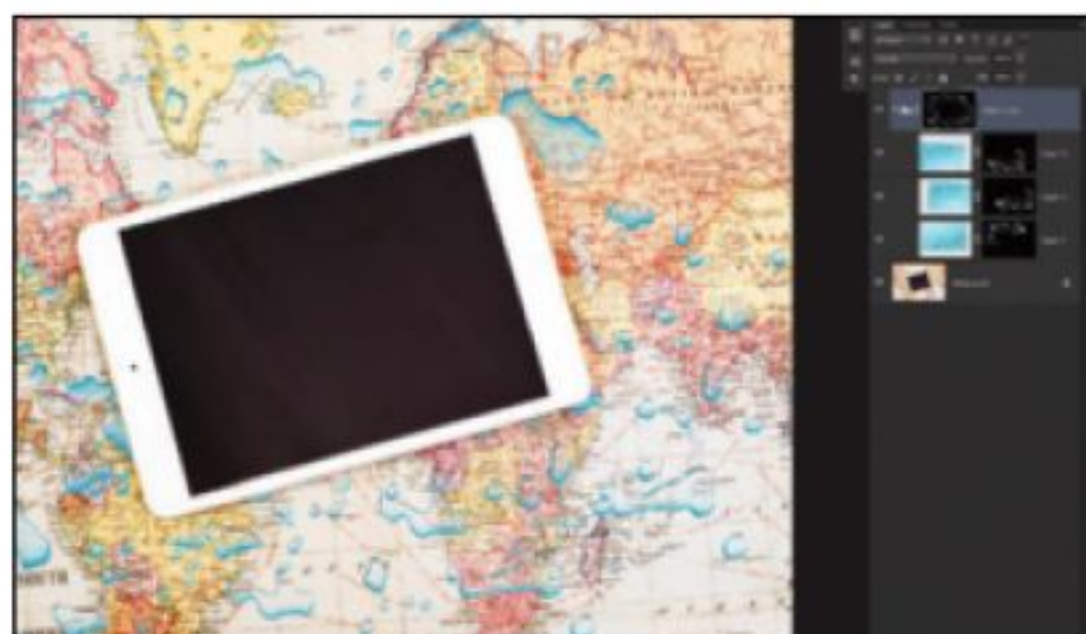
Select the spill

01 Use the Quick Selection tool to select several of the water drops. Smooth the selection with Refine Edge and use it as a layer mask to isolate the water drops.



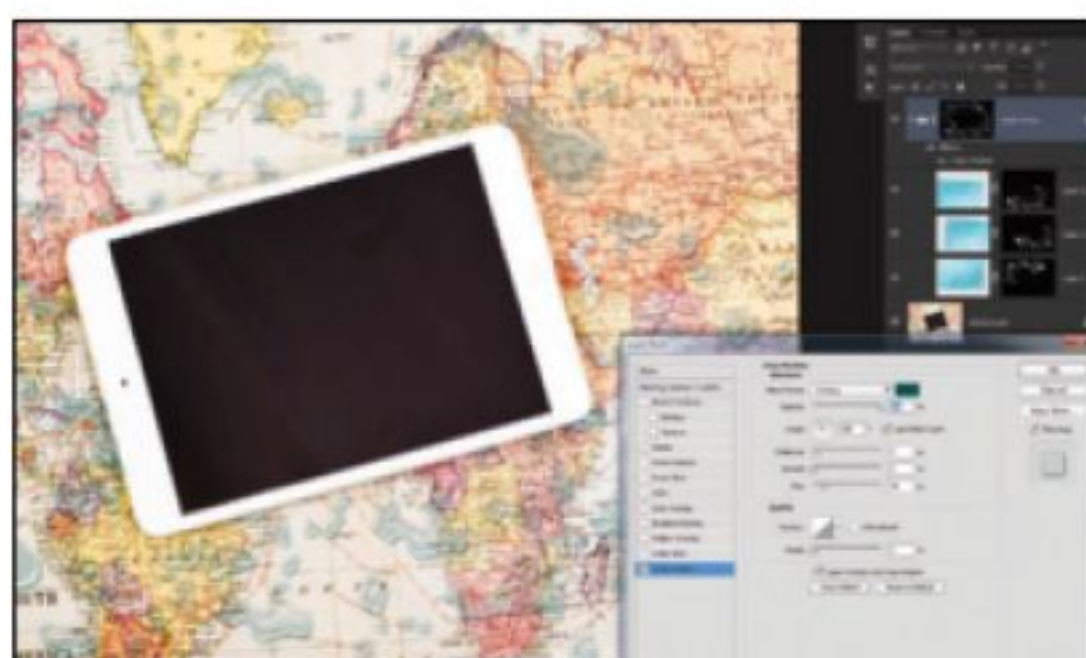
Group of spills

02 Drag the water drops onto the main project and position. Then duplicate and transform to fill the table top with more water drops. Group all these layers together.



Transparent water

03 Hide all layers except the water drop group. In the Channels palette, Cmd/Ctrl-click on the RGB channel to load luminosity. Invert the selection and use as a mask on the group.



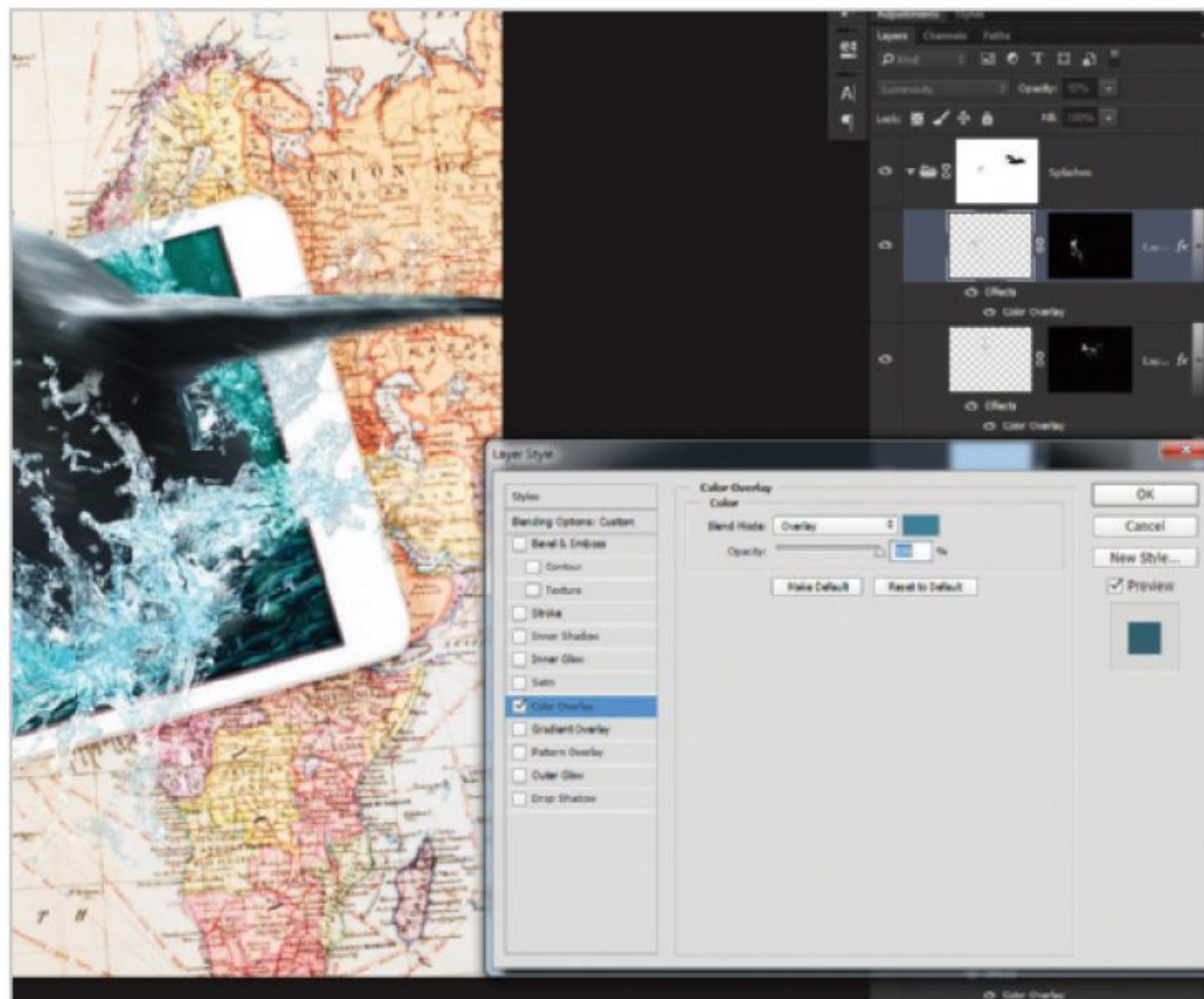
Water styles

04 Change the group's blend mode to Soft Light and add a Drop Shadow layer style. Set the shadow colour to a dark aqua hue and increase the Size to 24 pixels.



Subtle shark shadow

08 Create a SharkShadow layer just above the Background. Cmd/Ctrl-click on the Shark copy mask to create a selection. Fill with black and cancel the selection. Give the shadow a 5-pixel Gaussian Blur, set the mode to Multiply, reduce the Opacity to 18% and scale down slightly so the shadow is visible.



Smart splashes

11 Add a mask to the group and use it to hide splashes behind the shark's fin. Then create a merged copy of the splash group by holding down Opt/Alt and going to Layer>Merge Group. Convert the splash group into a Smart Object.



Make a splash

09 Open one of the splash stock images and use the Magic Wand tool to select a splash. Copy the selected pixels to a new layer. Fill the background layer with black. In the Channels panel Cmd/Ctrl+click the RGB channel to select the luminosity of the image. Then use this selection as a layer mask on the water splash. Position and repeat with the other splash pictures.

Make a bigger splash!

10 For each splash layer, set the blend mode to Luminosity and add a Color Overlay layer style using a teal colour set to Overlay. Copy and transform the splashes until the effect surrounds the shark. Then group all of these splash layers.



Path Blur

12 On the splash's Smart Object go to Filter>Blur Gallery>Path Blur. Create a short path matching the shark's motion. Set the Speed to 13% and End Point Speeds to 145px. After applying the blur, use the Smart Filter's mask to apply the effect to the splashes only at the base of the shark.



Splash explosion

13 Target the merged Splash layer, set the blending mode to Vivid Light and reduce the Opacity to 52%. Then go to Filter>Blur>Radial Blur. Set the Amount to 26, the Method to Zoom and adjust the blur centre to match the location of the splash epicentre.



Puddles

14 Use a group mask on the splash group to remove the blur effect from areas that should remain sharp. Open the supplied 'WaterDrops.jpg', then follow the instructions on the sidebar to add small puddles of water to the tabletop.



Flopping fish

15 There are two supplied stock images of fish. Extract and position these using techniques we used earlier. To make them more dynamic, add motion blurs and layering in some additional splashes. Then use a Drop Shadow layer style with the Size increased to 30px.



A grand finale

16 Create a merged layer of all the background elements and use the Camera Raw filter to add a Post Crop Vignette with an Amount set to -60. Then use an Iris Blur from the Blur Gallery set to a 6px blur to add a focal blur to the outside edges.

LIQUIFY
The distortion is created by using the Liquify filter, particularly the Forward Warp Tool, to simulate the refraction.

DUPLICITOUS DUPLICATE
Use a copy of the background that is cleverly masked using a selection created from the separate drop layer masks.

Closer look Water refraction
Take a closer look at the refracted background

MASK UNCHAINED
It's critical to unclip the layer mask from the layer so the distortion will not affect the mask.

WATER DISTORTION
To make the water drops convincing, the background that shows through them must have some distortion.

Essentials

Works with



Photoshop CS6 and above
and Photoshop CC

What you'll learn

How to create a graffiti
composition with images,
paint and 3D text

 **Time taken**
1 hour

Expert

Andre Villanueva



"I'm a huge fan of graffiti, and love incorporating the style into my work. I first discovered Photoshop while studying Web Design. After graduation, I taught in the Media Arts department. I'm now Art Director in southeast US, soothing my inner instructor by sharing techniques with readers."

Make cool graffiti art

Gain major street cred by producing a graffiti-inspired piece with paint, images and 3D text

Get ready to hit the streets! We'll use the free-flowing style of graffiti as inspiration to create a piece that's sure to grab attention. Just like fleet-footed city artists, we'll be agile and resourceful, using available assets around us. We'll enlist a radical font from 11-d.net and graphical elements from mediamilitia.com.

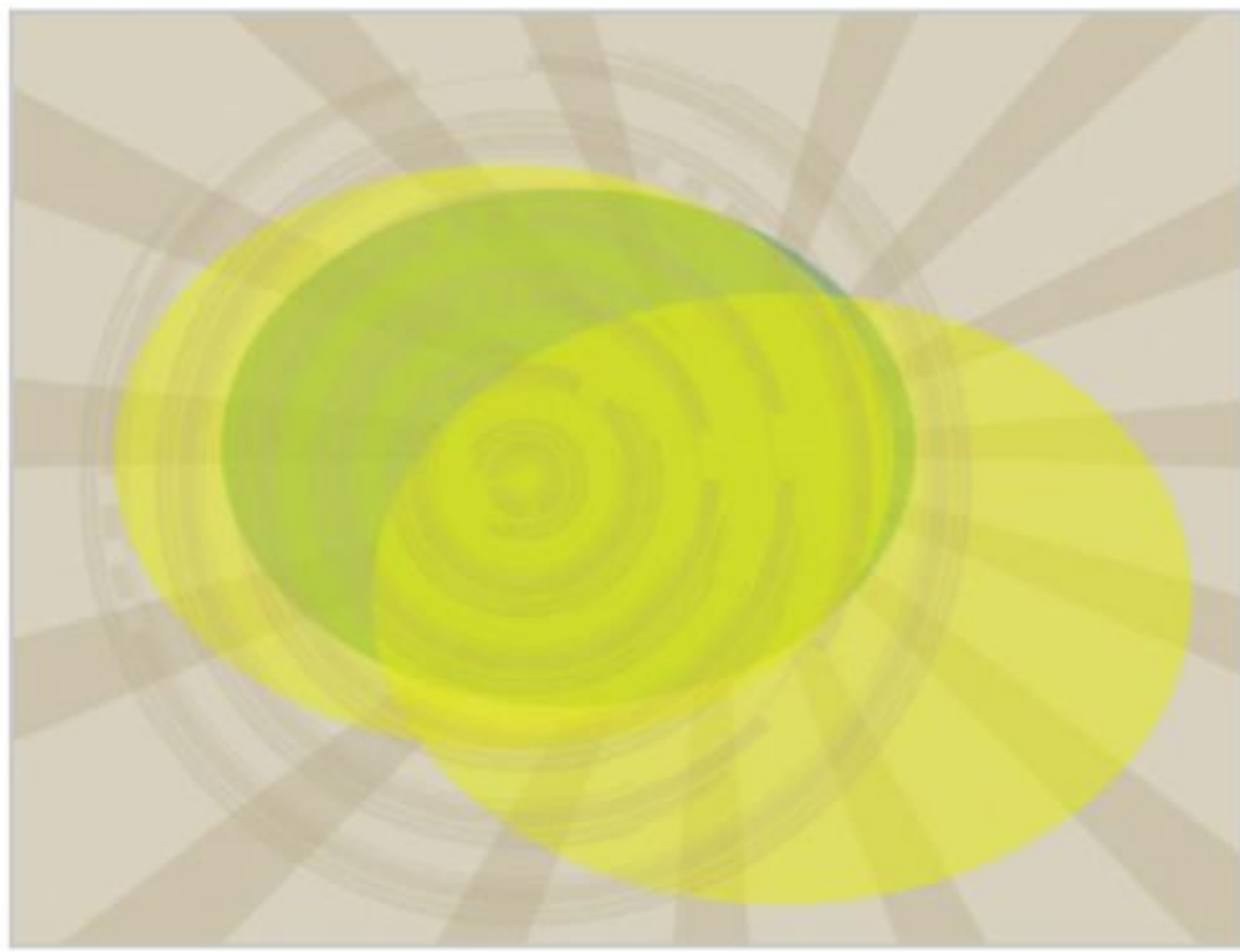
Knowing what assets to deploy and how to combine them is a skill that's well worth developing, and you'll have plenty of practice here. Join paint splatters, tags, buildings and more with a

Paint Daubs-processed model to create the base composition. To make a big impact, we'll tap into the enhanced 3D capabilities of Photoshop to quickly convert a text layer.

To finalise the piece, we'll 'paint' with Color Fill layers set to Hard Light. Adjustment layers and a texture set to Color Burn will add gritty weathering, and there will be sprinklings of bling.

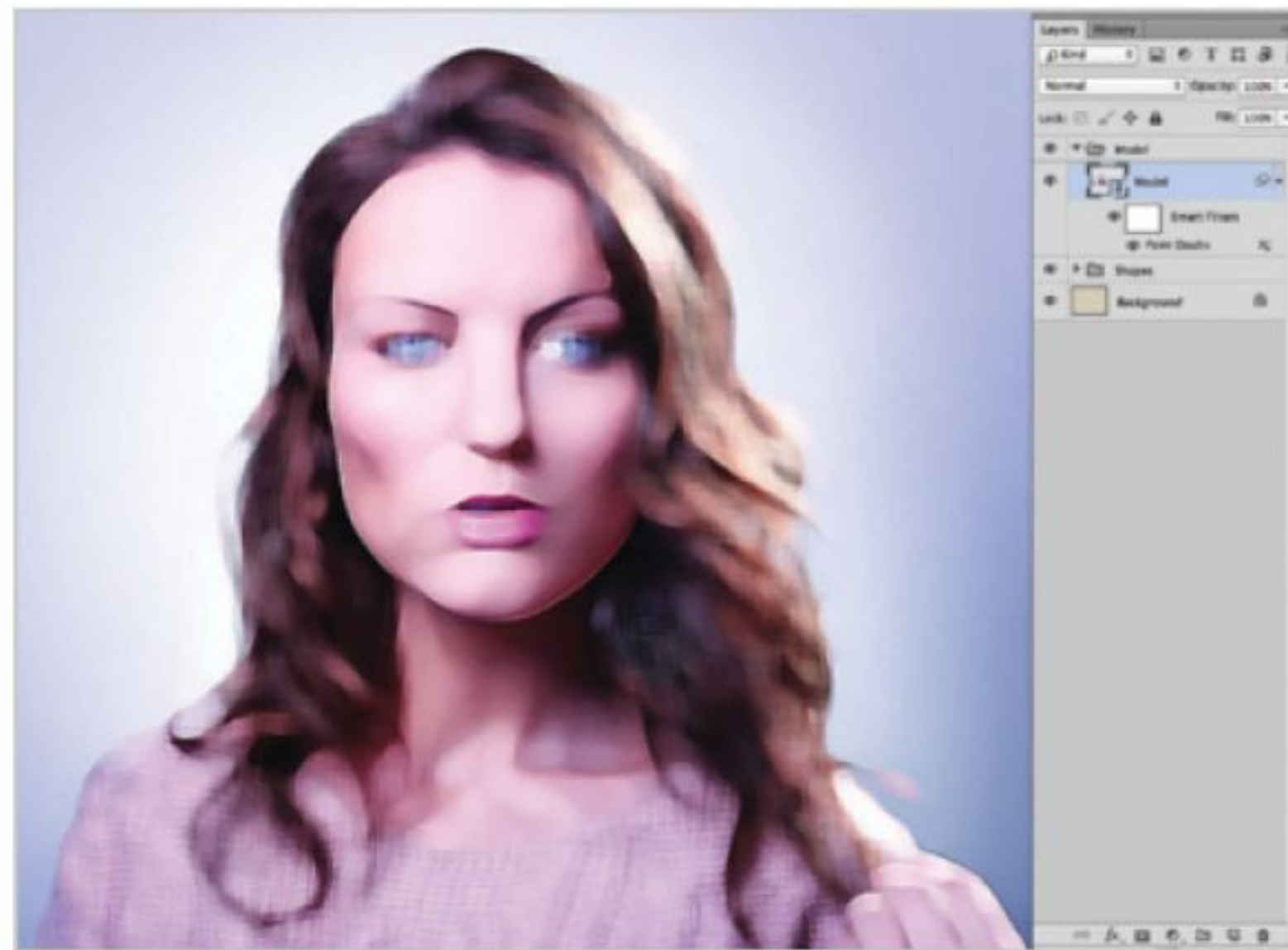
After completing the tutorial, swap out some of the objects and play with different blend modes and adjustments.





Add shapes

01 Open 'Start.psd'. Use the Ellipse tool set to Shape to drag out some yellow and green shapes. Drop Opacity on each to 50%. Go to File>Place (in CC 2014, use File>Place Embedded) and add 'CircularDesign.png'. Situate before confirming the place. Drop Opacity to 25%.



Add the model

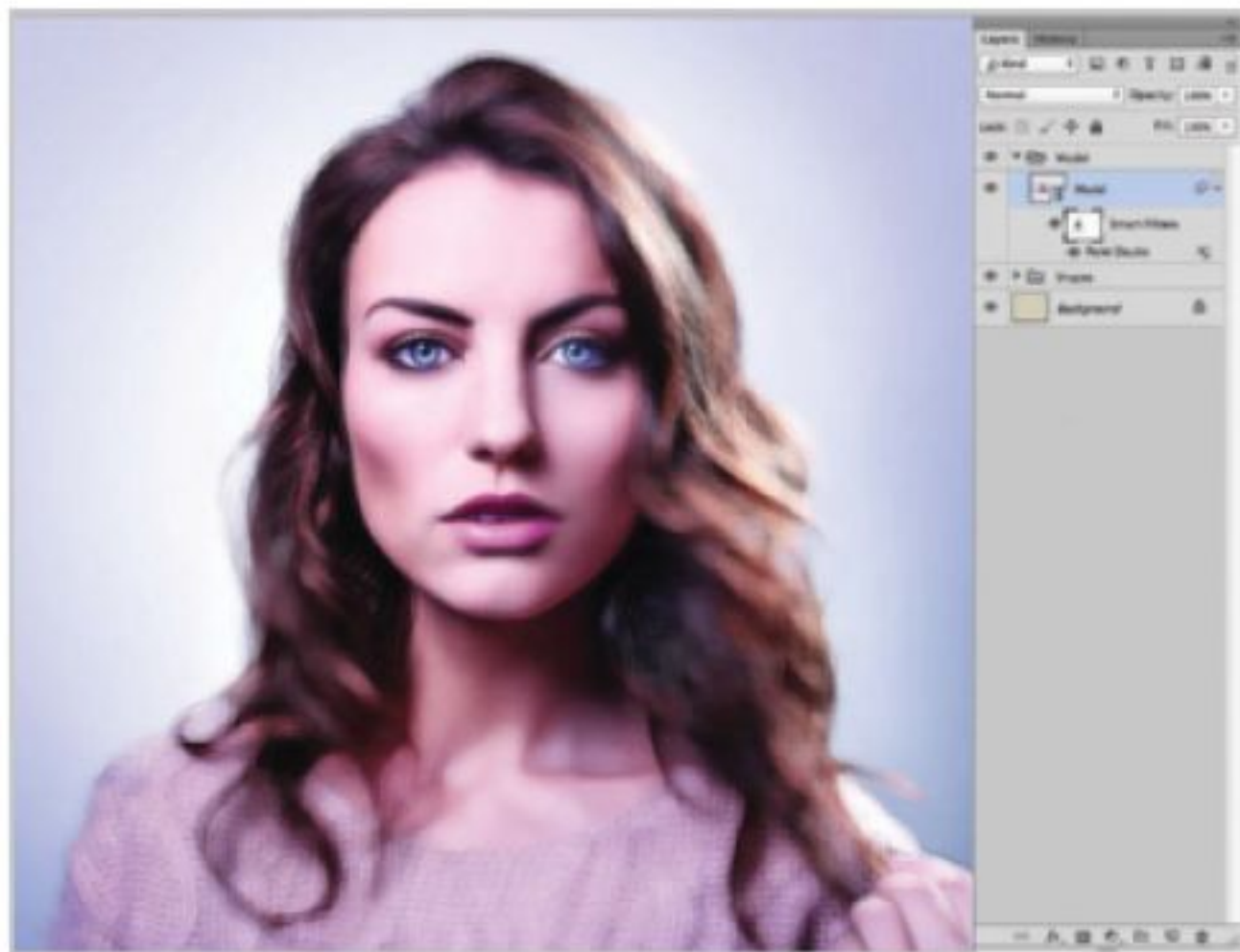
02 Place 'Model.jpg'. Scale down and situate at the left before confirming the place. We'll now apply a filter to give her a painterly look. Go to Filter>Artistic>Paint Daubs. Set Brush Size to 22, Sharpness to 26 and Brush Type to Simple. Click OK.

Expert tip



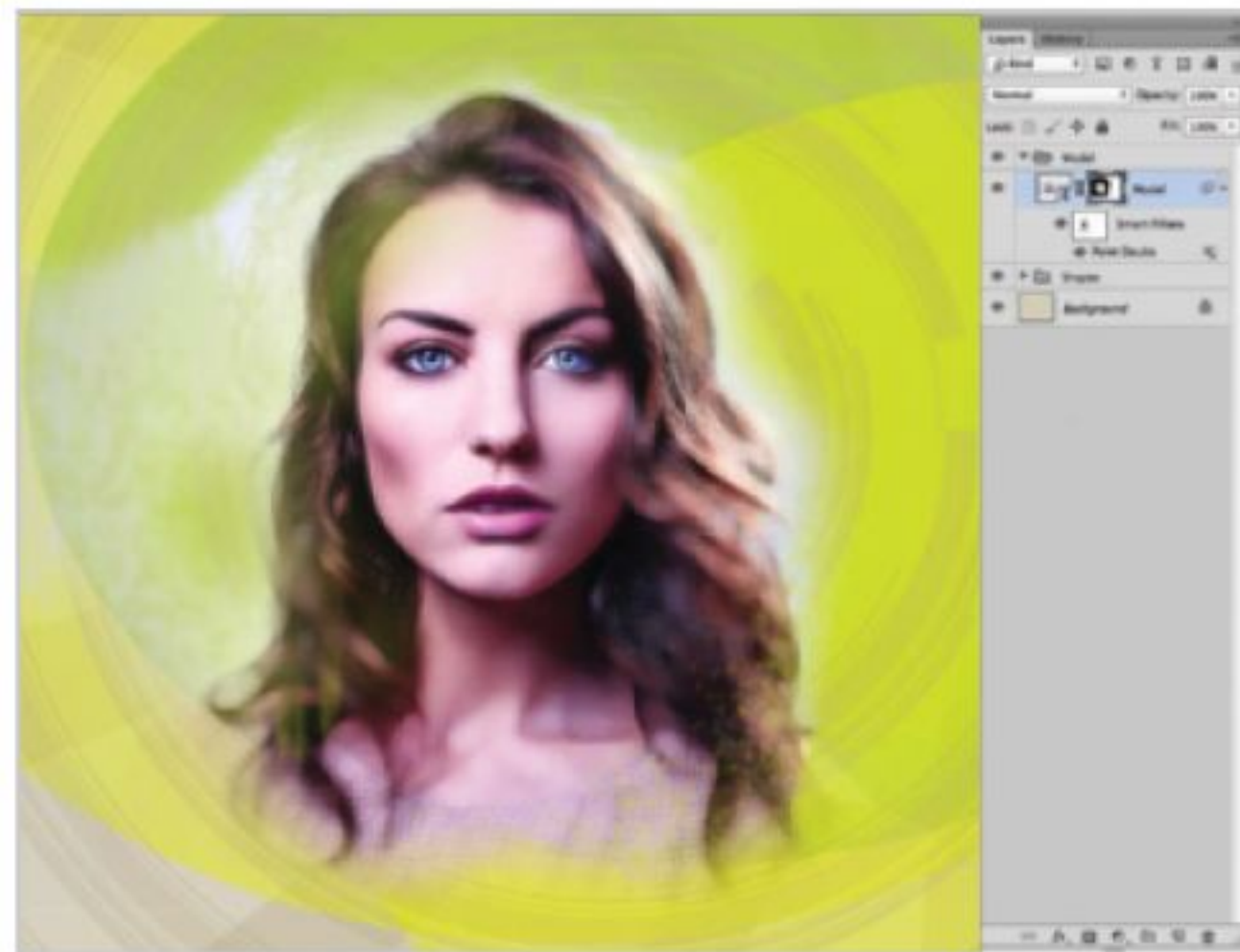
Adjustable lighting

One of the very best things about working with a 3D object is the ability to change the lighting whenever you fancy and to whatever you like. Select the light in the 3D palette. With the Move tool active, you'll see an on-canvas widget with which you can adjust lighting direction. In the Properties palette, you can choose from a bevy of presets, or adjust settings, such as Color and Intensity. Tick Shadows to add some, and then soften with the Softness slider.



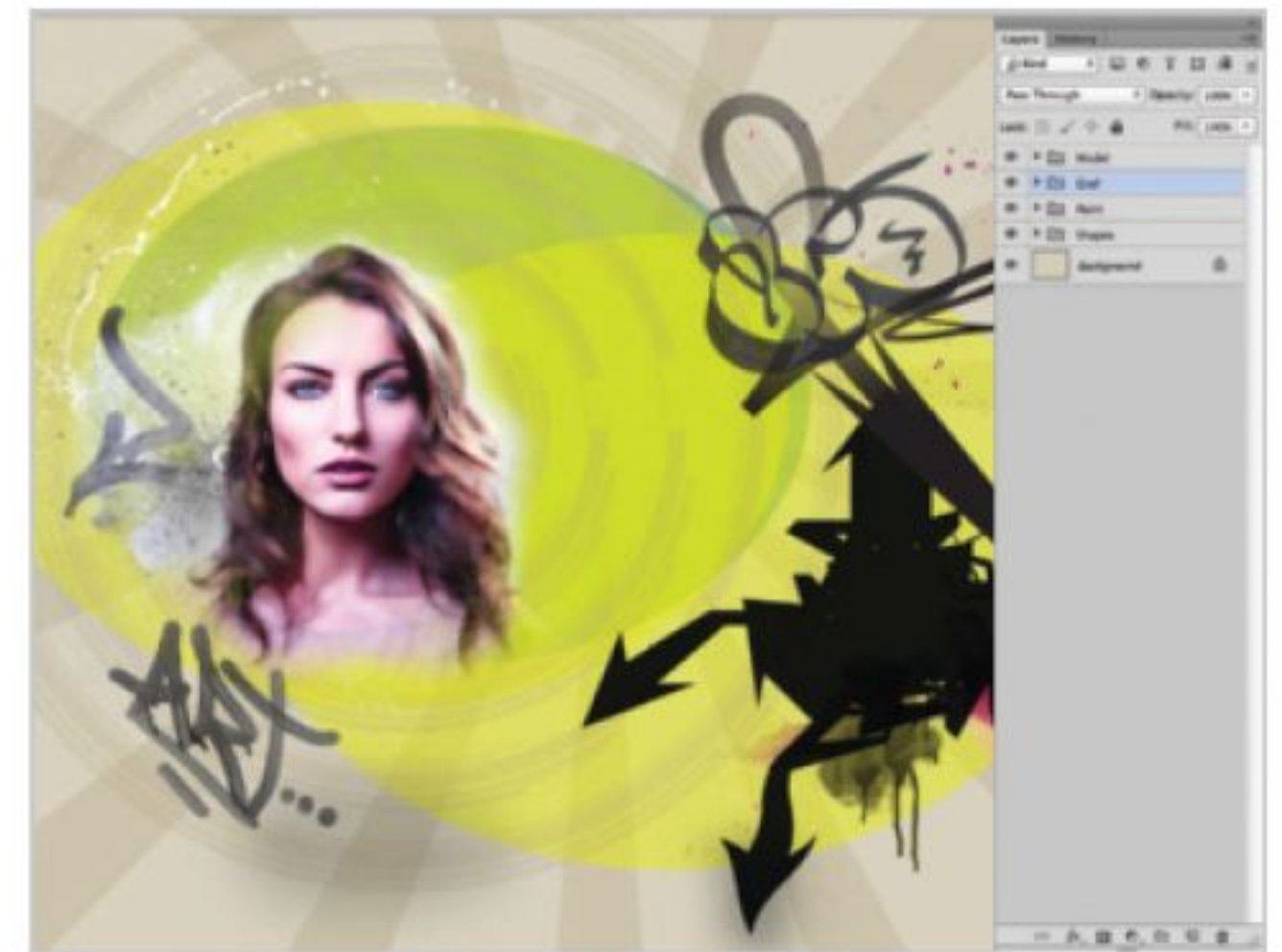
Reduce Paint Daubs

03 Because the model layer is a Smart Object, the Paint Daubs filter was applied as a Smart Filter. Use a soft, round brush at 80% Opacity to paint black in the Smart Filter mask and remove the effect in the facial area.



Apply a layer mask

04 Add a layer mask. Paint black to start fading the edges. Switch to a coarse brush like Spatter and lower brush Opacity to about 40%. Size the brush with square brackets, then gingerly dab to rough up the edges.



Add paint and graffiti

05 Select the layer below the model. Place the 'Paint' images. For 'Paint3' and 'Paint4', set to Darken blend mode to remove the white. Then place the 'Graffiti' and 'GraffitiArrows' images. Use Darken again on these to remove the white.



Add extrusion and buildings

06 Place 'Fresh.png' and 'Buildings' images. Duplicate the buildings if desired (Cmd/Ctrl+J). Apply Drop Shadow and Stroke layer styles to Fresh. For Stroke, choose white and 5px Size. Option/Alt+click and drag the fx on the Fresh layer to each building layer to copy styles. Place 'Cityscape.png' to the left.



Add circles

07 Place the 'Circles' images and arrange. Option/Alt+click and drag with the Move tool to quickly duplicate and position simultaneously. Vary size with Free Transform (Cmd/Ctrl+T). Use the corner handles and hold Shift in order to constrain the scaling.



Paint with Hard Light

08 Select the model layer. Click the Create New Fill Layer button in the Layers palette and choose Solid Color. Pick #ed9119. Set blend mode to Hard Light. Click the mask, press Cmd/Ctrl+I. Paint white with a soft, round brush at 40% Opacity to add colour. Repeat the steps with #aa19ed.



Genius Guide



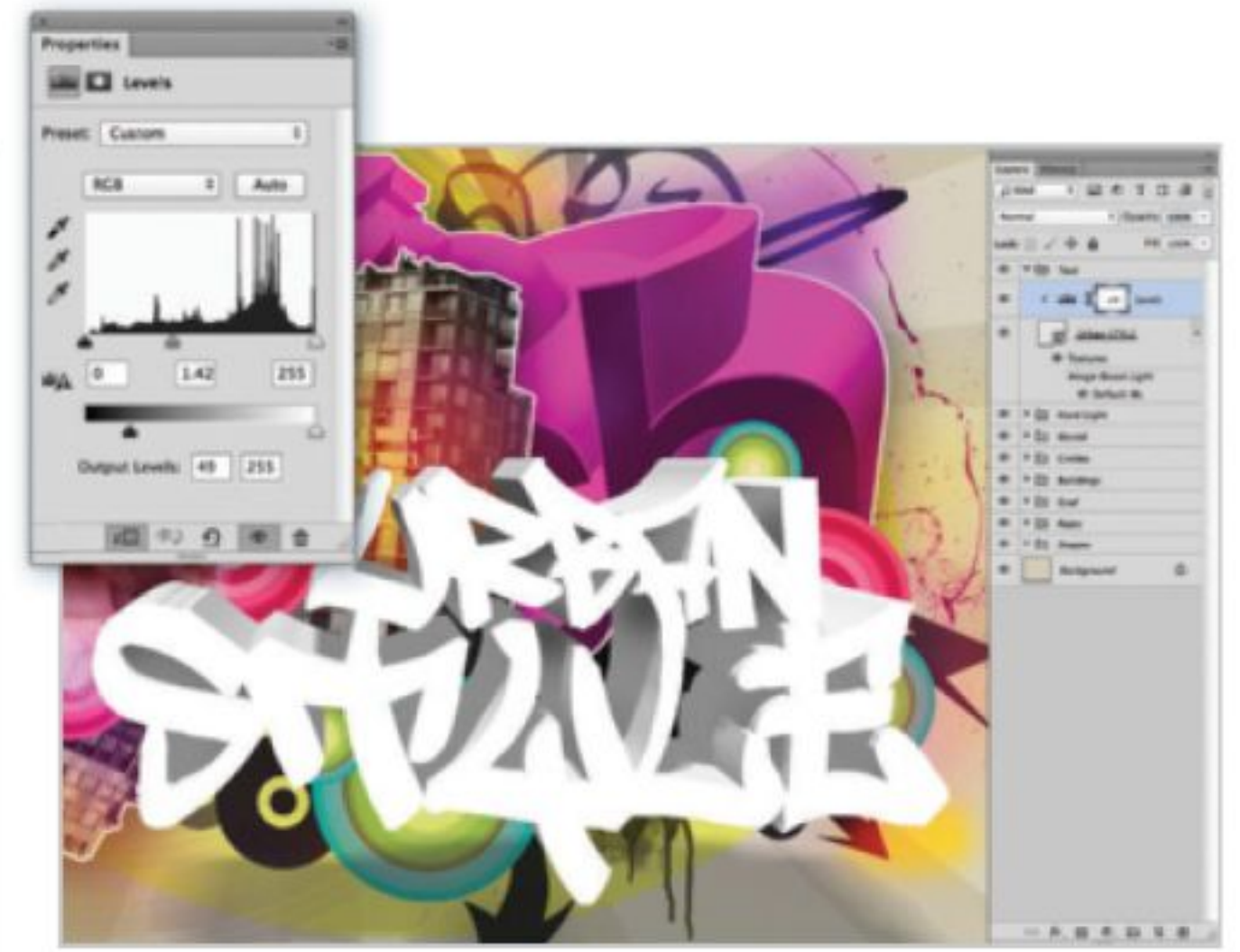
Add text

09 Select the Type tool. Here we used the Writers font courtesy of Johan Waldenström. Create the text on one layer (use Return/Enter for line break). Use the Character palette to adjust leading and other settings.



Create 3D text

10 With the Type tool still active, click the 3D button in the Options bar. Select the Move tool to activate the 3D Mode tools in the Options bar. Use these five tools (Rotate, Roll, Drag, Slide and Scale) to manipulate the 3D text.



Lighten the text

11 Add a Levels adjustment layer. Option/Alt+click between this layer and the text layer below. To lighten, slide the midtones slider under the histogram leftward and move the dark Output Levels slider inward. Paint black in the mask at 40% Opacity to restore shading in areas.



Add bling

12 Place 'Bling.png' and situate. Option/Alt+click and drag with the Move tool to duplicate and position. Free Transform (Cmd/Ctrl+T) if needed to scale. Duplicate further if you need more. Lower the Opacity on each to 70-90%.



Apply Color Fill

13 Click the Create New Fill Layer button in the Layers palette and choose Solid Color. Pick #76700c. Set blend mode to Hard Light. Drop the Opacity to 35%. Paint black in the mask at 80% Opacity to reduce in areas.



Add texture

14 Let's now add some overall grit. Place 'texture.jpg'. Set the blend mode to Color Burn. Drop Opacity to 80%. Apply a layer mask. Paint black at 80% Opacity in the central area to reduce.



Apply Levels

15 Let's brighten the overall image by adjusting tonal levels. Add a Levels adjustment layer. Move the midtones and highlights sliders left to brighten the image. Paint black in the mask to tone down areas that have been brightened too much.





Desaturate

16 Now let's tone down the colour. Add a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer. Slide Saturation left to -50. Paint black to restore saturation in the central area.



Render 3D

17 Select the 3D text layer and make any final changes. It's now time to render it. Save the document, then go to 3D>Render. Then go through your whole image and tweak any adjustment layers or masks to complete it.

Alternative effects

See how you can make your graffiti art stand out even more with a few straightforward edits

PAINT SPLATTERS & DRIPS
To make the text stand out even more, use extra paint splats and drips behind the letters to give extra contrast and depth.

COLOUR CHANGE
To make the piece more tonal, create a new adjustment layer using Hue/Saturation.

BOOST COLOURS
Use a final adjustment layer with Brightness/Contrast to add overall enhancement.

ADD EXTRA TEXTURE
For more impact and interest, add an extra texture layer. Place an old texture at the top of the layer stack and set to Color Burn for instant grittiness.

NEW ELEMENTS
Add an extra element to create more interest. Use a layer mask to edit it, then place it on a layer under other adjustment layers so their effects apply to it.

3D TEXT
If you want text to stand out, replace the graffiti-style lettering with a clear, easy-to-read font. This was then converted to 3D with the button in the Options bar.



Essentials

Works with



Photoshop CS4 or above, CC and Elements 11

What you'll learn

Use clipping masks to contain a photo and limit an adjustment layer

Time taken
1 hour

Expert

Andre Villanueva



"I find clipping masks to be indispensable in my art and design work. I first discovered Photoshop in the early 2000s while studying Web Design. After graduation, I taught for several years in the Media Arts department. I'm now Art Director for a tech company in the Southeast US, soothing my inner instructor by sharing techniques with readers."



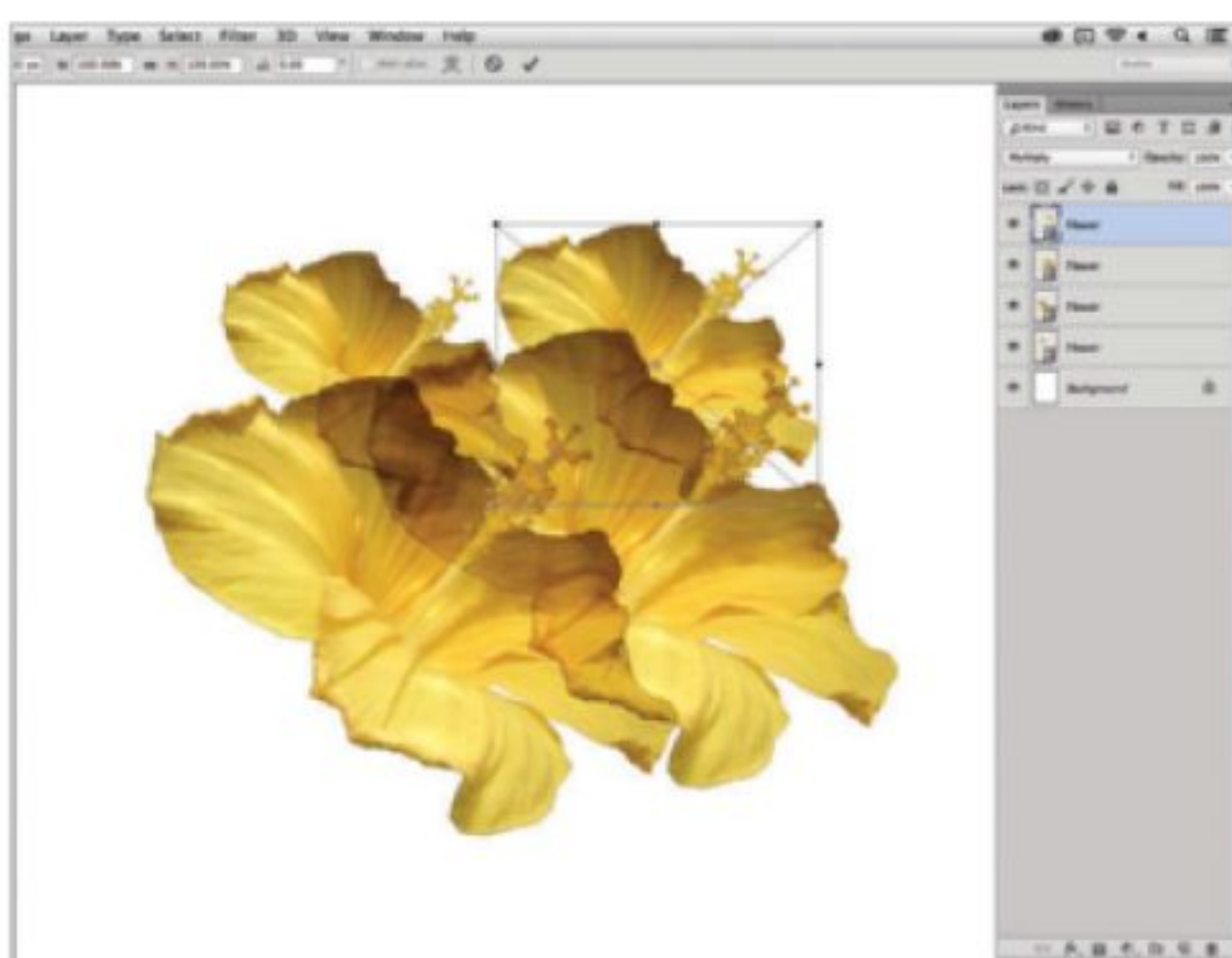
Creatively frame a portrait

Go beyond basic clipping masks to create a unique centerpiece for an eye-catching portrait

A clipping mask is a layer that uses its contents to dictate the visibility of one or more layers above it. They allow for precise framing and placement, and can be the gateway to imaginative visual concepts. At least two layers are required to form a clipping mask. To create one, just hold Opt/Alt key and click between the two layers. You can still edit each layer independently. To add more layers to the clipping mask, just place a layer above the last clipped layer, then repeat the shortcut command to clip those layers together.

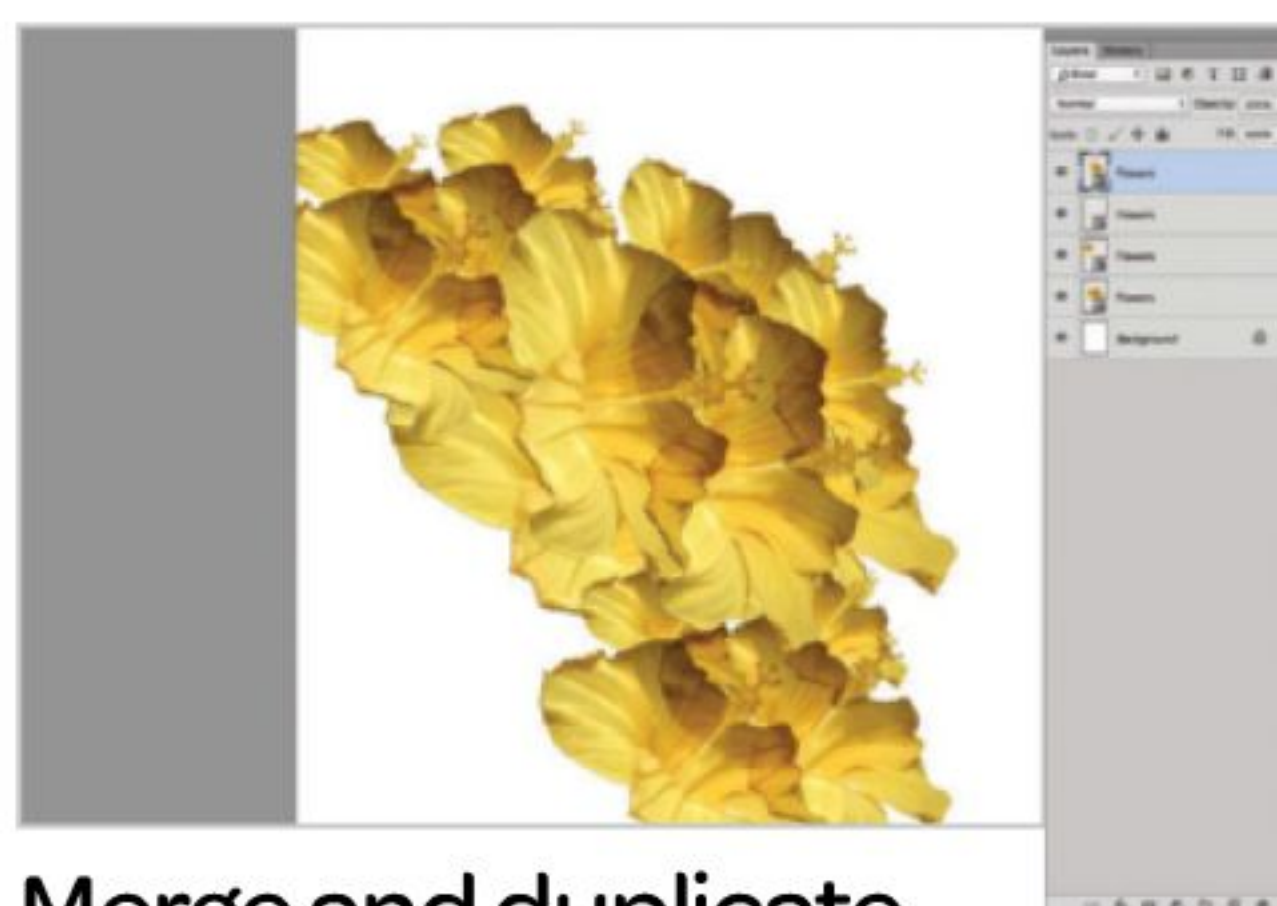
In this tutorial, we'll go beyond using basic shapes. We'll start with a flower, then duplicate, position, and merge to create a complex organic structure. We'll then place the model above and create the clipping mask. Shapes, adjustment layers and typographic flourishes will be added to complete the composition.

Use what you learn to create your own unique clipping masks. Combine different shapes, utilise semi-transparency in areas, add layer styles... tap into your imagination and go mask wild!



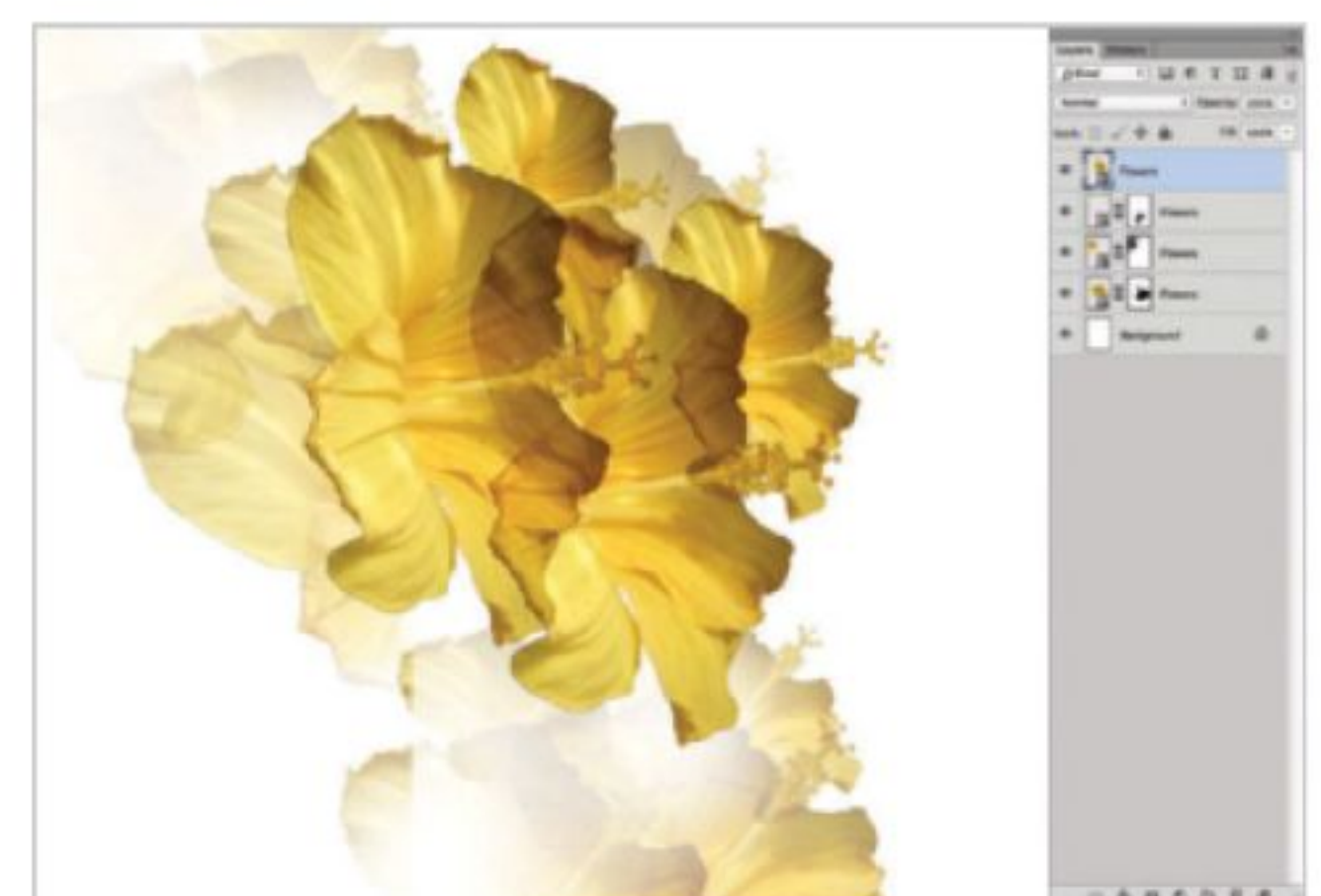
Duplicate flower

01 Open 'Start.psd' from the resources. Duplicate the flower several times (Cmd/Ctrl+J) and use Free Transform (Cmd/Ctrl+T) to scale and position. Set the duplicates to Multiply so they blend together.



Merge and duplicate

02 In the Layers palette, select the bottom flower layer then Shift-click the top one to select all. Press Cmd/Ctrl+E to merge. (Photoshop, right-click, choose Convert to Smart Object). Duplicate (Cmd/Ctrl+J) several times. Go to Free Transform (Cmd/Ctrl+T) to position, scale and rotate.

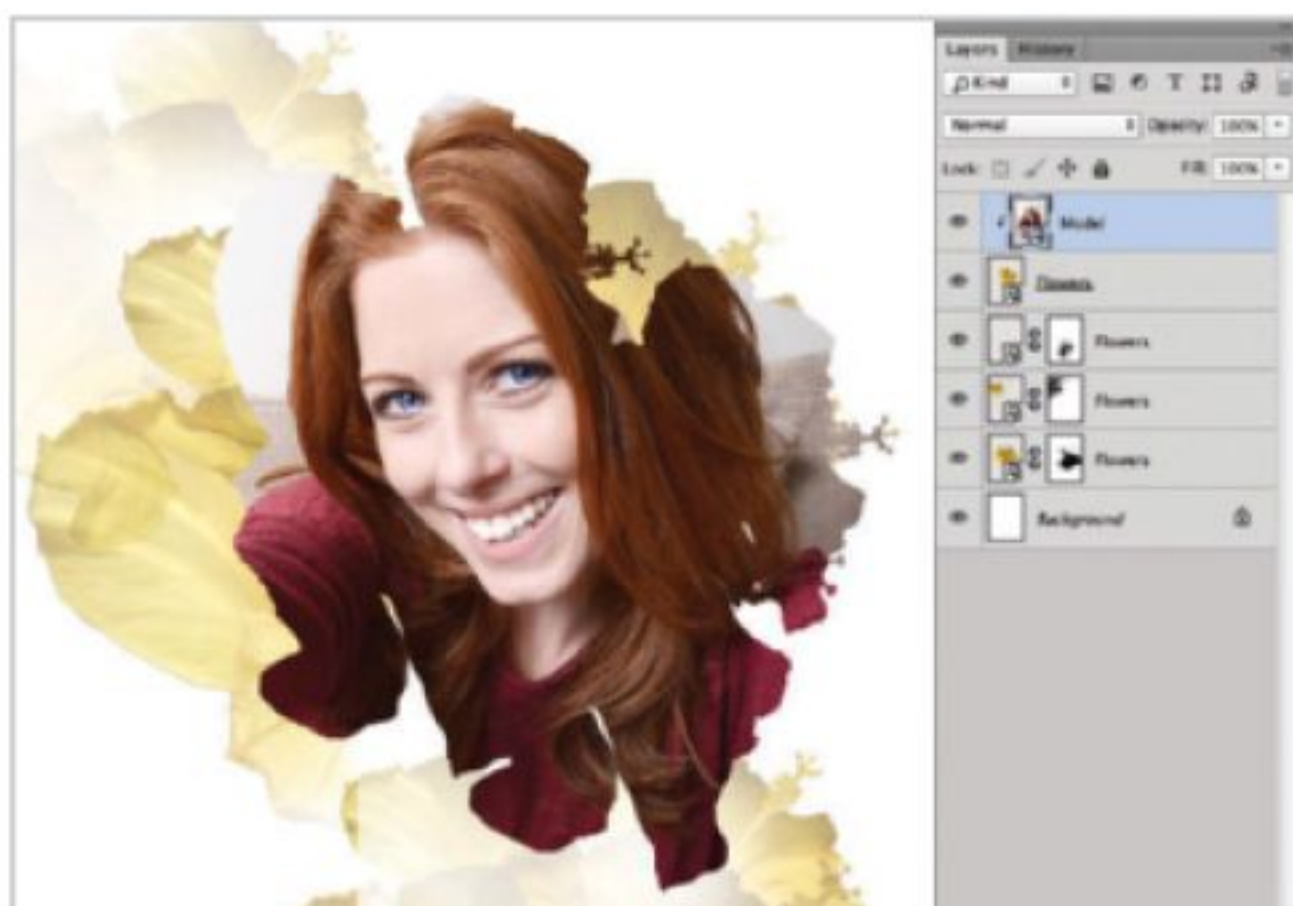


Designate clipping mask

03 Designate the top layer as the mask and situate centrally. Lower the Opacity of the other instances to 45-60%, and apply layer masks with the icon in the Layers palette. Use a soft, round brush at 60-80% Opacity to reduce.

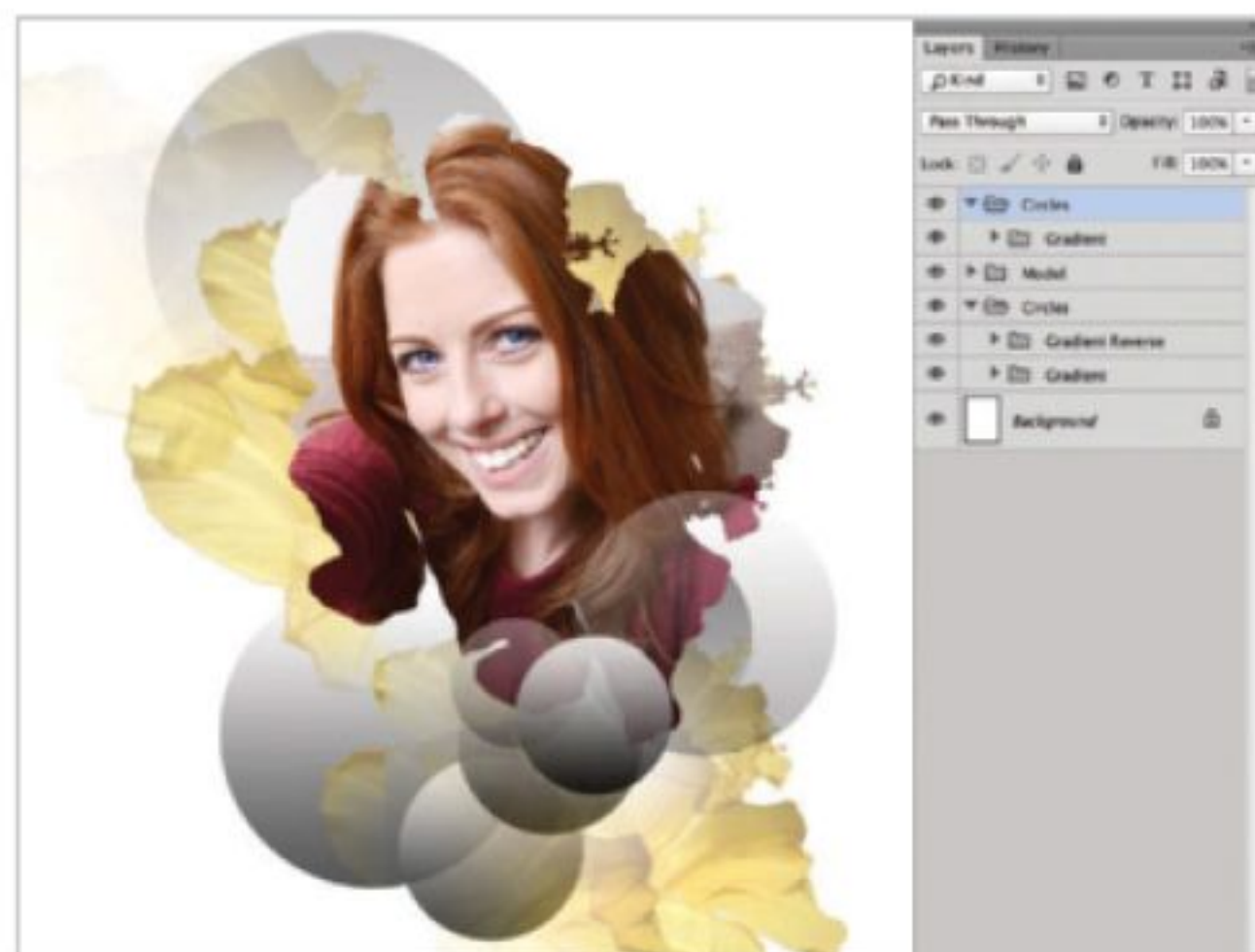


Genius Guide



Create clipping mask

04 Select the top layer. Go to File>Place, add 'Model.jpg'. Opt/Alt-click between the top two layers. After creating the mask, you can Free Transform the flower mask and the model independently to enjoy the optimal sizing and placement.



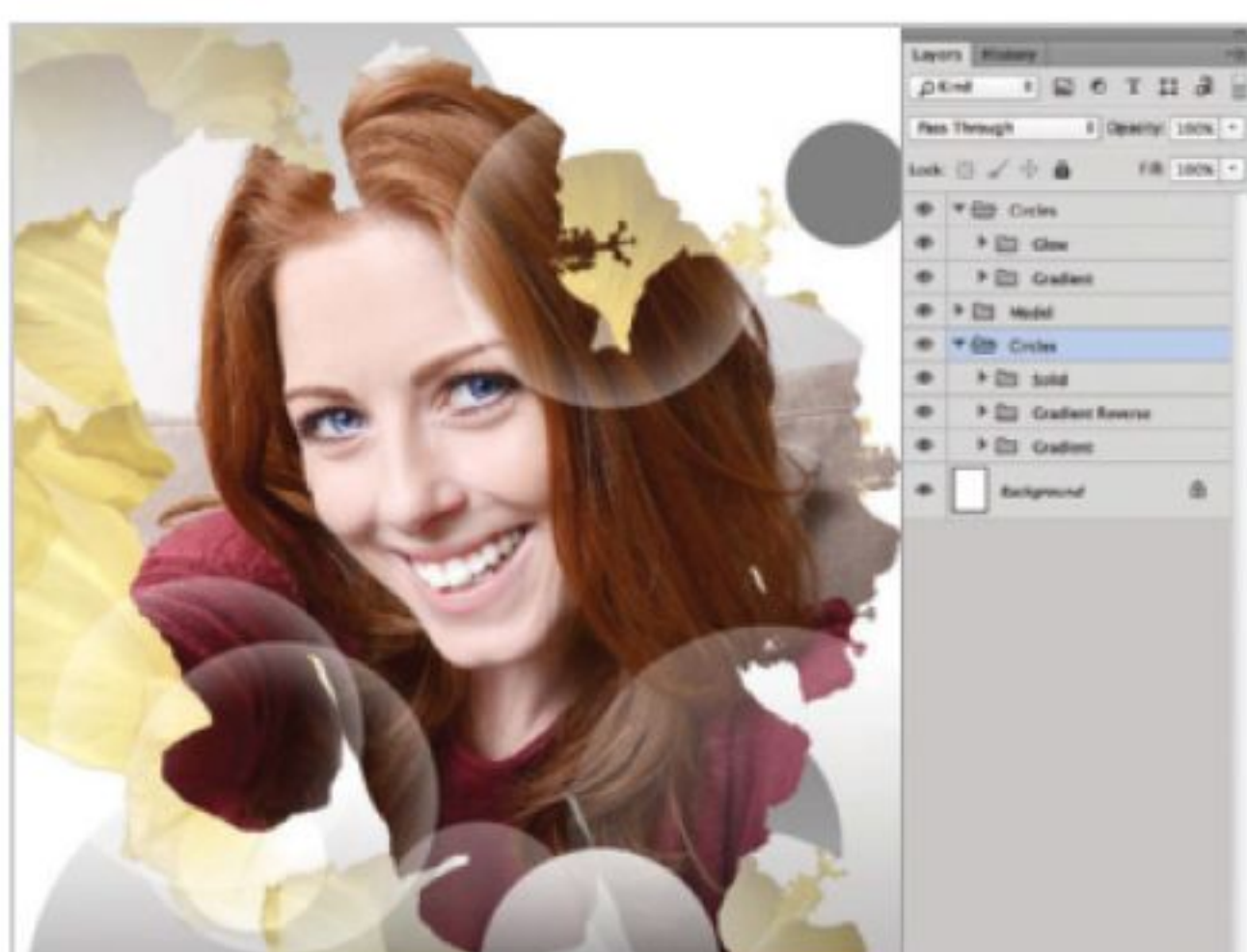
Gradient circles

05 Place 'CircleGradient.png' and 'CircleGradientReverse.png'. Duplicate each several times and position above and below the model. Use Free Transform to vary the scale, and change the Opacity from 25% to 80% so they overlap.



Make them glow

06 Place 'CircleGlow.png' above the model. Drop the Opacity to 50%. Select the Move tool. Opt/Alt+click and drag to simultaneously duplicate and position. Repeat this a few times.



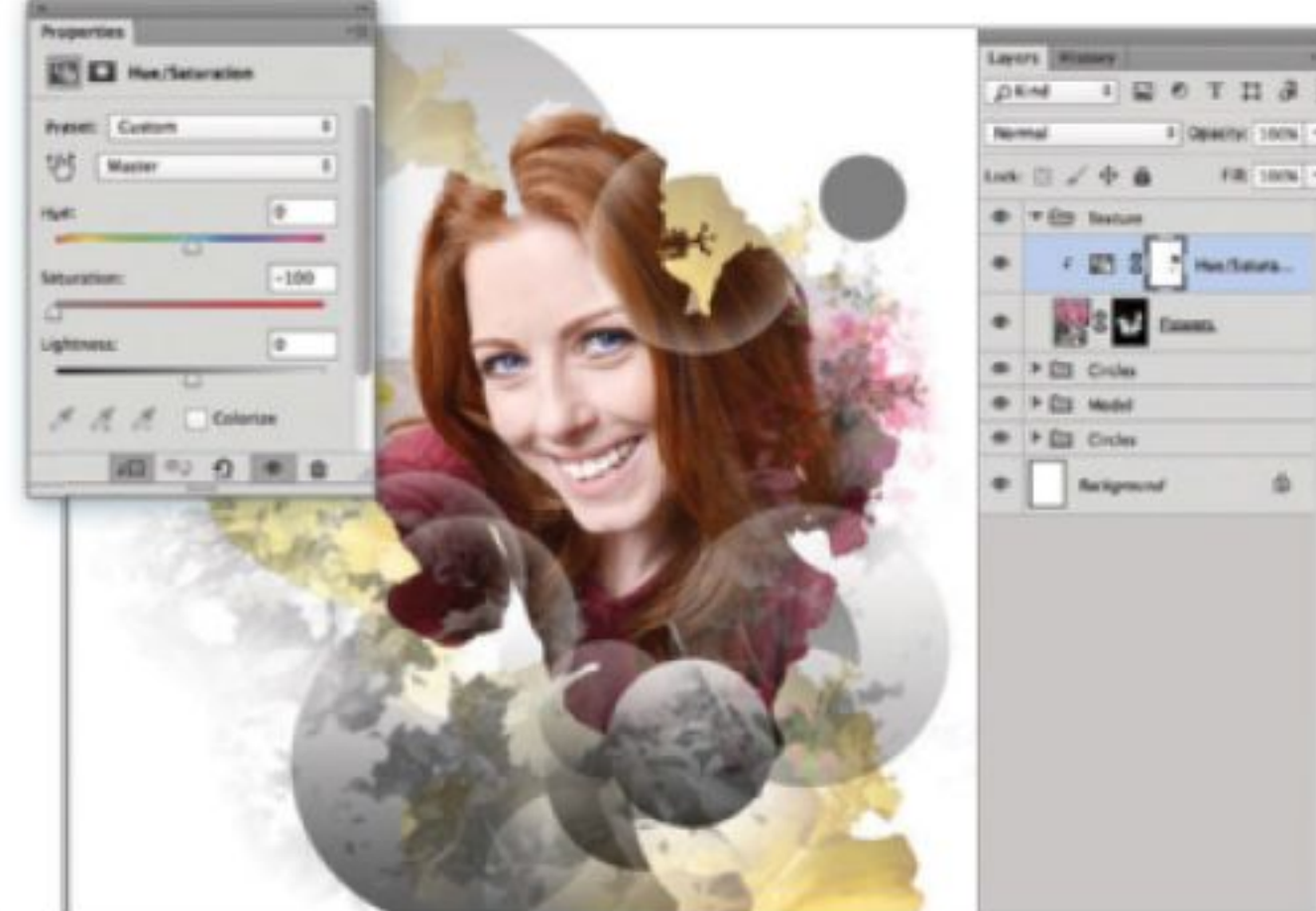
Seeing double

07 Set the Foreground colour to white. Now use the Ellipse tool (set to Shape in Photoshop) to create circles below the model. Vary the Opacity from 50% to 100%. Set Foreground colour to black and create one circle, top-right, at 50% Opacity.



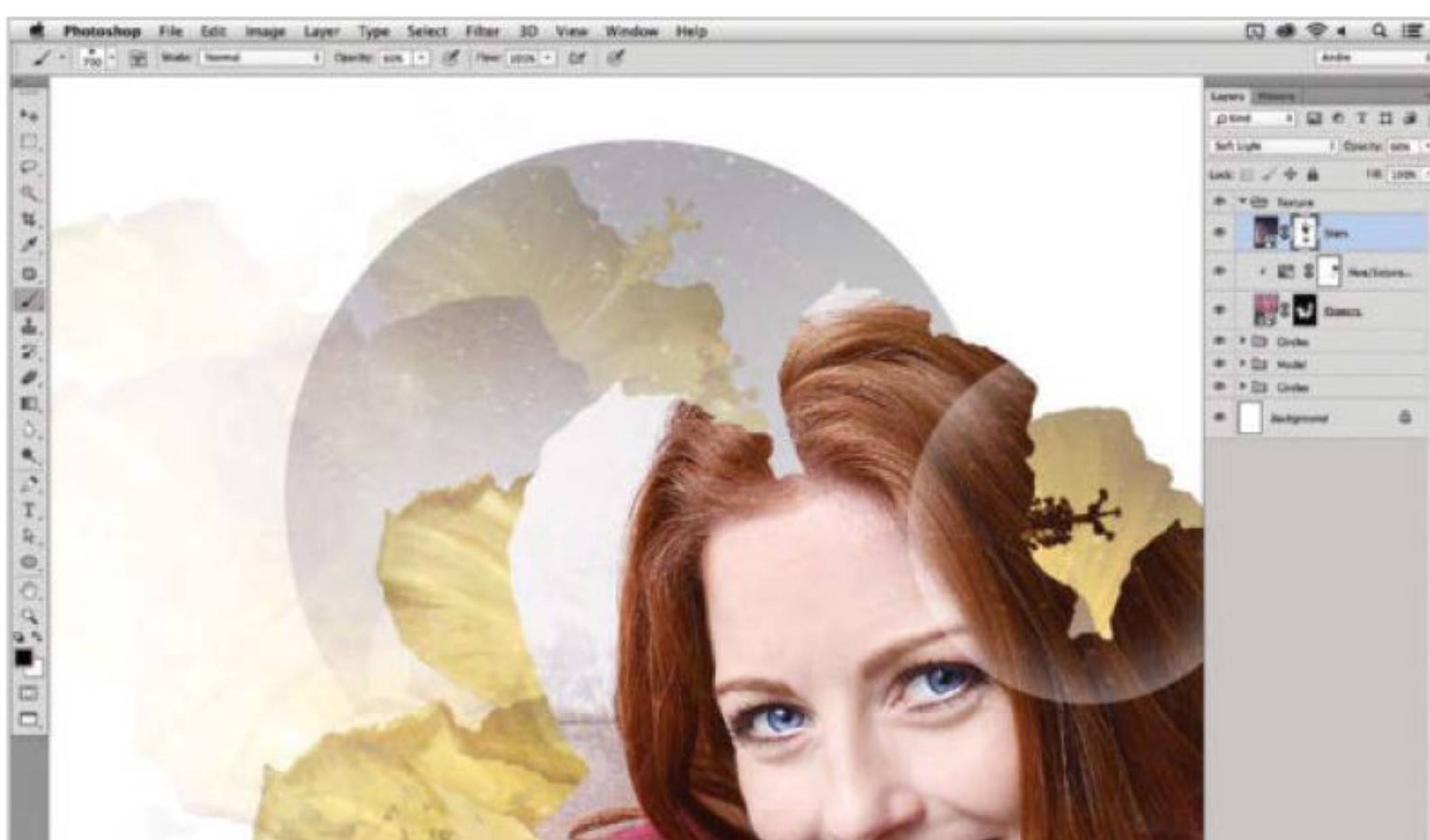
Add flower texture

08 Select the top layer. Place 'Flowers.jpg'. Set the blend mode to Pin Light and Opacity to 60%. Option/Alt+click the Add Layer Mask icon in the Layers palette. Now paint back with white and a soft, round brush at 60% Opacity to paint some of the texture back in.



Desaturate texture

09 Click the Create New Adjustment Layer button in the Layers palette, choose Hue/Saturation. Slide Saturation to -100. Create a clipping mask (Opt/Alt+Click between the layers). Paint black in the adjustment mask at 20% Opacity to restore some colour.



A starry texture

10 Place the 'Stars.jpg' image. Set the blend mode to Soft Light and drop the Opacity to 60%. Apply a layer mask with the icon in the Layers palette. Paint black at 60% Opacity in the mask to reduce in areas like the face.



Boost up contrast

11 Click the Create New Adjustment Layer button in the Layers palette, choose Hue/Saturation. Slide Saturation to -100. Set the blend mode to Soft Light to restore the colour and provide contrast.

Creatively frame a portrait



New Gradient Fill

12 From the same menu, choose Gradient Fill. Pick the Yellow, Violet, Orange, Blue preset at 45 degrees. Tick Reverse. Set the blend mode to Color Dodge and Opacity to 80%. Paint black in the mask at 50% Opacity to reduce.



Apply Screen colouring

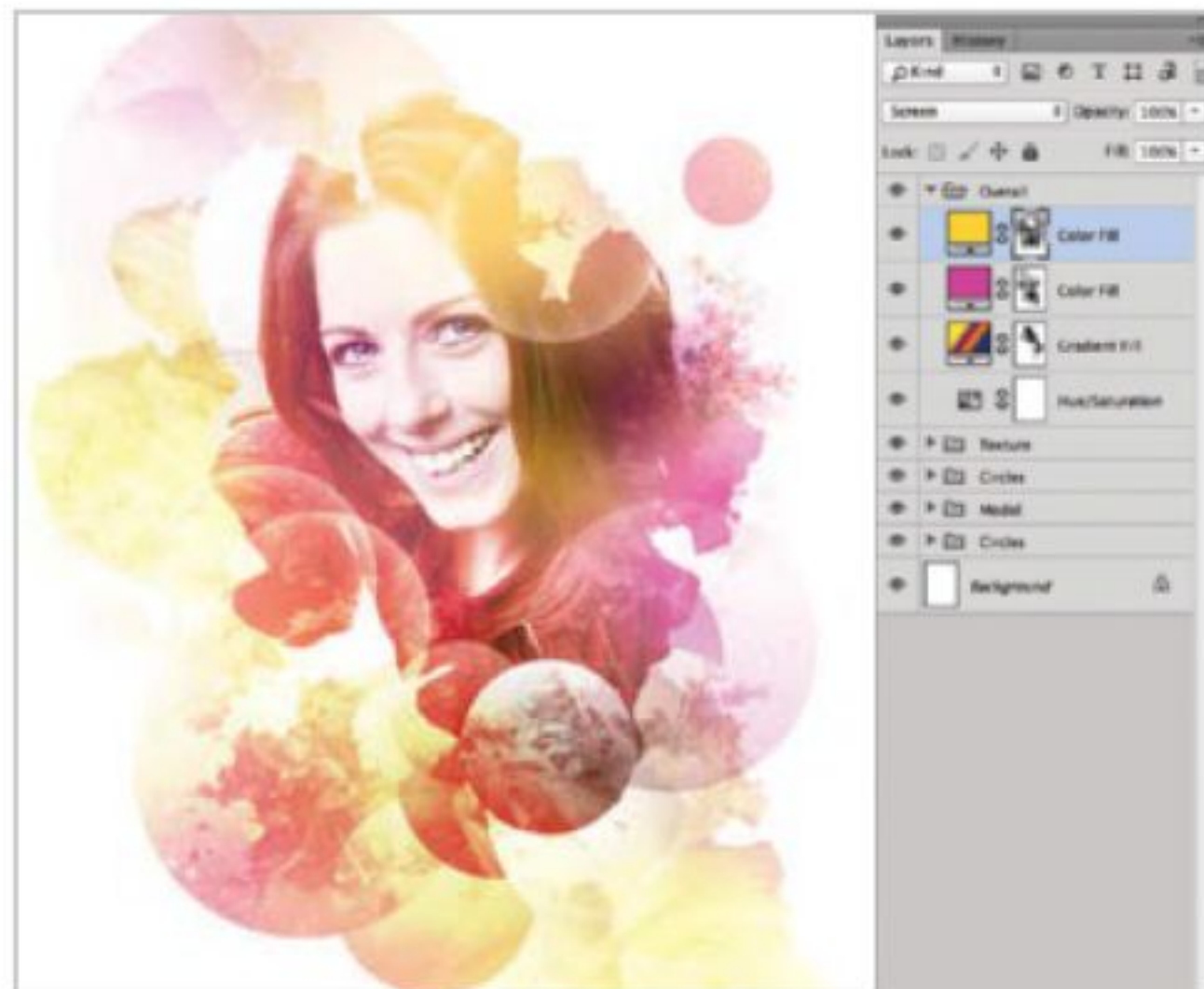
13 Go to Layer>New Fill Layer and choose Solid Color. Pick #e124ae for the colour code. Set blend mode to Screen and paint black into the mask at 50% Opacity to reduce in areas.

Expert tip



Adjustment layer masks

Using layer masks is integral to utilising the adjustment layers correctly in this image. Without them, most of the adjustments are too potent to apply canvas-wide. Layer masks enable us to pinpoint the colouring effects of Color Fill and Gradient Fill layers, and also to limit the application of balancing effects such as Levels and Vibrance. Be sure to use soft, round brushes for best results, and adjust brush opacity and size as needed.



Increase the colour

14 Apply another Solid Color fill layer but this time pick #ffd200 for the new colour. Set the blend mode to Screen again, and paint black in the mask to lessen the impact in certain areas.



Apply Vivid Light

15 Add the last Solid Color fill layer and pick #087bc0 for the colour. Set blend mode to Vivid Light. Click the mask and press Cmd/Ctrl+I to invert. Now paint back with white at 50% Opacity to apply on the right side.



Increase the saturation

16 Click the Create New Adjustment Layer button, choose Vibrance (Elements, use Hue/Saturation). Slide both Vibrance (Photoshop only) and Saturation to +100. Invert the mask (Cmd/Ctrl+I), then paint back with white at 50% to apply.



Self-multiply

17 Click the Create New Adjustment Layer button and choose Levels. Don't actually adjust anything in the Levels dialog, just set the blend mode to Multiply. Paint black in the mask's central area and edges at 80% Opacity to reduce.



Add typographic flourishes

18 Select the Type tool. Choose a script font like Bickham Script Pro, a large font size, and white font colour. Add an 'A' and position for best fit. Continue adding more letters using different sizes and colour.



Essentials

Works with



Photoshop CS2 and above, Photoshop CC

What you'll learn

Load and use custom brushes combined with blend modes and masks

Time taken
45 mins

Expert

Jenni Sanders



"Using custom brushes is a great shortcut to unlock real creativity. My Brush panel is full of different sets I've found over the years. My first experience with photomanipulation was watching as my father cloned out holidaymakers from our family beach photographs. From then on, I was absolutely hooked."

Apply mystical smoke effects

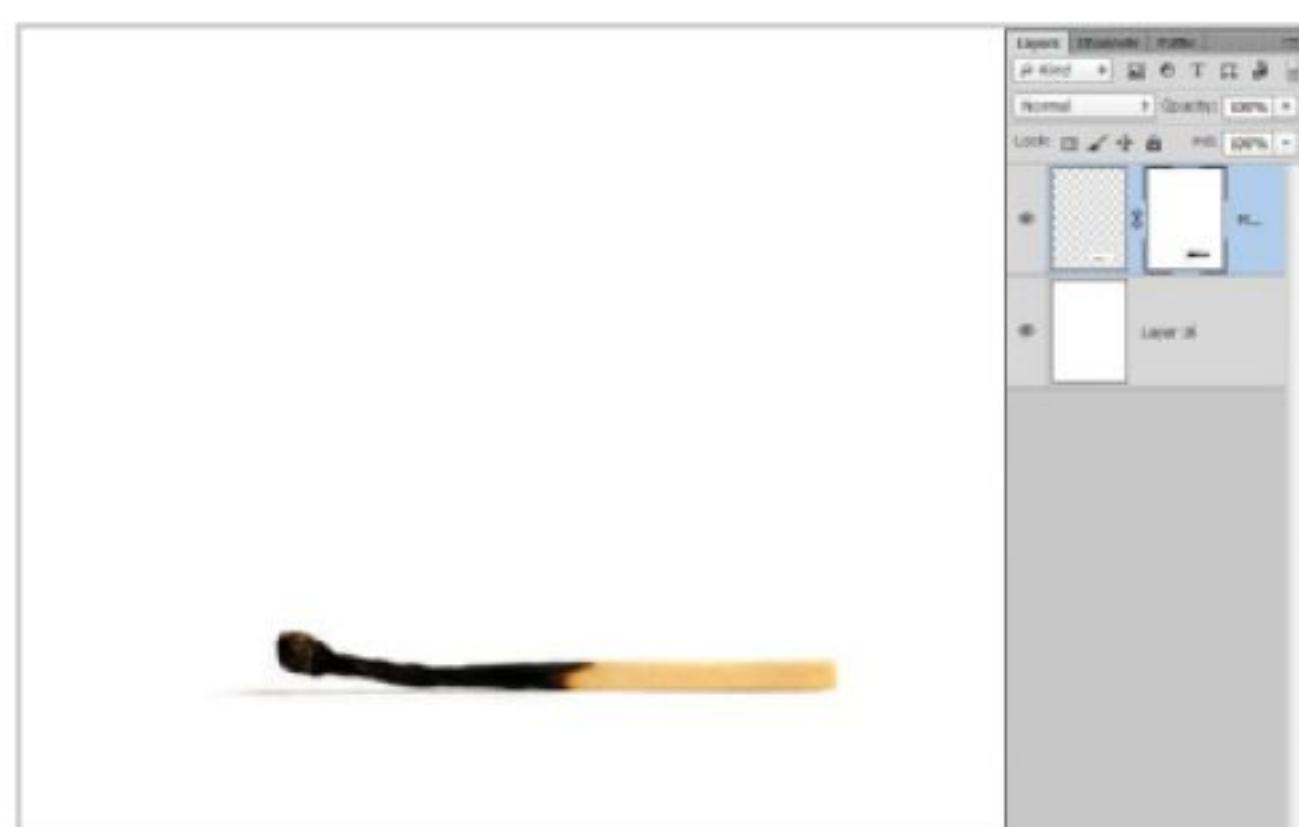


Create an ethereal beauty by learning to combine brushes and masks in one seamless effect

This abstract image is surprisingly easy to make, thanks to the clever combination of custom brushes and layer masks. The brushes you need are free online, and our steps will lead you through how to load them into Photoshop and begin creating. It's incredibly easy to add new brushes, and it opens up so many possibilities in your creative projects. Feel free to search around for more shapes and themes for your final piece.

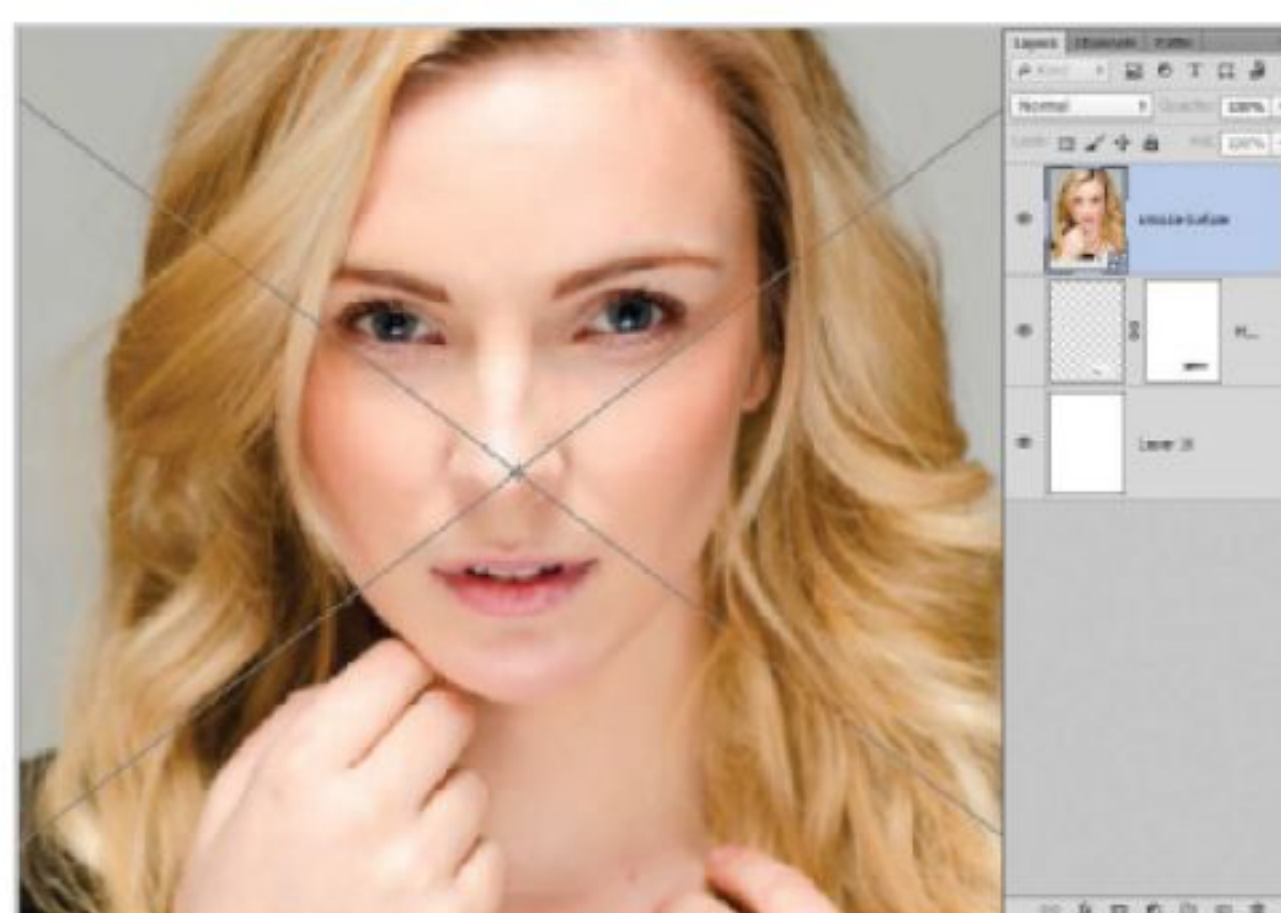
Once the basic shape is in place, masks and blend modes will come into play to add back tone

and some standout features. Overall, the techniques we're going to be using are very basic. However, the placement of the brushes and the tweaking and shaping of our portrait will require patience and a sharp eye. Trial and error is often the best way to move forward; paint a smoke brush on a new layer, move it around, transform it, use the Brush panel to flip or rotate it, decide if it works and simply delete it if it doesn't! Don't be afraid to get things wrong; it's often the best way of finding out what looks right.



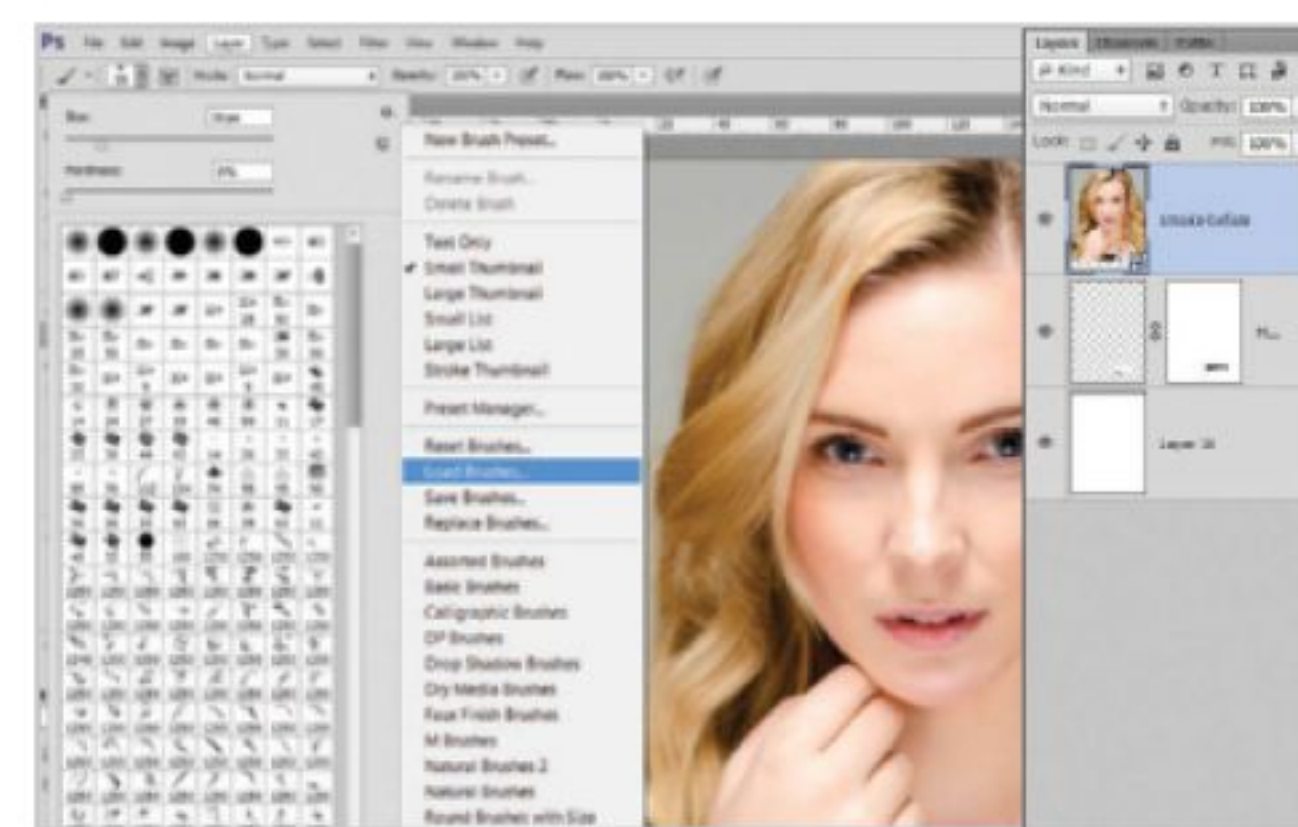
Create your base

01 Create a portrait canvas with File>New and add 'Match.jpg'. Use Transform (Cmd/Ctrl+T) to resize and position the match towards the bottom right-hand corner. Add a layer mask and remove the white above the match using a black paint brush.



Position the face

02 File>Place 'smoke-before.jpg' onto your canvas. Resize and position it so it's large in the centre. You can temporarily lower the Opacity to use the position of the match as a guide. Hit Enter to confirm the placement.



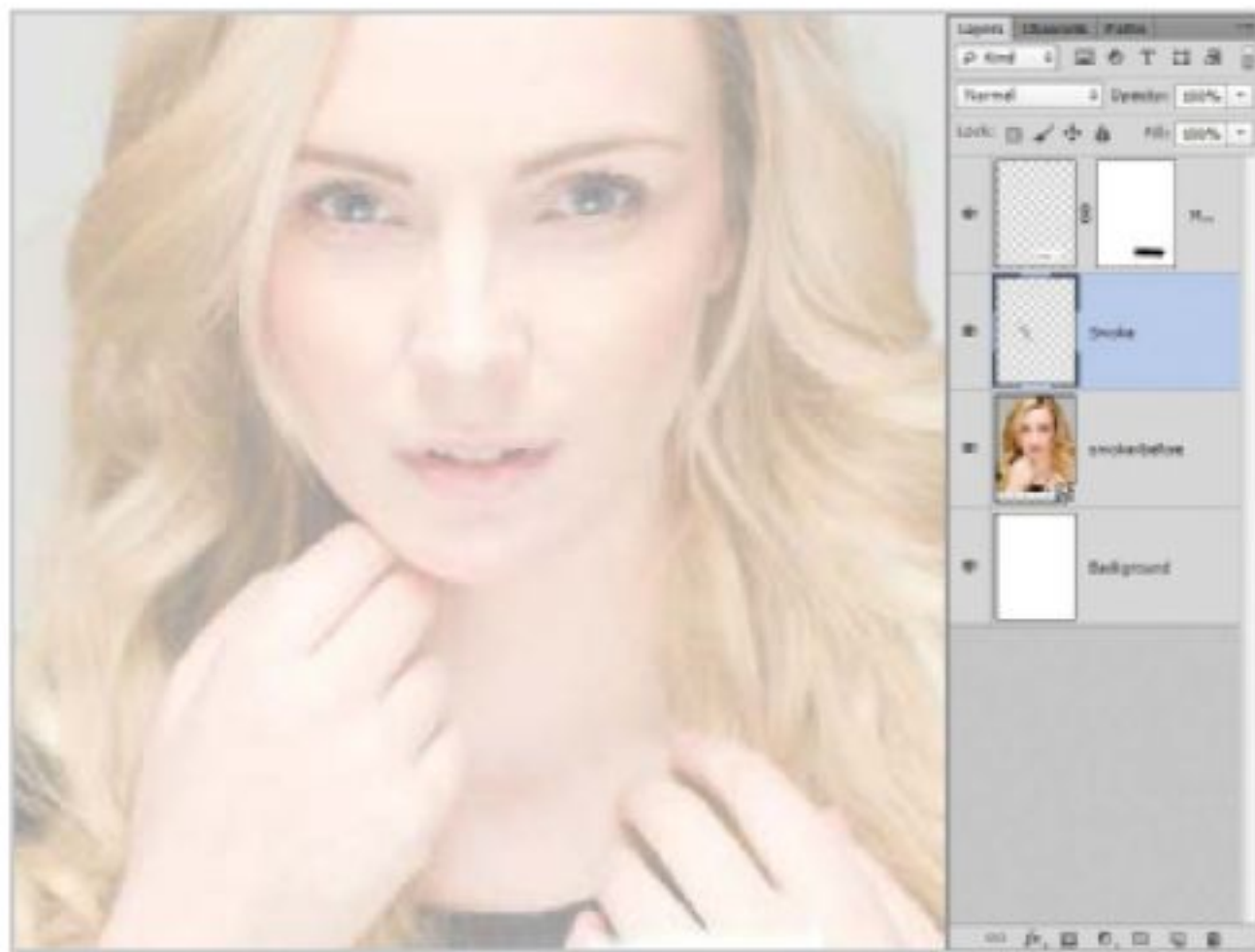
Load custom brushes

03 Download 'Real Smoke Photoshop Brushes' from www.brusheezy.com. Save the file, unzip it and go back to Photoshop. Select the Brush tool (B) and in the Brush Preset menu, click the Settings icon and go to Load Brushes. Navigate to your new ABR file and hit Load.



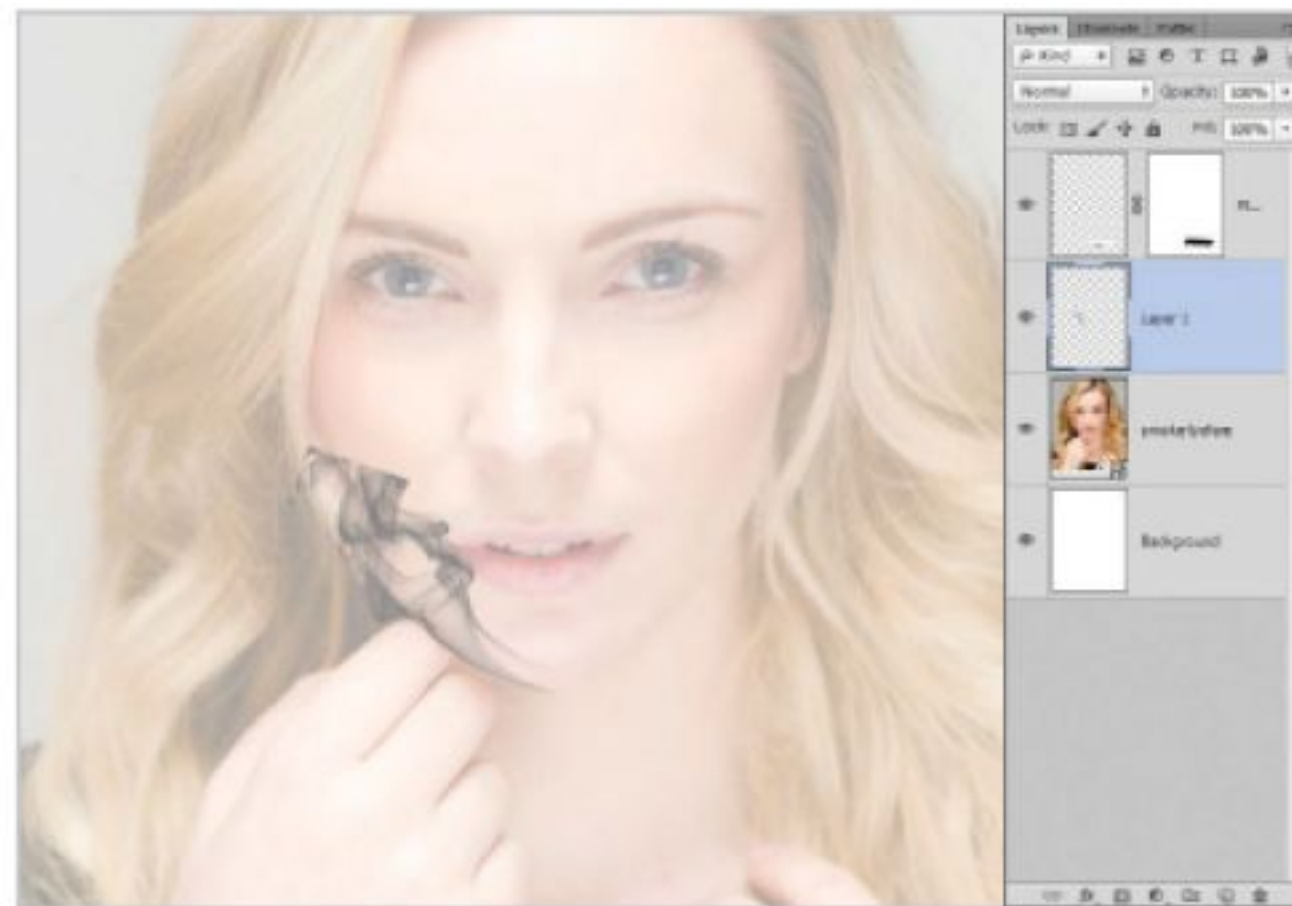


Genius Guide



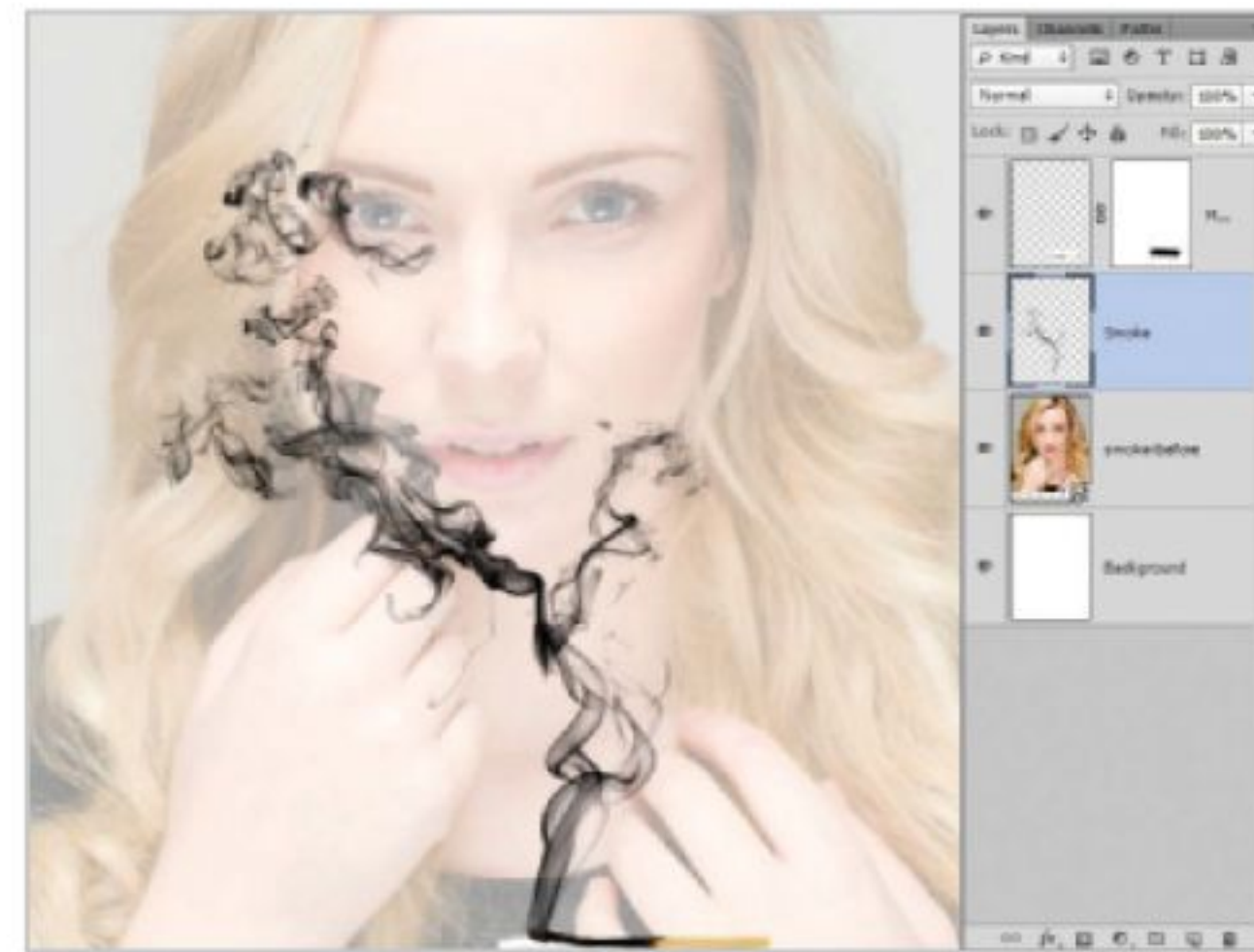
Prepare your layers

04 Adjust your layer order so that the match layer is on top and the photo underneath, then create a new layer with Cmd/Ctrl+Shift+N in between the two. Lower the Opacity of the photo layer to around 40%. This is going to be our guide.



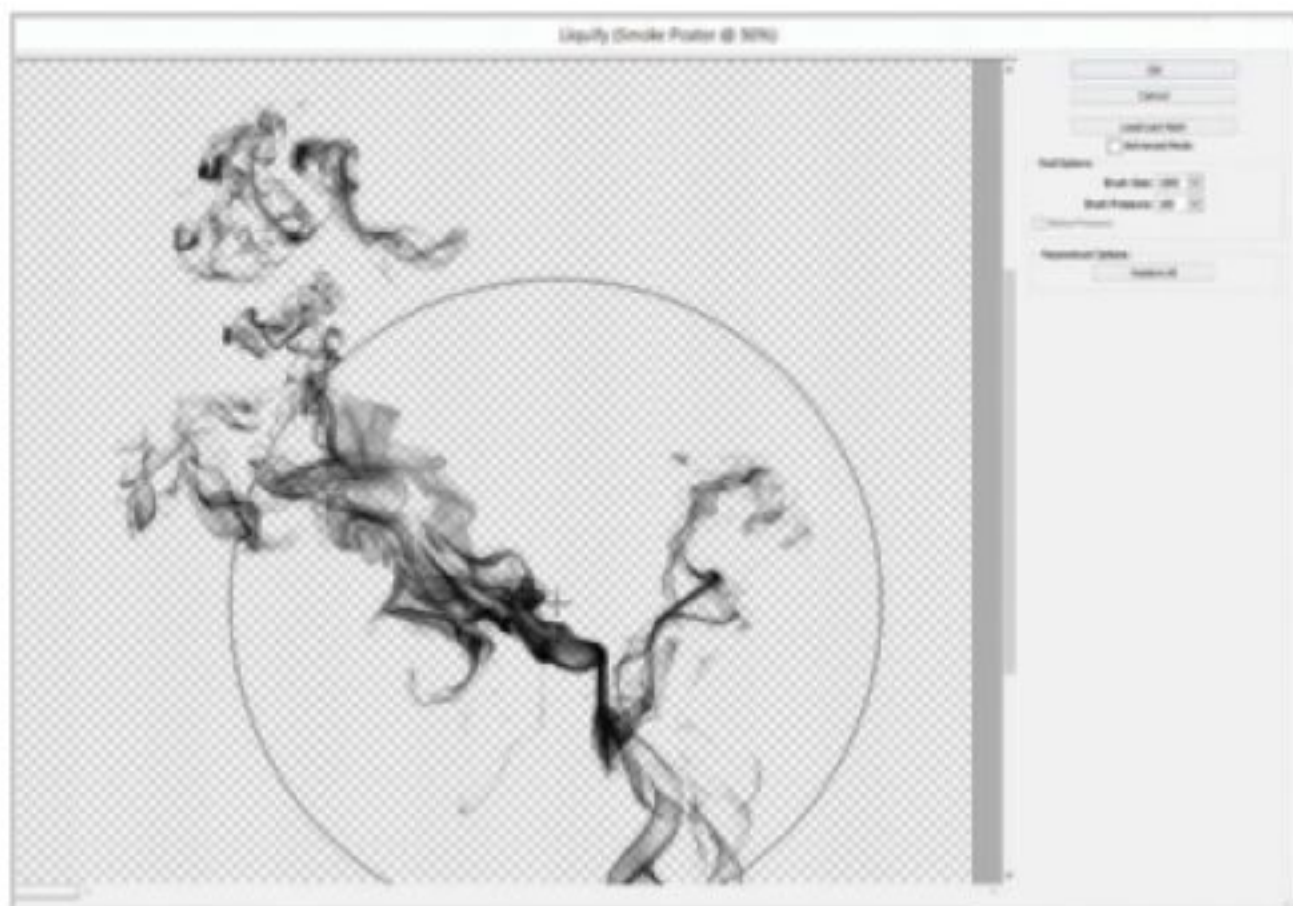
Use the Brush panel

05 Open your Brush Preset menu and pick a brush that matches the curve of the right-hand side of the model's jaw – you may need to use the Brush panel to rotate and flip. Open this using the icon next to the Preset thumbnail. Use black to paint in the main smoke.



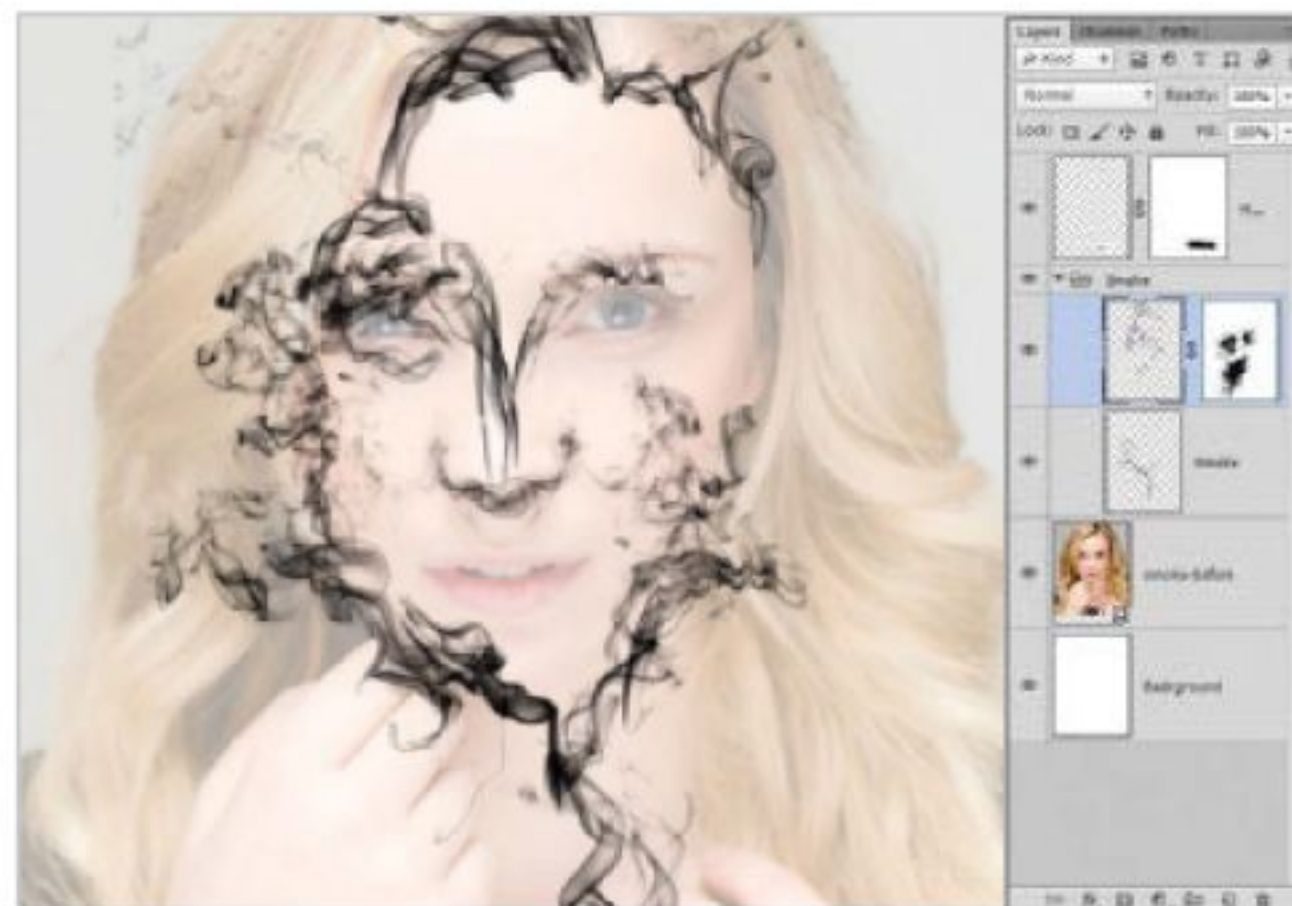
Outline the jaw

06 Continue to select brushes, and adjust with the Brush panel to roughly outline her jaw, and create a trail down to the match. Work carefully and slowly. To help prevent mistakes, you can use each brush on a separate layer.



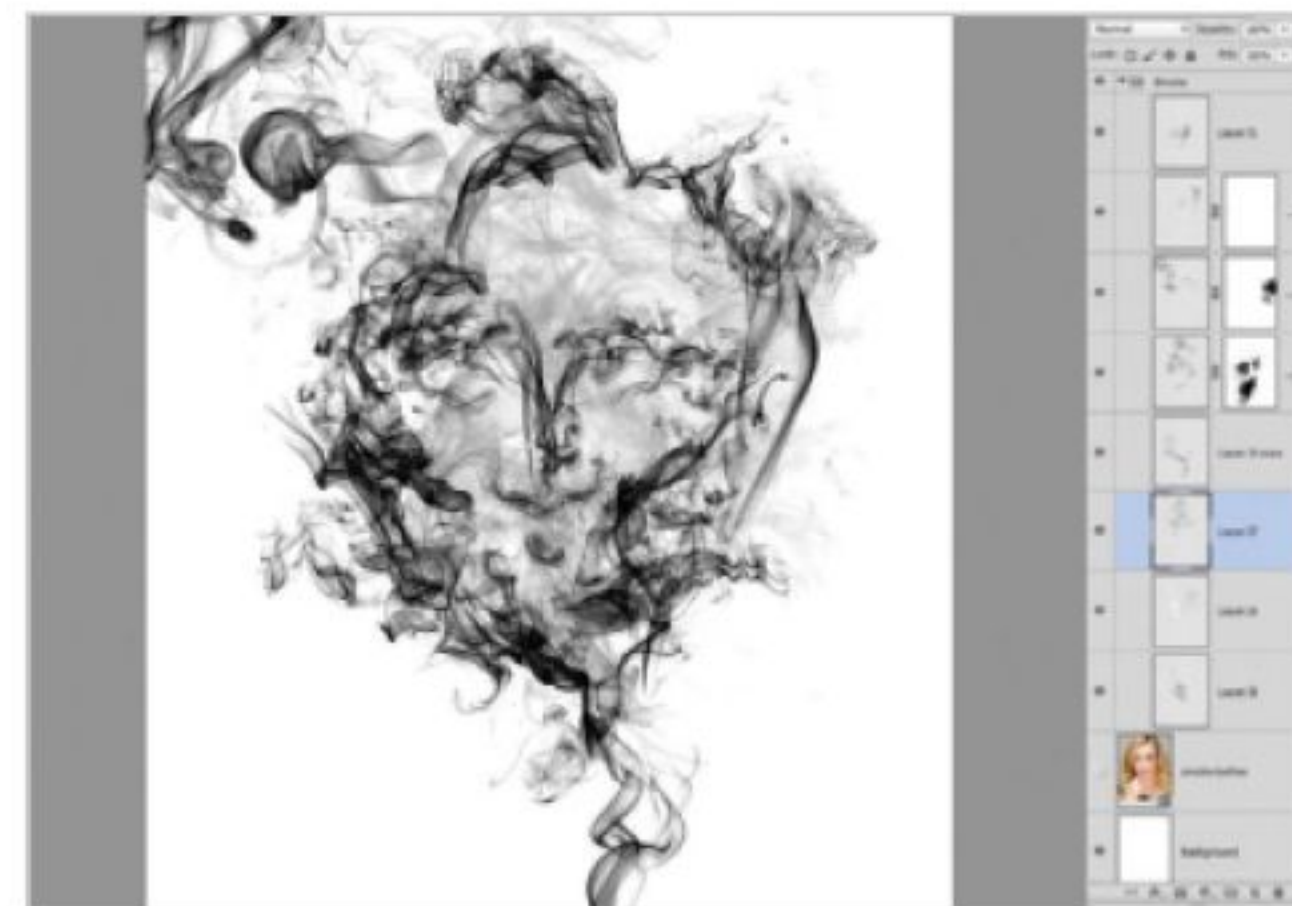
Liquify the smoke

07 To get the smoke to the correct shape, you can use the Liquify tool in Filter>Liquify. Select the Forward Warp tool (W) and use a large brush to avoid sharp shapes that wouldn't exist in smoke. Gently push the smoke so that it is slightly straighter at the jawline.



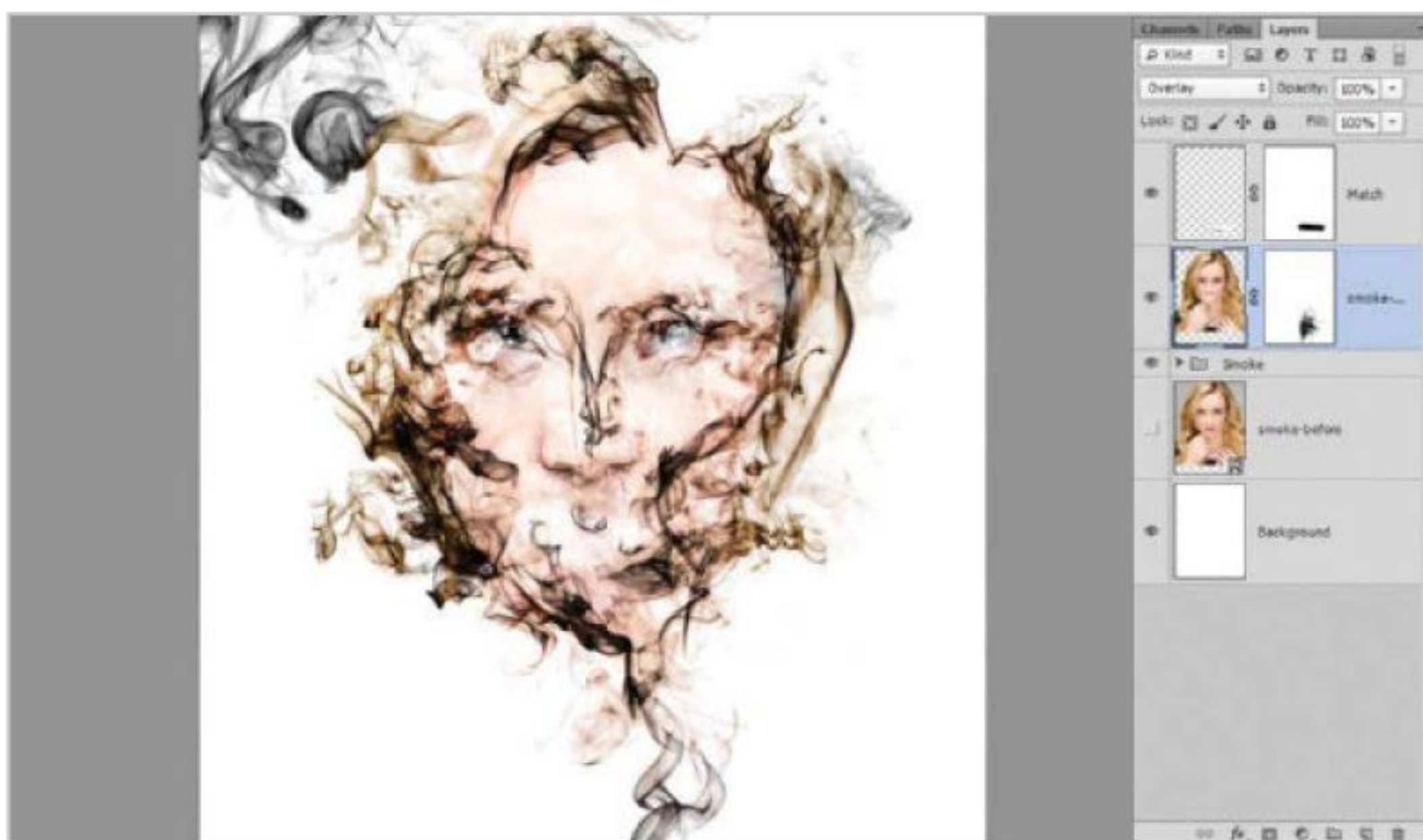
Add smokey features

08 Go through the brushes, finding shapes that match the contours of the photo. Use new layers to separate sections. Keep the outline fairly rough, defining only main features, such as the eyes and nose. Use layer masks to help define areas and don't forget Liquify!



Fill in the outlines

09 Select a neutral grey colour and create new layers below your smoke outlines. Use the fuller brushes to create a paler body of smoke behind the black – don't worry about obscuring features; they'll be redefined in the next few steps. Group all of your smoke layers.



Add some colour

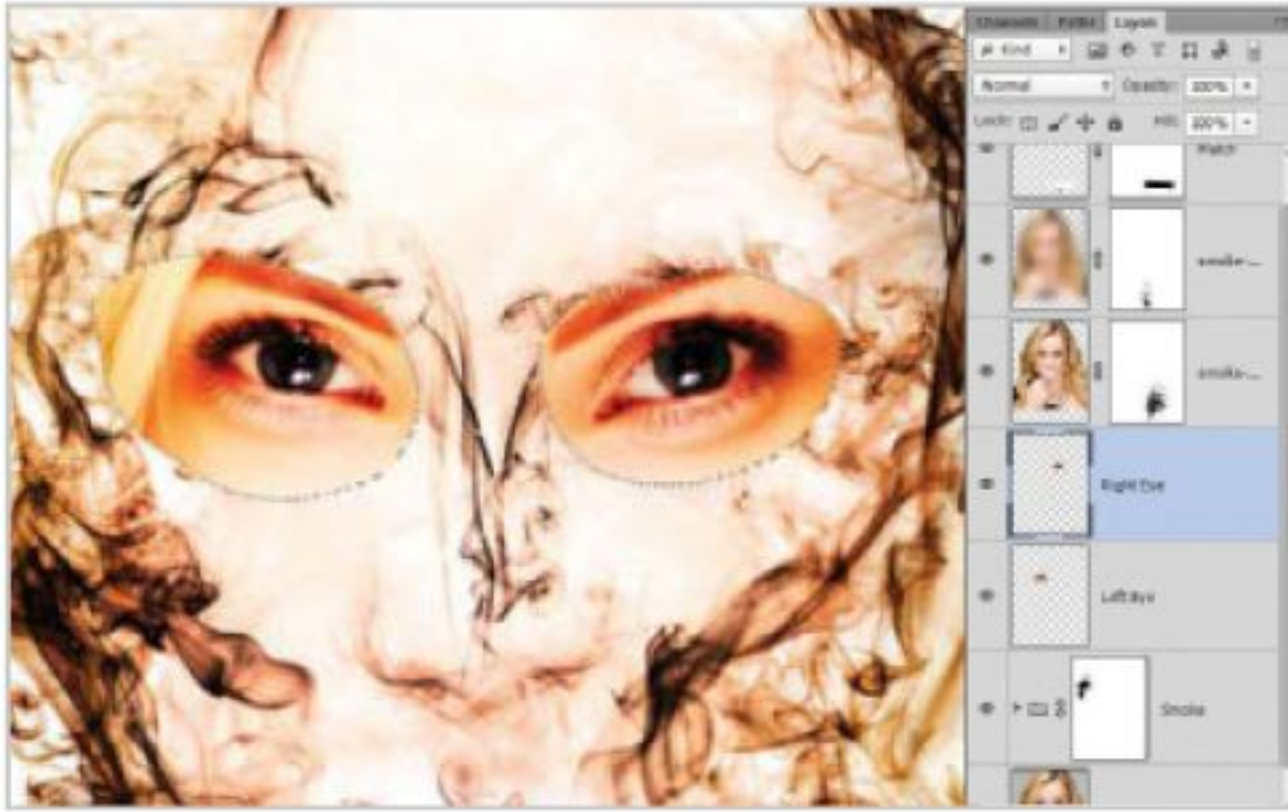
10 Duplicate your photo layer with Cmd/Ctrl+J and hide the original. Drag the new copy above the smoke and set the blend mode to Overlay. Erase the mouth on the layer, as the colour is too bright, and use a layer mask to blend the sharp bottom-edge of the layer.



Create vibrant colour

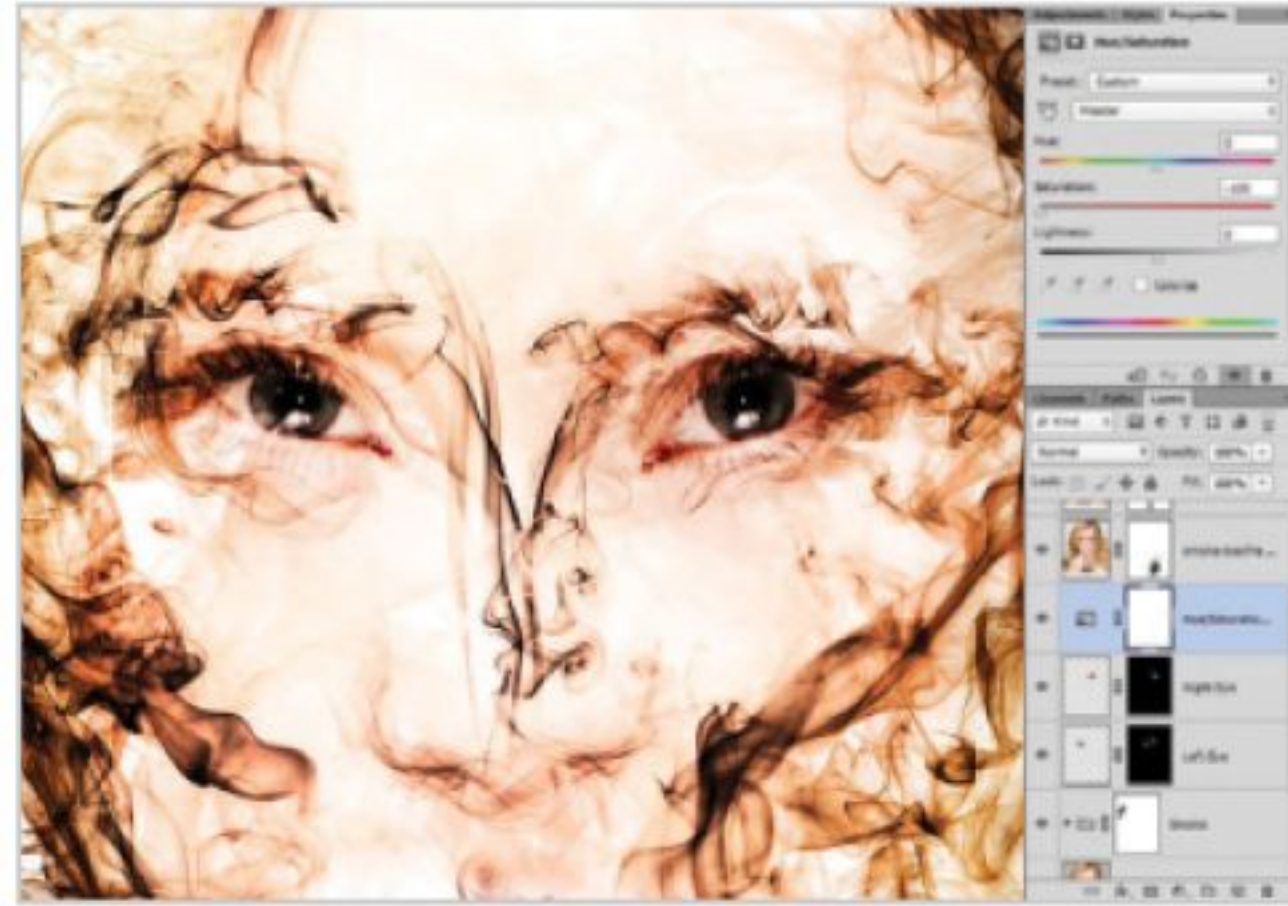
11 Duplicate this layer and then go to Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur. Set the slider options to around 95px to blur the details. Add a vibrant colour all over the image. Adjust the layer mask as necessary.

Apply mystical smoke effects



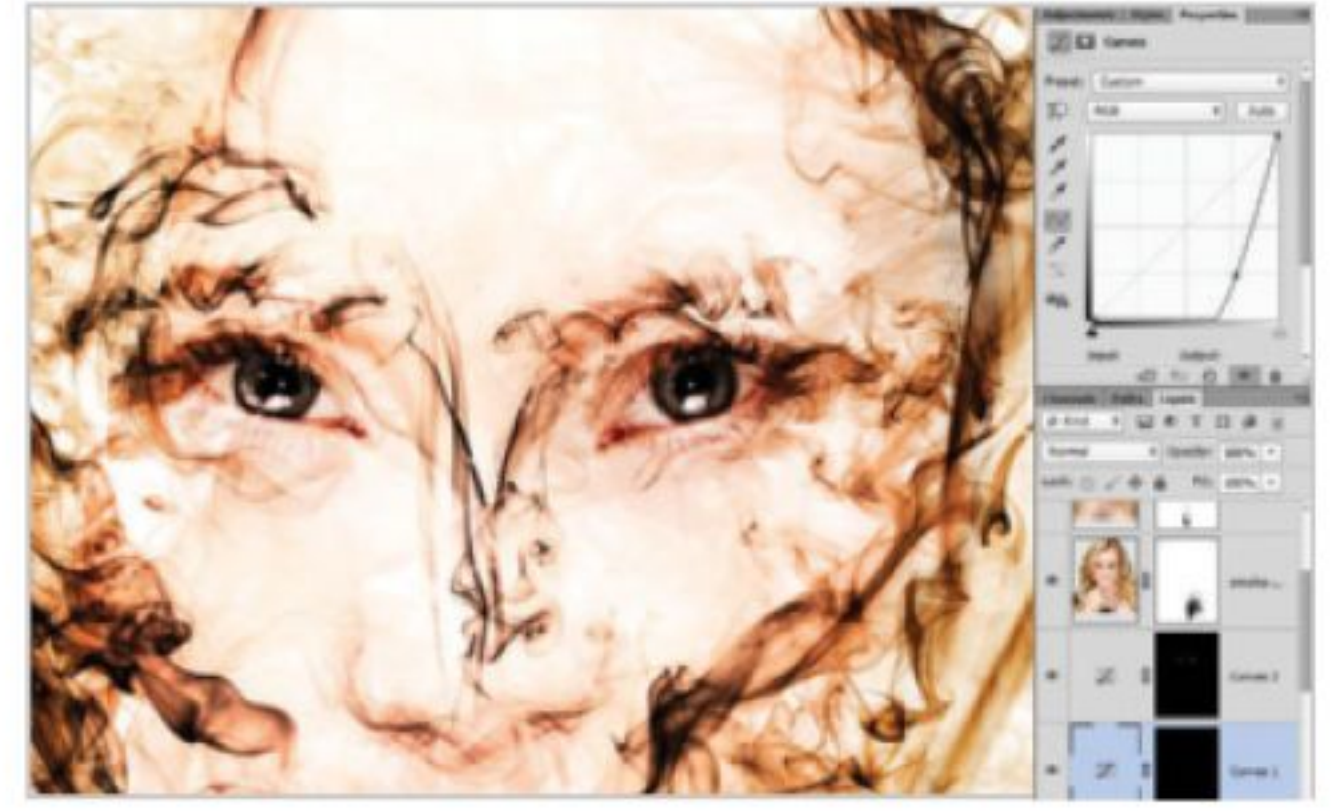
Duplicate the eyes

12 Duplicate your original photo layer and move it above the smoke layers. Use the Lasso tool (L) to roughly draw around the right eye. Hit Cmd/Ctrl+J to duplicate. Go back and roughly draw around the left eye. Cmd/Ctrl+J to copy. Delete the photo layer copy.



Blend in eye layers

13 Add layer masks to both eye layers and use a soft, low-Opacity brush (around 10-30%) to blend the eyes with the smoke. Add a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer above the eyes and set Saturation to -100 to remove unwanted colours.



Make the eyes pop

14 Add two Curves adjustment layers above the eyes, drag one of the curves all the way down to darken, fill the mask in black, and paint white in a ring around each iris. With the other, drag the curve up to lighten and apply to the inside of the iris.



Add eye colour

15 Create a brown Solid Color adjustment layer above all your layers. Set the blend mode to Color and use the layer mask to only apply it to the eyes. Add a lighter brown Solid Color adjustment layer and apply to the eyes as well, for a more realistic tonal range.



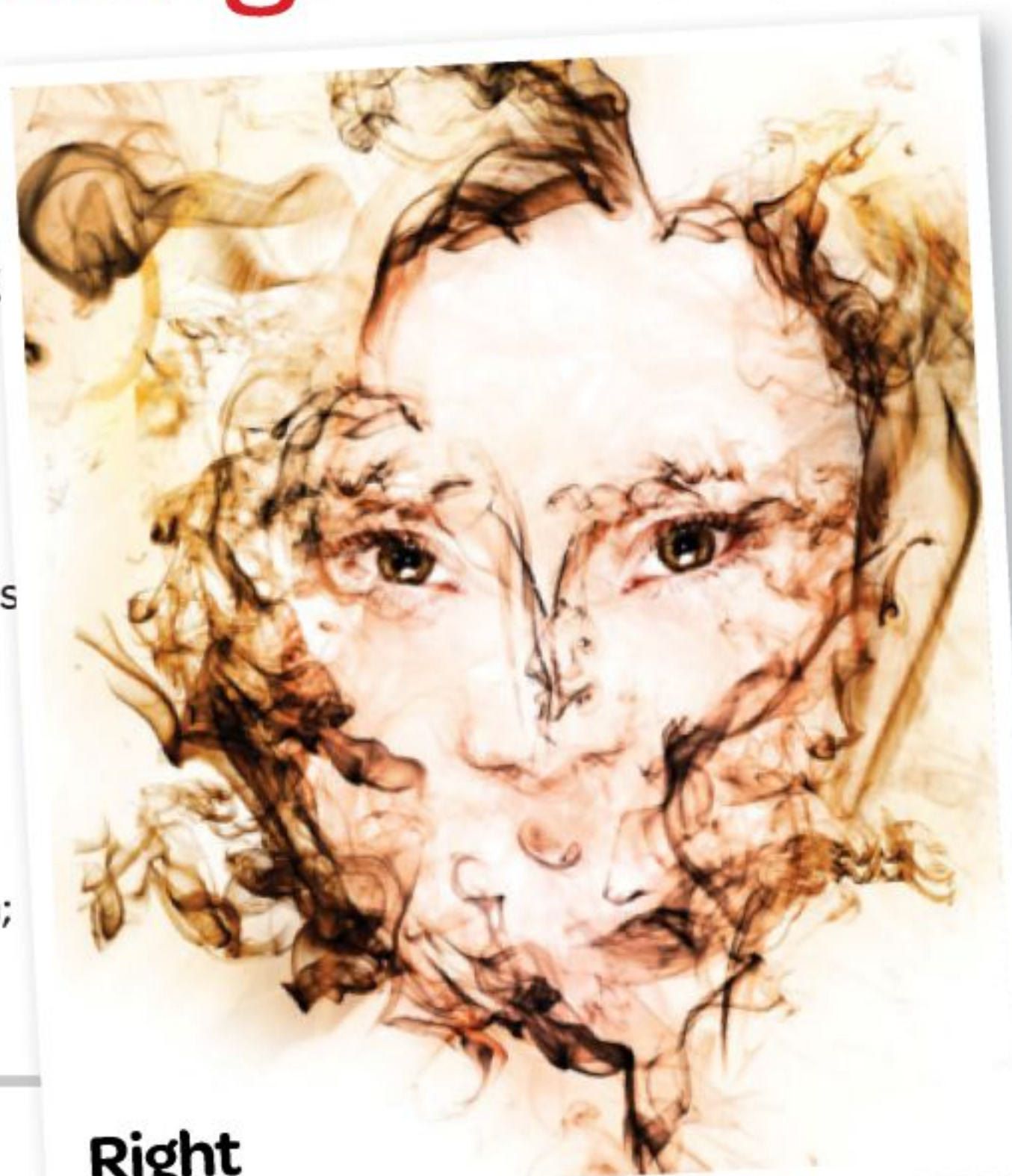
Touch up smoke colours

16 As our photo layer isn't quite as big as the smoke needs to be, add more Solid Color adjustment layers – one for her hair and one for her skin colour. Set blend modes to Color and use the masks to blend in areas of smoke that are still black.

What can go wrong? Avoid brush overkill

Keep the smoke simple

When using interesting brushes, it can be tempting to try and use them all in the one edit. However, this can result in a messy image. To avoid this, try testing out each brush before introducing it properly into your image, or use separate layers to allow you to remove any that don't work later on. Try to stick to defining the most prominent features with the darker, thinner strands of smoke, such as the jawline, hairline and nose. Then, move onto the fuller brushes with a lighter shade to subtly add texture to less important areas, such as the main bulk of the skin. Try not to spread the strands out too much; imagine how real smoke might rise and gradually disperse.



Right



Wrong



Genius Guide



Essentials

Works with



Elements



CS



CC

What you'll learn

Use layer masks to create a beautiful underwater scene



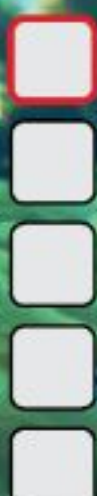
Time taken
2 hours

Expert



Daniel Sinoca

"I enjoy creating underwater compositions and Photoshop has all the necessary tools to make my job easier. There is always something new I can try, and the results are fascinating. I started to get involved in the digital world more than 10 years ago and have been working as a freelance artist ever since, creating all kinds of multimedia projects and tutorial guides."



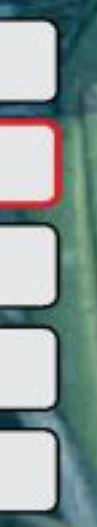
Make an underwater city

Discover the power behind masks, and learn the skills to create an underwater world

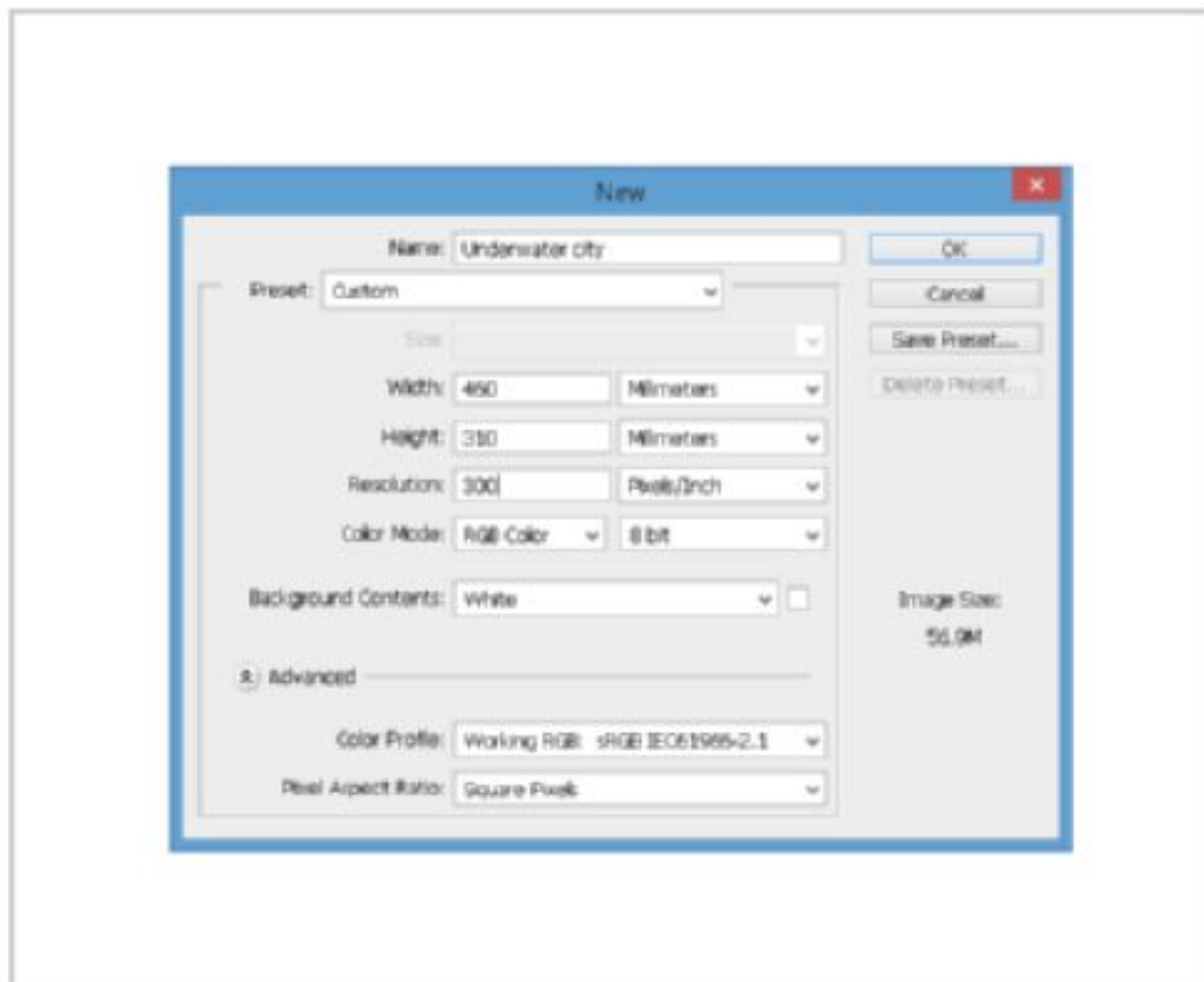
Making an underwater composition is a great way to put a whole range of Photoshop tricks and techniques into practice. There are so many details to observe, such as lighting, image focus, perspective and, of course, the sea creatures. All of these factors have an important role to play in the final result. In each step of this tutorial, we will cover

many of these details and show you how simple techniques can be very effective in creating this kind of scene. You'll learn how to control the opacity and create a translucent image using layer masks. We'll also show you an easy way to change colours by filling the layer with solid colours. You'll learn how to create light rays and other ethereal effects.

Remember to take a look at the expert tip for extra advice on achieving the effect. And visit the FileSilo to download all of the images and PSD file to get started. We prepared each image for you, so you don't need to worry about cutting or masking them – just follow this straightforward step-by-step guide to learn the essential skills to create an underwater scene.

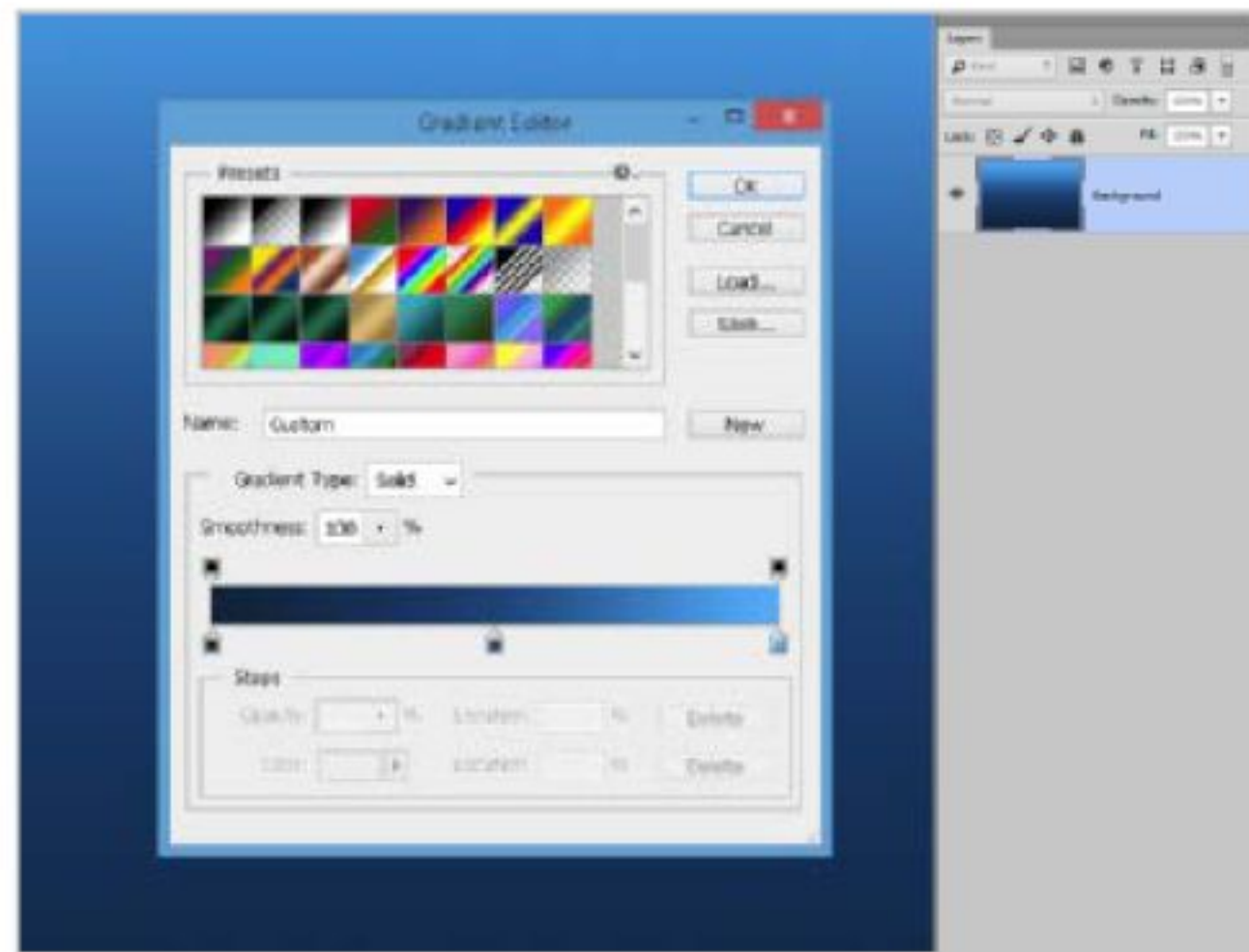


Genius Guide



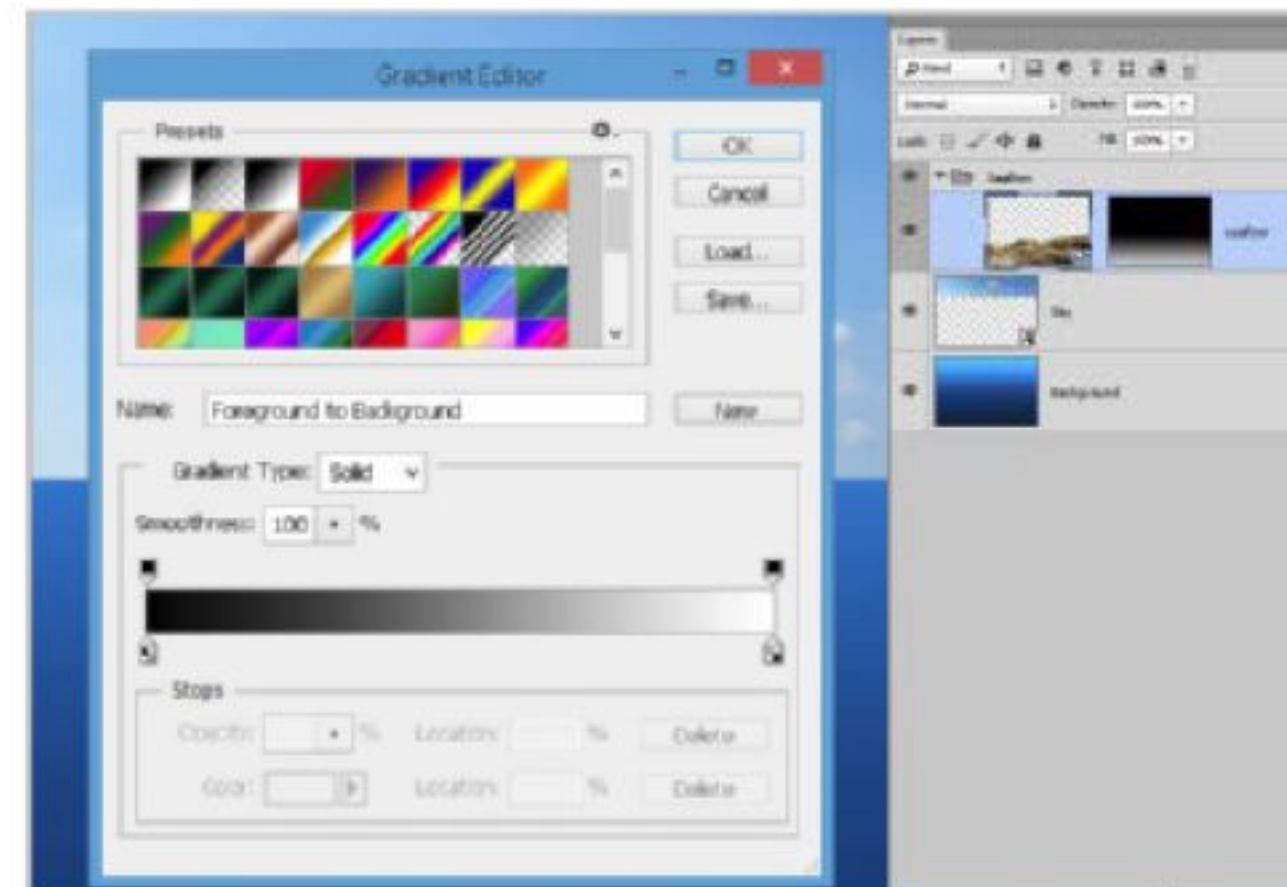
Create a blank file

01 Begin by setting the stage. Go to File>New (Cmd/Ctrl+N) and name your project Underwater City. Now set the Width to 460mm, Height to 310mm and Resolution to 300 pixels/inch. Confirm this by clicking OK.



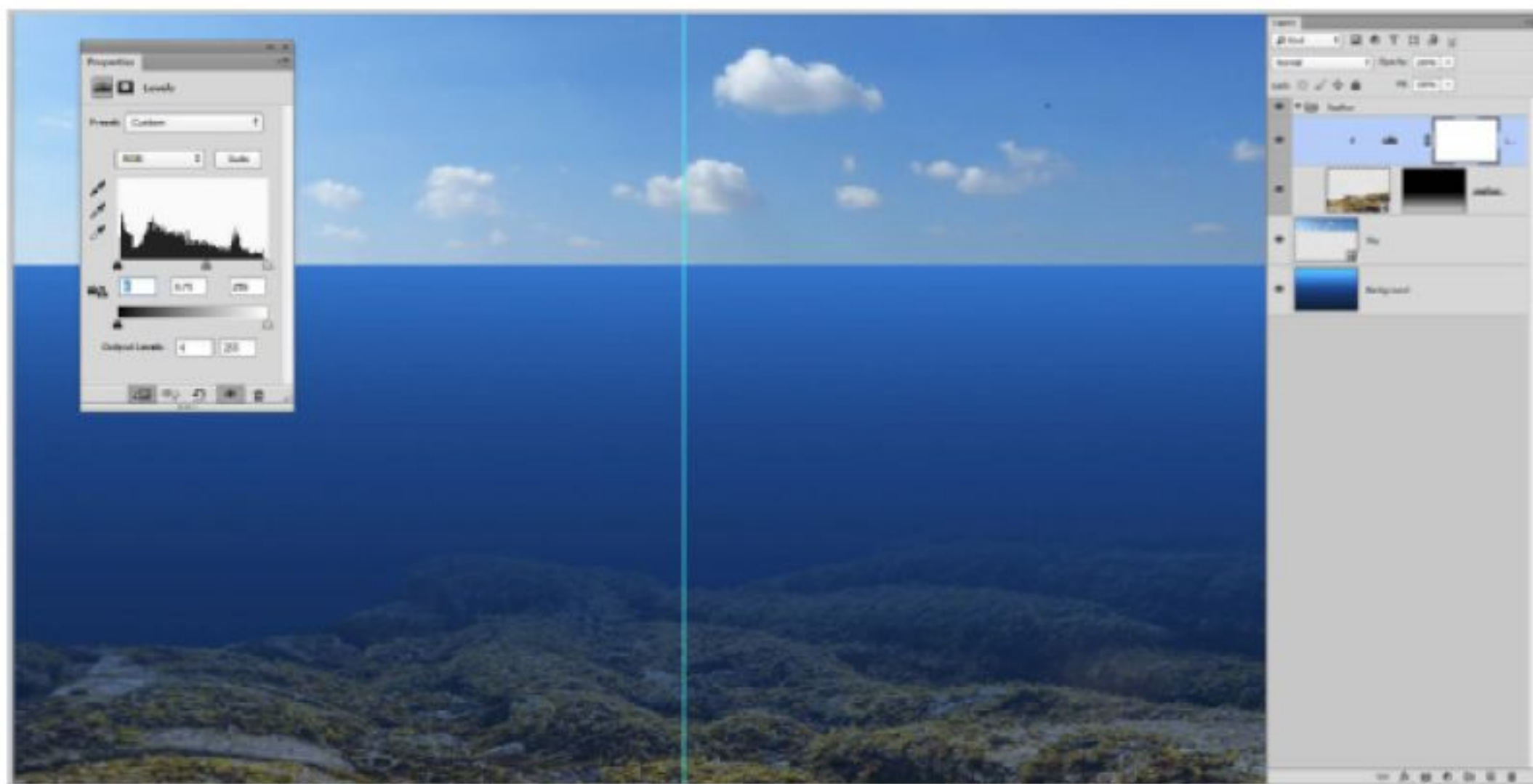
Make the background

02 Grab the Gradient tool (G) and click Edit to open the Gradient Editor. Create a new gradient using the colours #051e36, #0a4177 and #3baefe, set it to Linear and click OK. Hold Shift and drag from top to bottom. Now go to File>Place 'Sky.png' to complete the background.



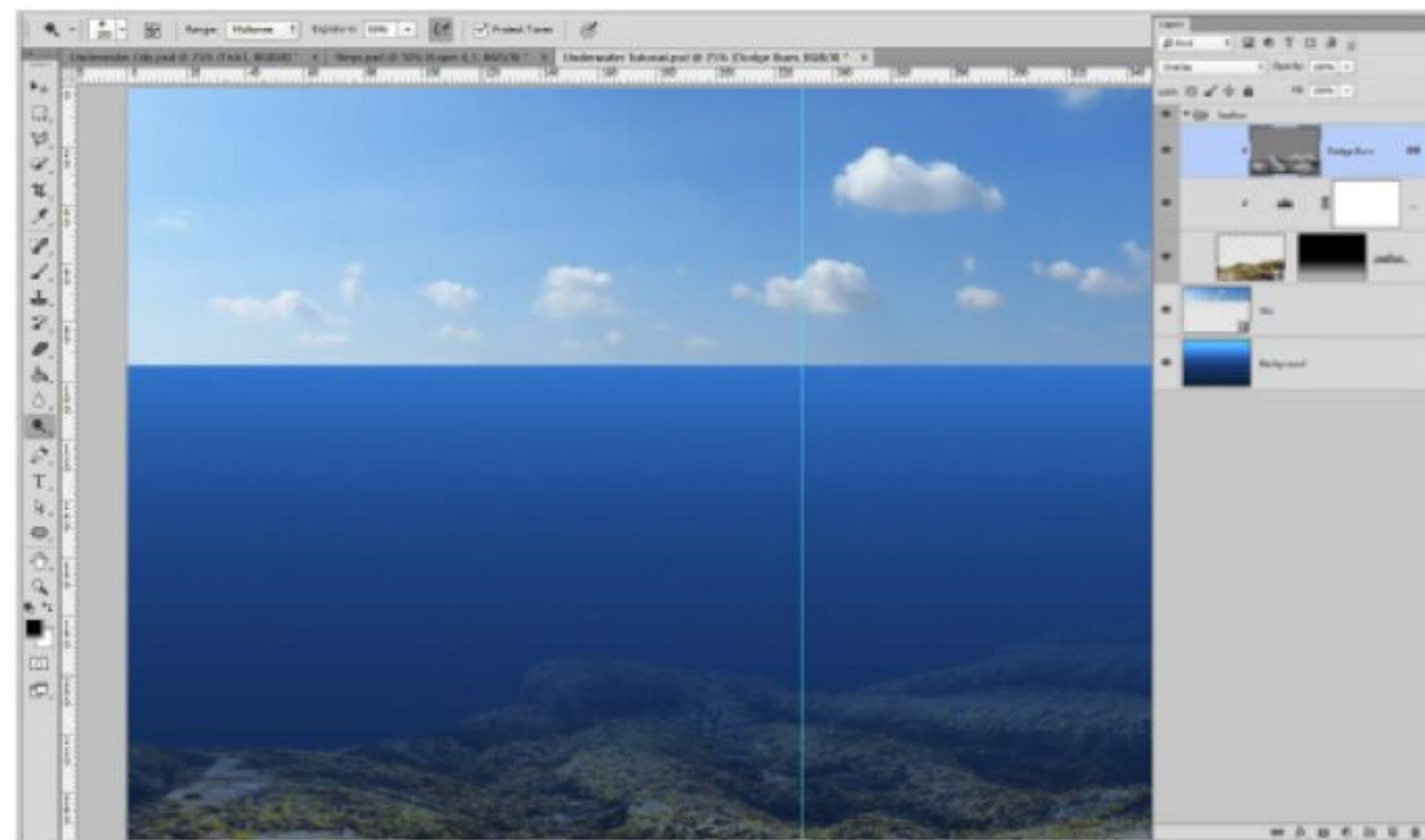
Place the sea floor

03 Go to File>Place 'Seafloor.png'. Grab the middle-top handle, drag down to resize the image then hit Enter. Go to Layer>Layer Mask>Reveal All. Grab the Gradient tool (G) and open the Gradient Editor, choose Presets Foreground to Background and click OK. Hold Shift and drag from the bottom to the centre.



Add an adjustment layer

04 Go to Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Levels and set the Midtone input to 0.75. Now press Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+N. In the new dialog box that appears, name it Dodge/Burn, check the Use Previous Layer to Create Clipping Mask box, set the blend mode to Overlay and check Fill Overlay-neutral Color. Hit OK.



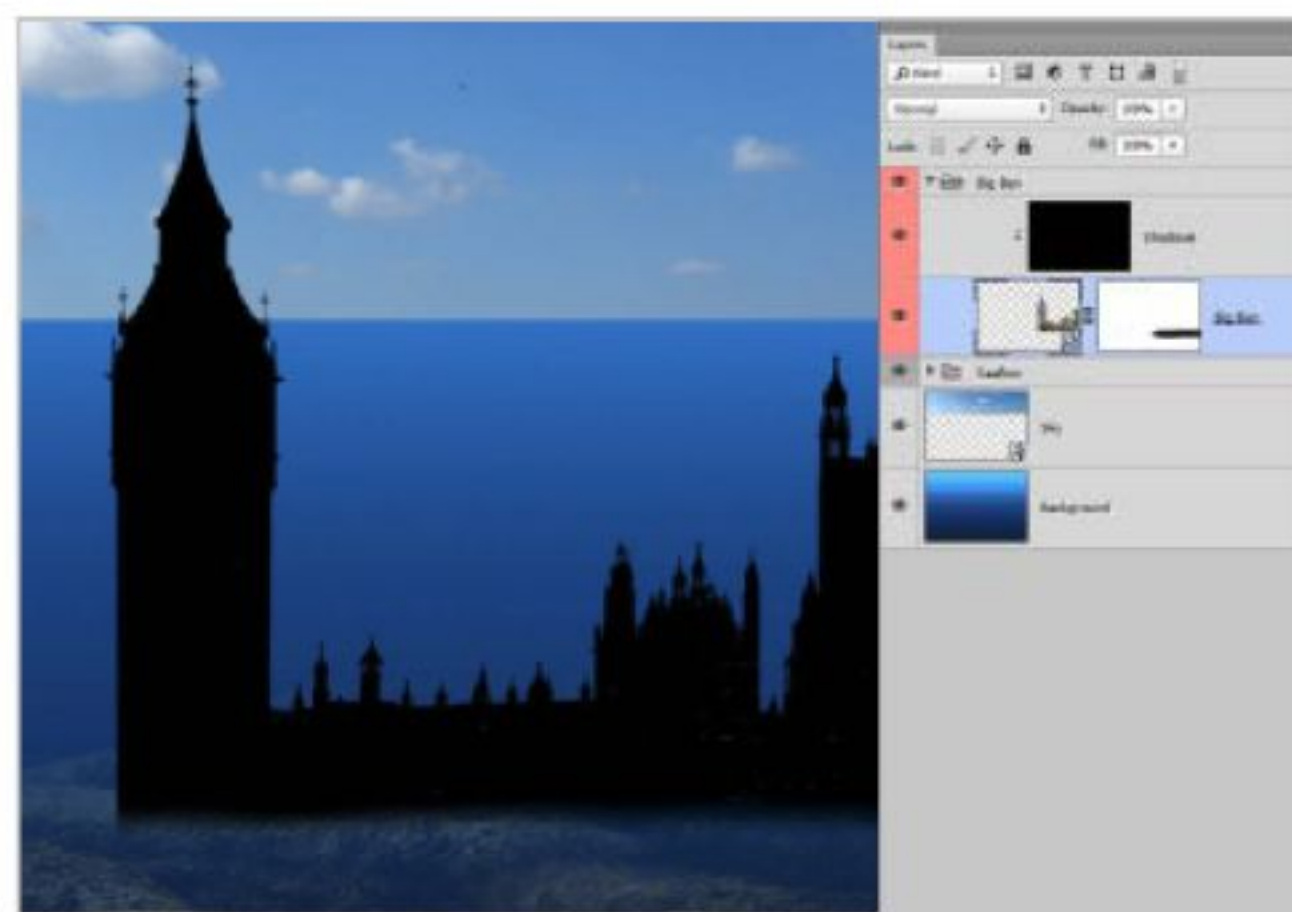
Paint the rocks

05 With the neutral layer selected, grab the Dodge tool (O), change the Range to Midtones, set Exposure to 80% and with a soft brush paint over the seaweed. Press Shift+O to switch to the Burn tool, change the Range to Midtones, set Exposure to 80% and paint the rocks.



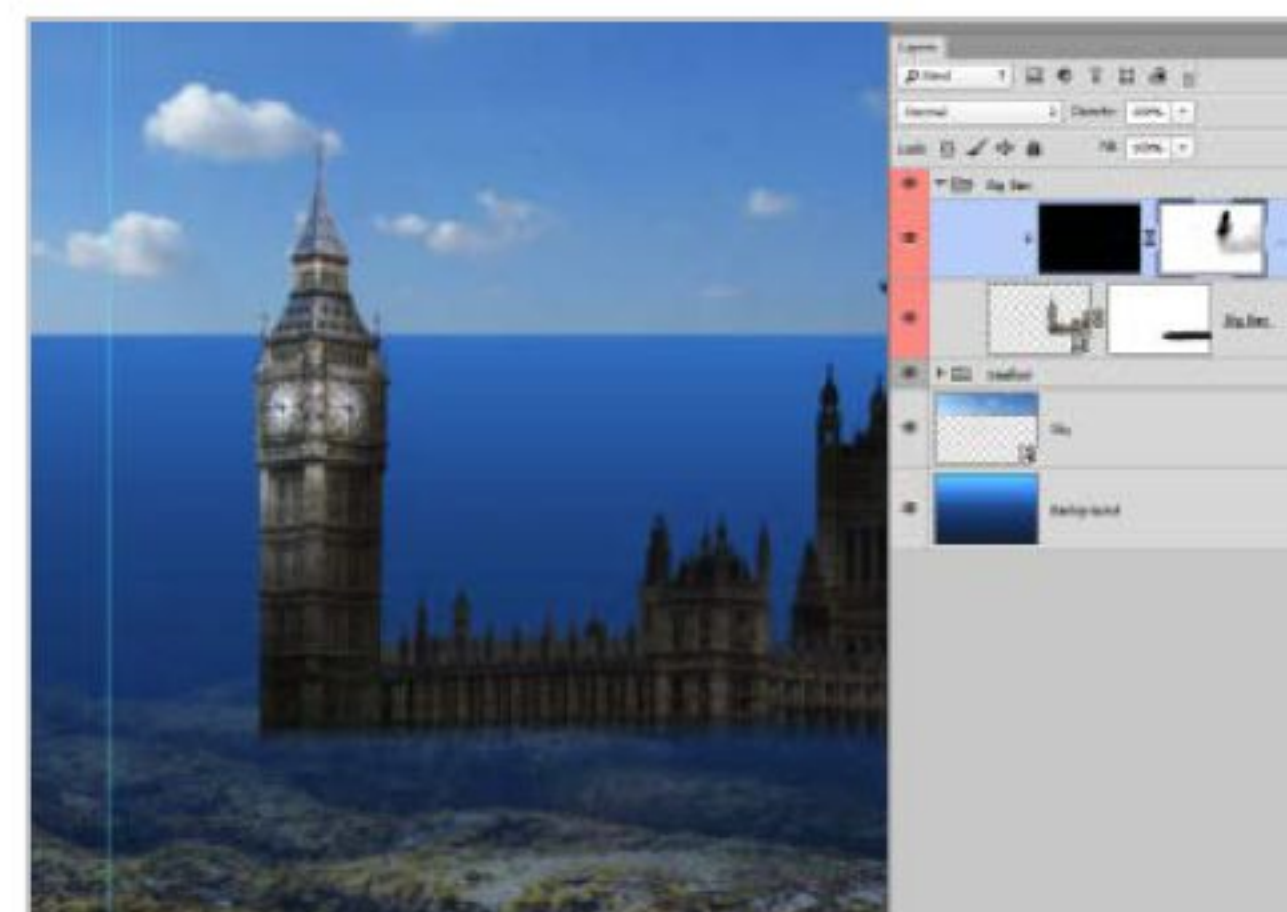
Place the images

06 Go to File>Place 'Big Ben.png'. Hold Shift and drag the handles to resize the image. Create a layer mask (Layer>Layer Mask>Reveal All). Set the default Foreground/Background colour (D). Grab the Brush tool (B), choose a soft tip brush and paint the bottom to hide the extra areas.



Fill with solid colours

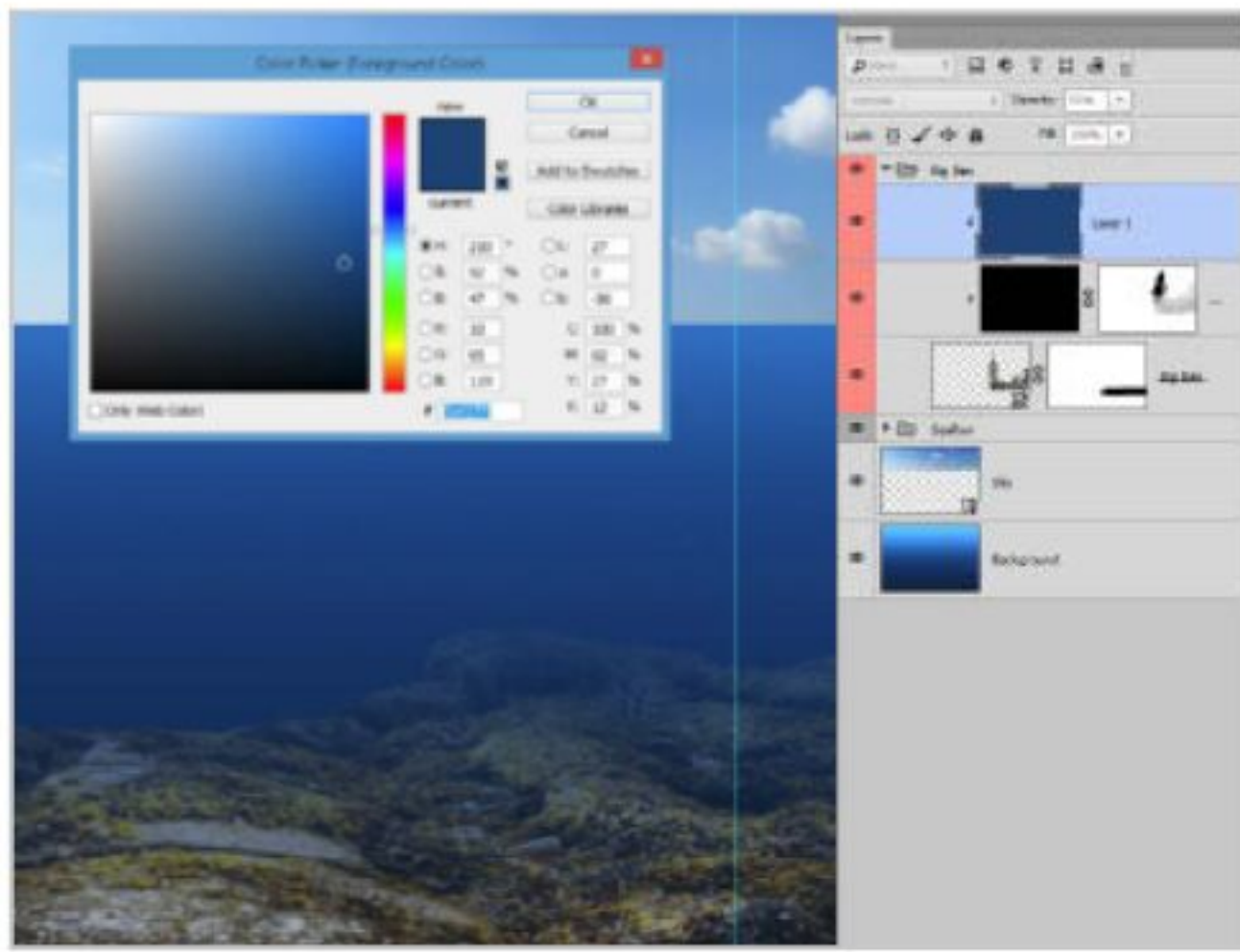
07 Press Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+N. In the new dialog box that appears, name it Shadows, check the Use Previous Layer to Create Clipping Mask box and hit OK. Now press Opt/Alt+Delete to fill the layer with black and create a new layer mask (Layer>Layer Mask>Reveal All).



Create shadows

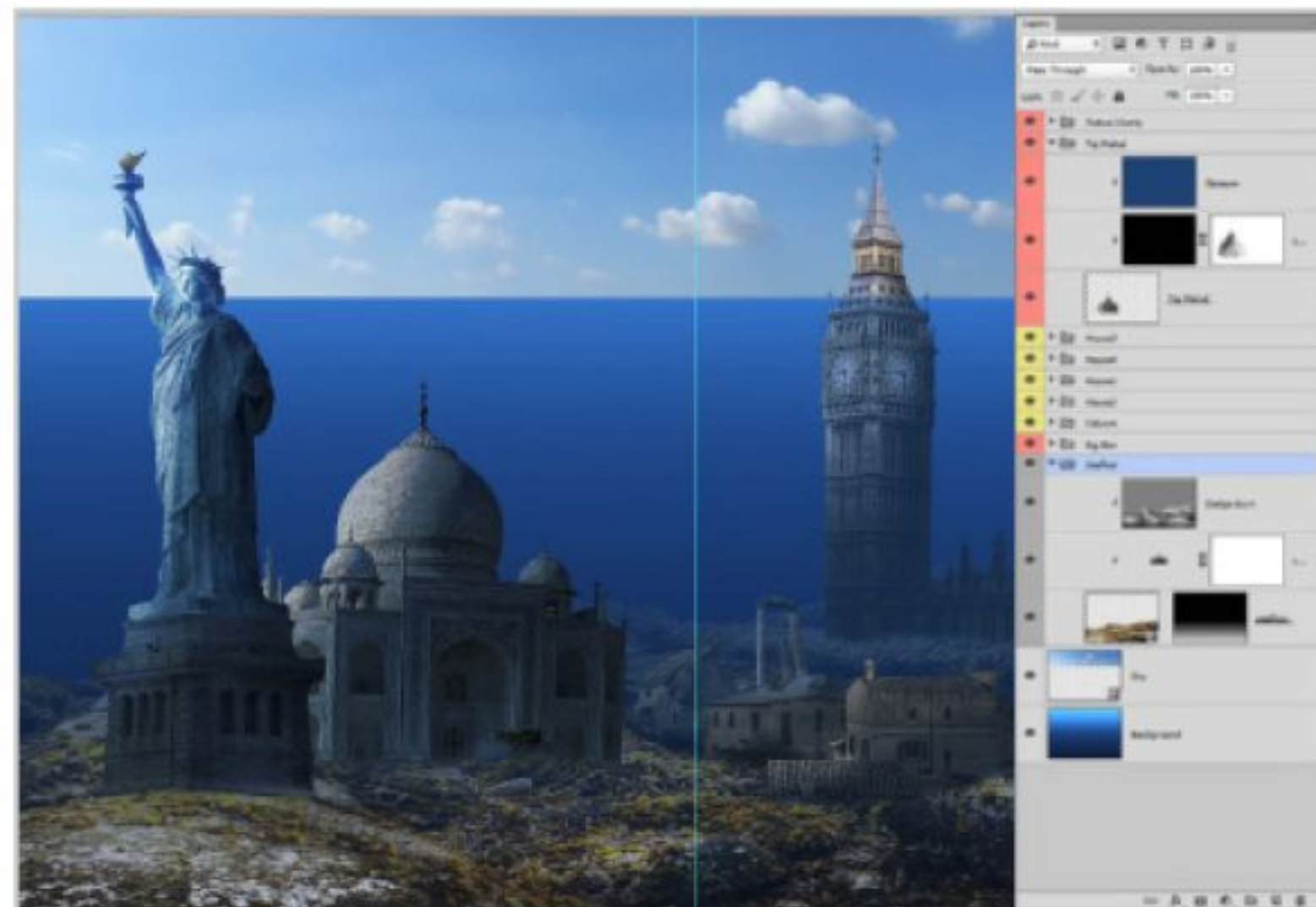
08 Now let's use the brush to paint over the mask and create the shadows. Grab the Brush tool (B). Choose a soft tip brush, size 300. In the tool options bar, set the Opacity to 10%. Gently paint over the mask to create a nice shadow.

Make an underwater city



Make the image opaque

09 Create a new layer by clicking on the icon at the bottom of the Layers palette. Name it Opaque and press Cmd/Ctrl+Opt/Alt+G to clip the layer. Set the Foreground colour to #0a4177 and press Opt/Alt+Delete to fill the layer. Now change the layer's Opacity to 55%.



Repeat the steps

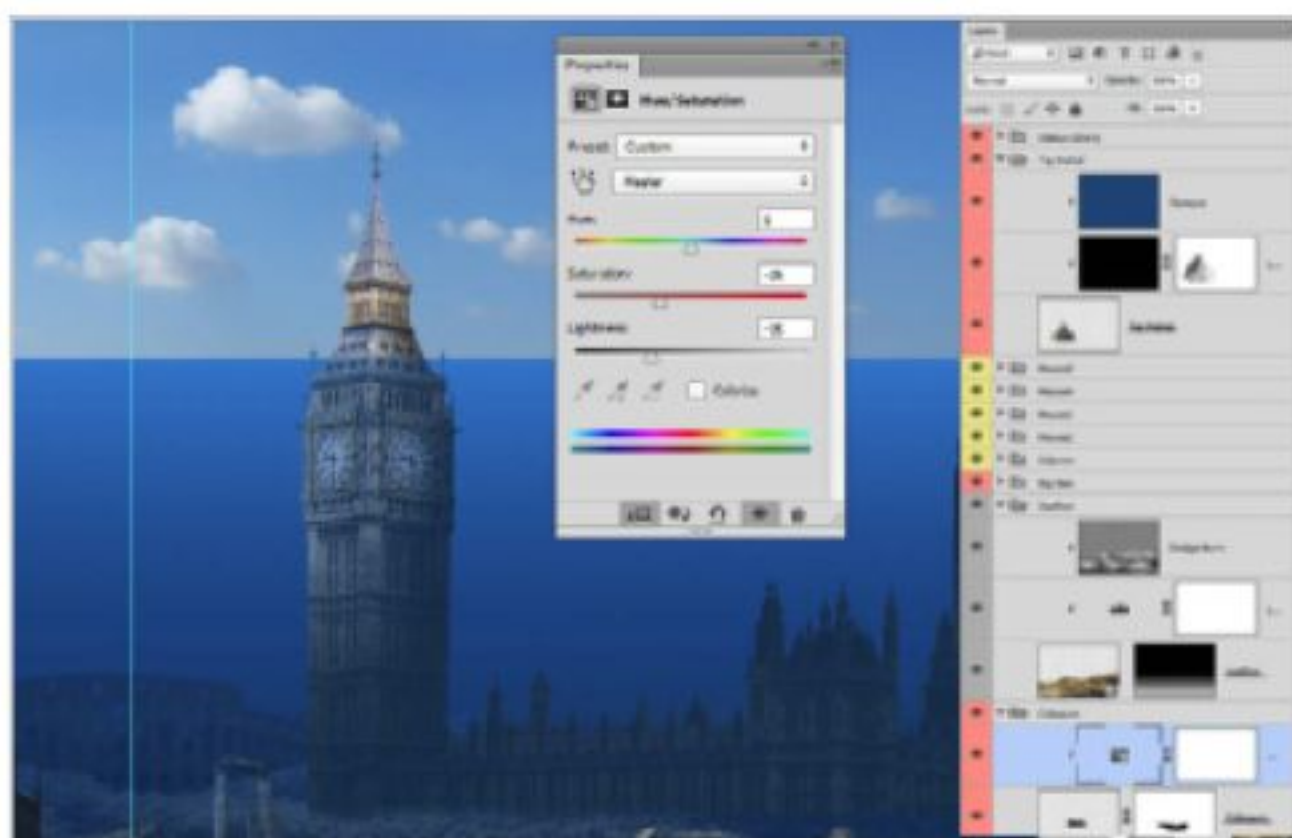
10 Place the other historic architecture and houses. Resize each image and distribute over the sea floor, trying to create a sense of perspective. Repeat the previous steps to create the shadows and the opaque layer (increase or decrease the opacity to make the colour more or less translucent).

Expert tip



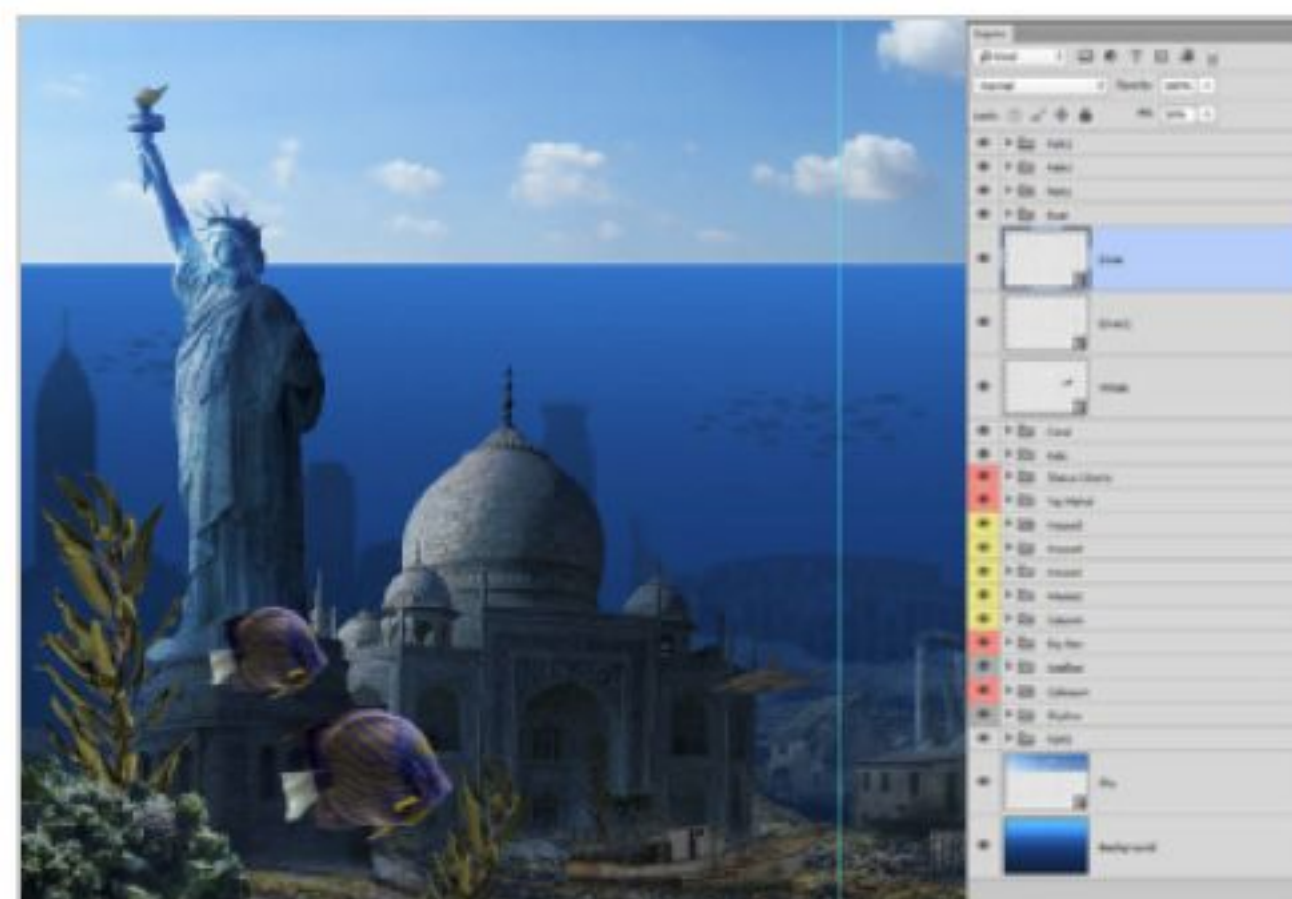
Keep organised

Organising the layers into groups will greatly improve your productivity and make it easier for you to find each image. Whenever you are dealing with a composition that involves many layers, groups enable you to isolate similar elements. In order to create a new group, first hold the Shift key and select each layer, then click the Create a New Group icon on the bottom of the Layers panel. Now just rename the layers to keep all the contents in a safety folder.



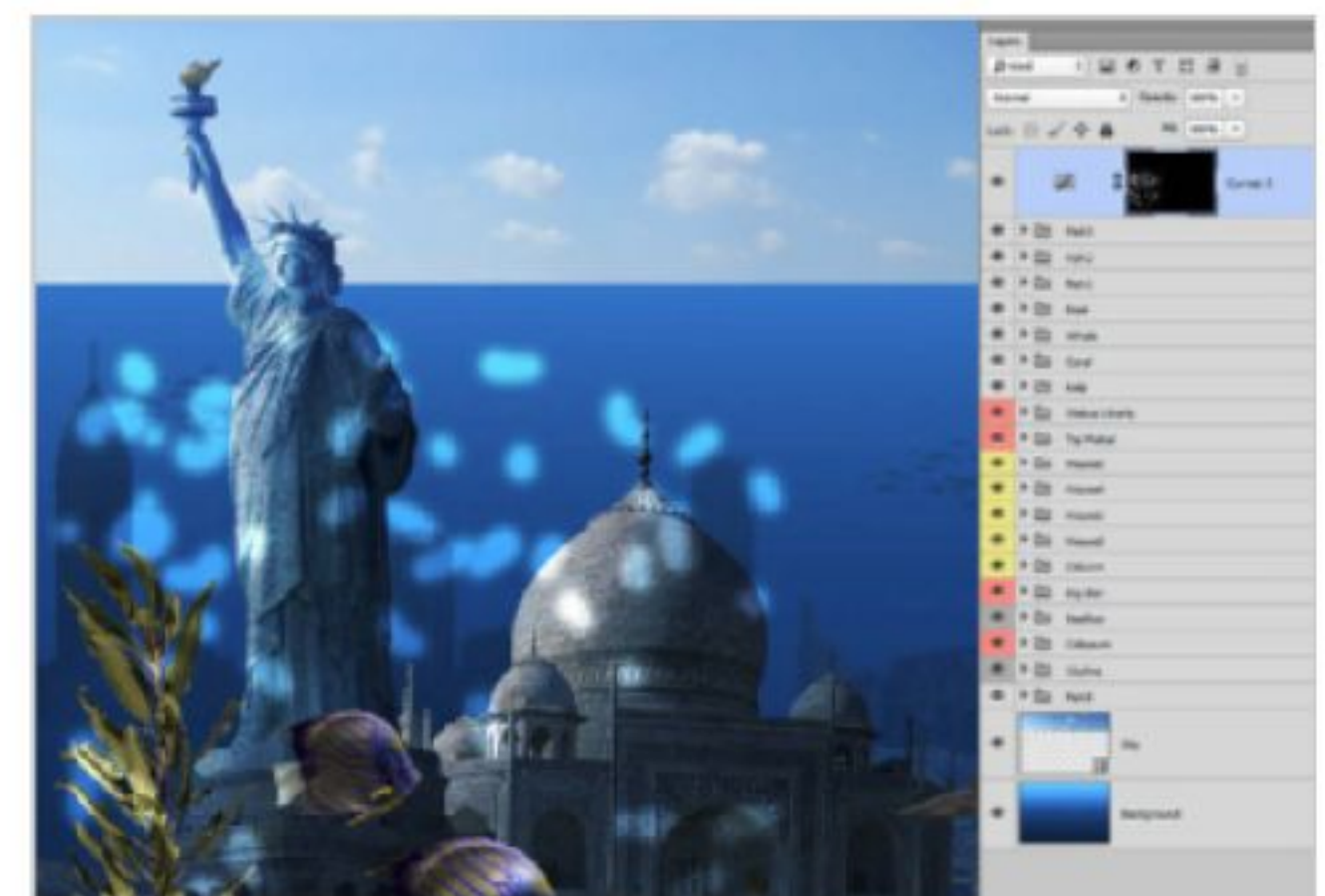
Make adjustments

11 Place the 'Coliseum' and the 'Skyline.png' under the Seafloor layer. Create a layer mask and hide the unwanted areas. Now change the layer's Opacity to 25%. Go to Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Hue/Saturation. Decrease the Lightness to make the image darker. Go to Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur and set Radius to 5px.



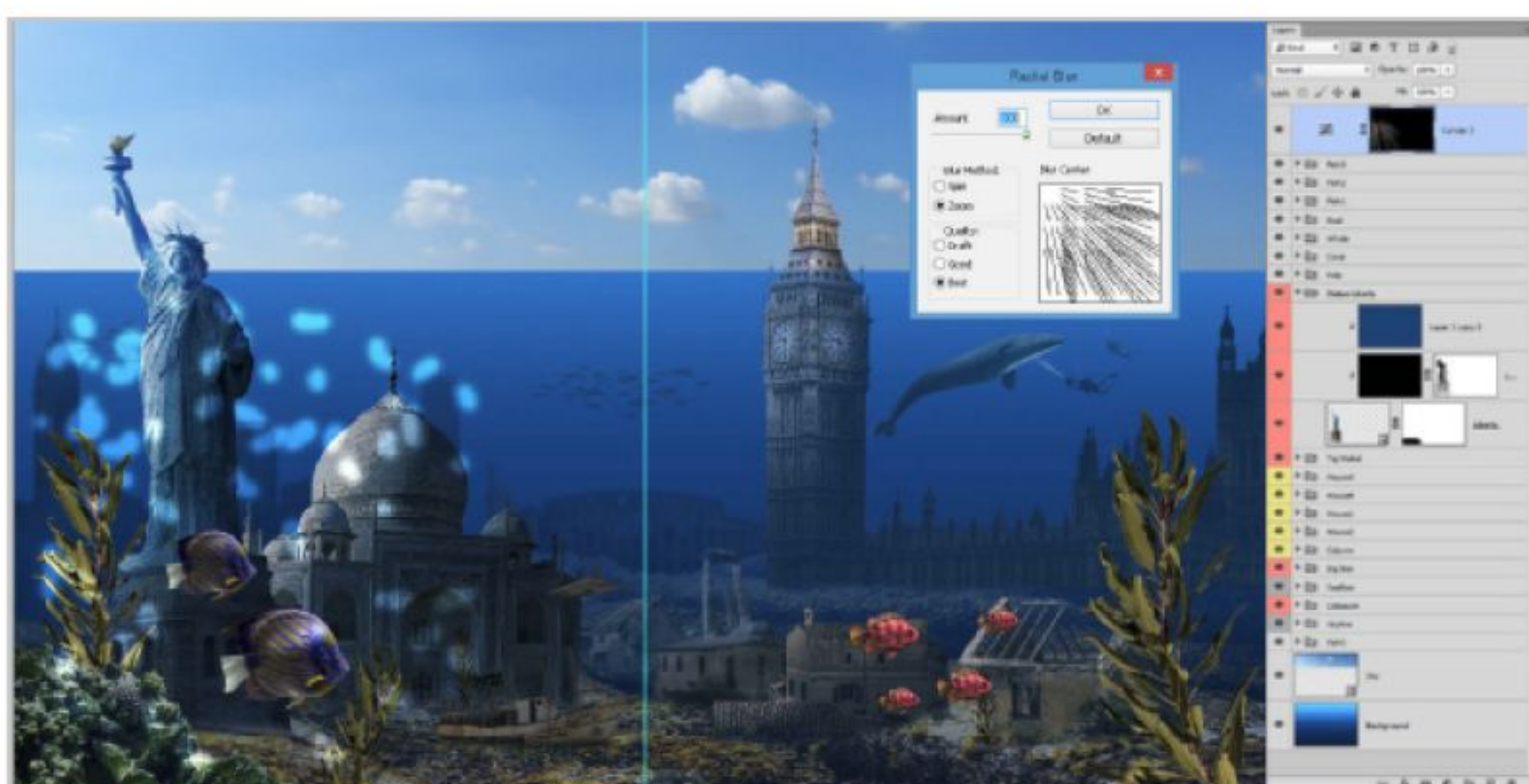
Add more images

12 Go to File>Place and add the sea creatures, divers and kelps. Duplicate and resize each image to create a pleasing composition. Add a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer to make the images darker or to lower the Saturation. Lower the layer Opacity for the whale and divers.



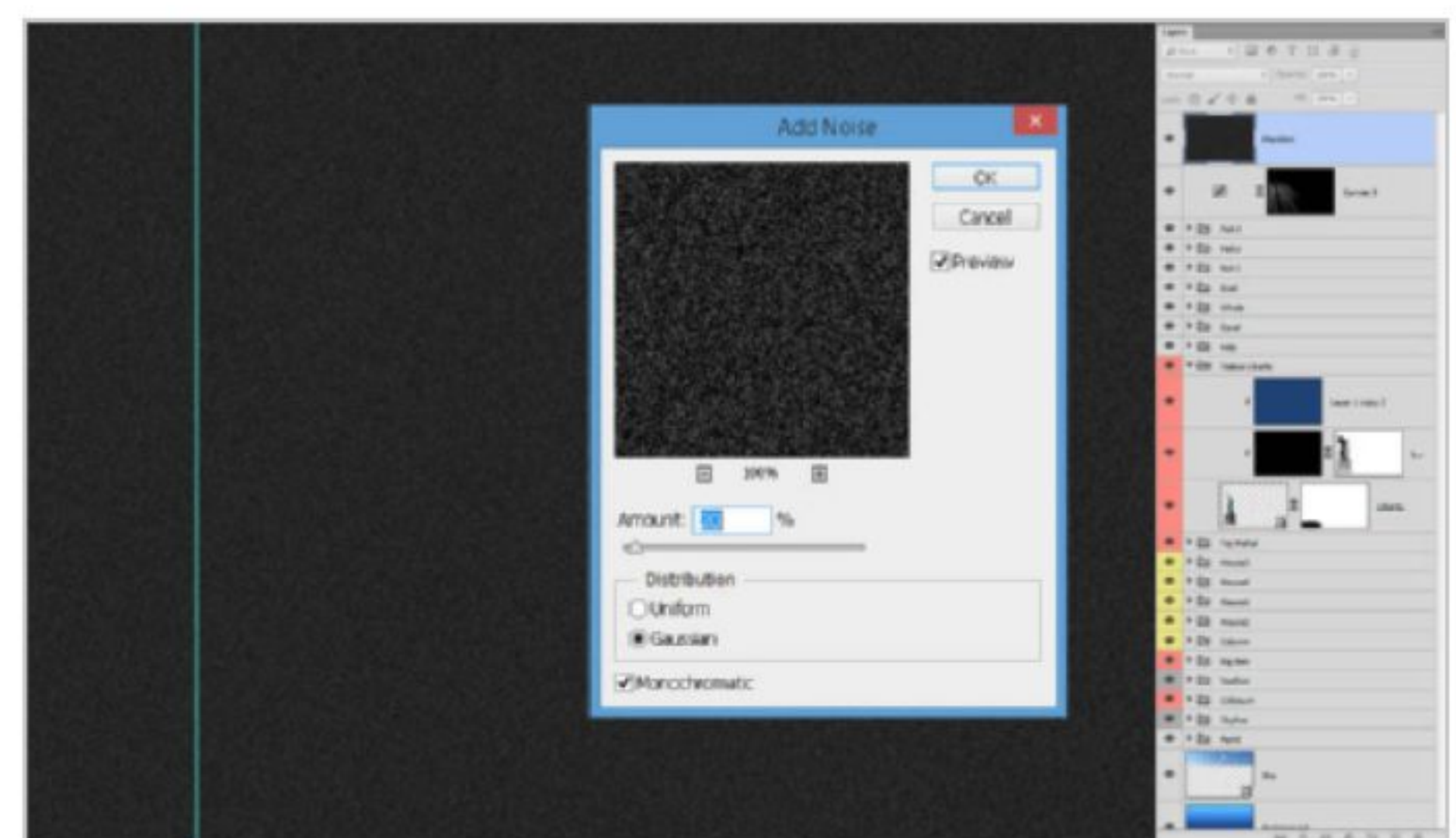
Create light rays

13 Add a Curves adjustment layer on top of the layer stack. Go to Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Curves. Drag the curve line up to increase the highlights. Press Cmd/Ctrl+I to invert the mask (Elements users: add the Levels Adjustment and set the Highlight input level to 20).



Add the Radial Blur filter

14 Grab the Brush (B), set the Foreground colour to White and paint random strokes over the mask. Head to Filter>Blur>Radial Blur. Set the Amount to 100, Blur Method to Zoom, and Quality to Best, then drag the Blur Center to the top left and hit OK. Press Cmd/Ctrl+F to re-apply the effect.

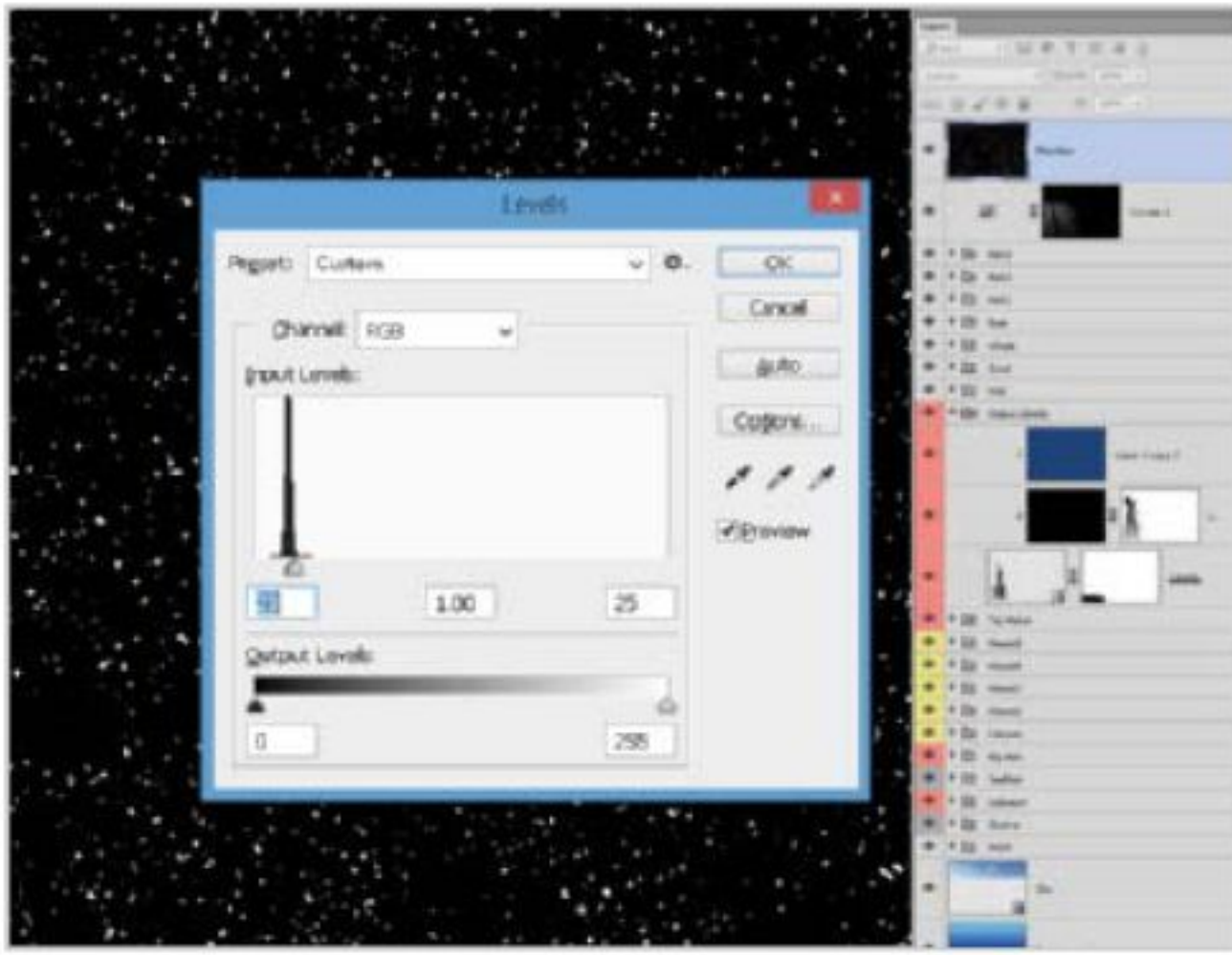


Create the plankton

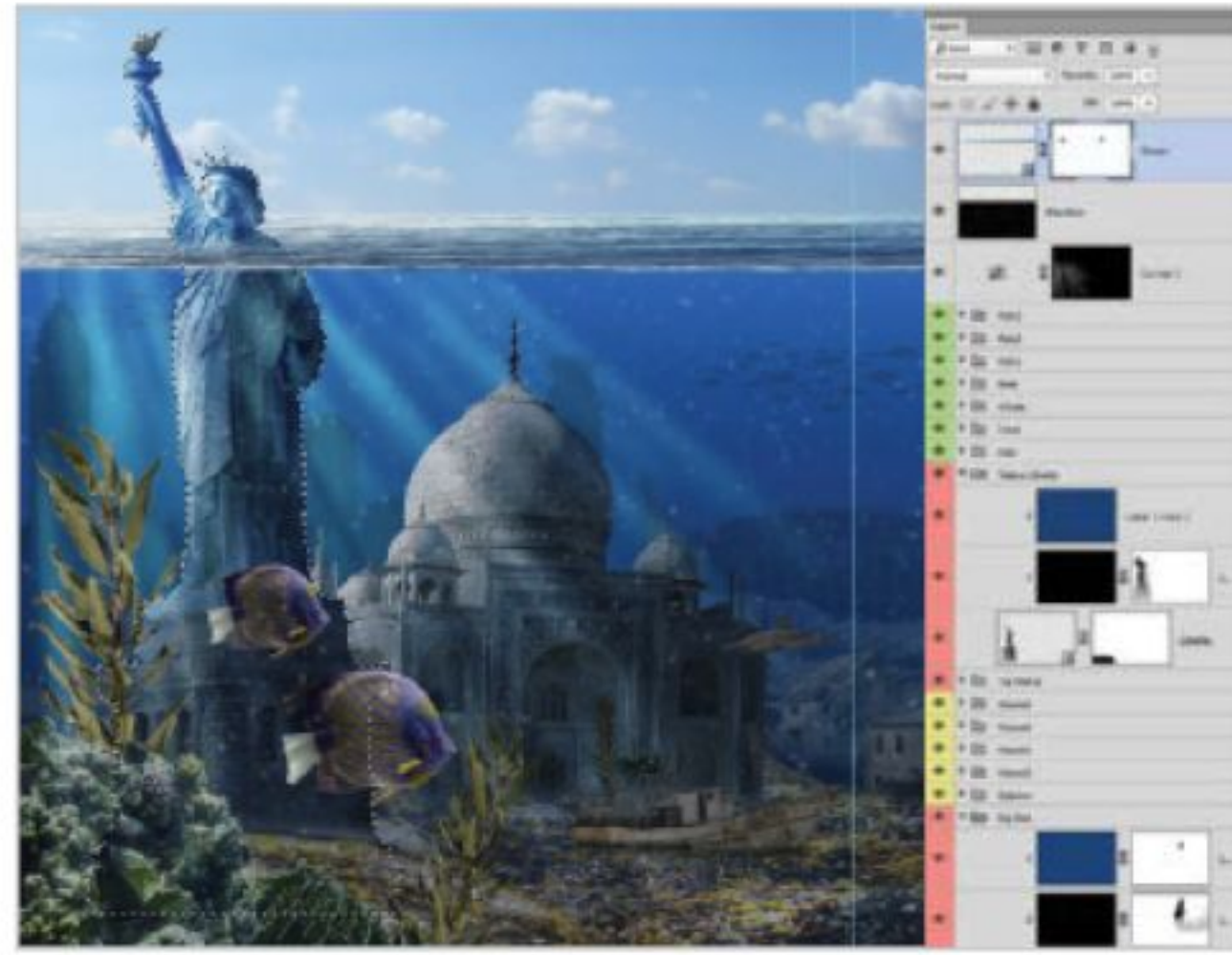
15 Add a new layer and name it Plankton. Fill with a black colour and go to Filter>Noise>Add Noise. Set the Amount to 20%, and Distribution to Gaussian, and check the Monochromatic box, then hit OK. Go to Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur, set the Radius to 5px and hit OK.



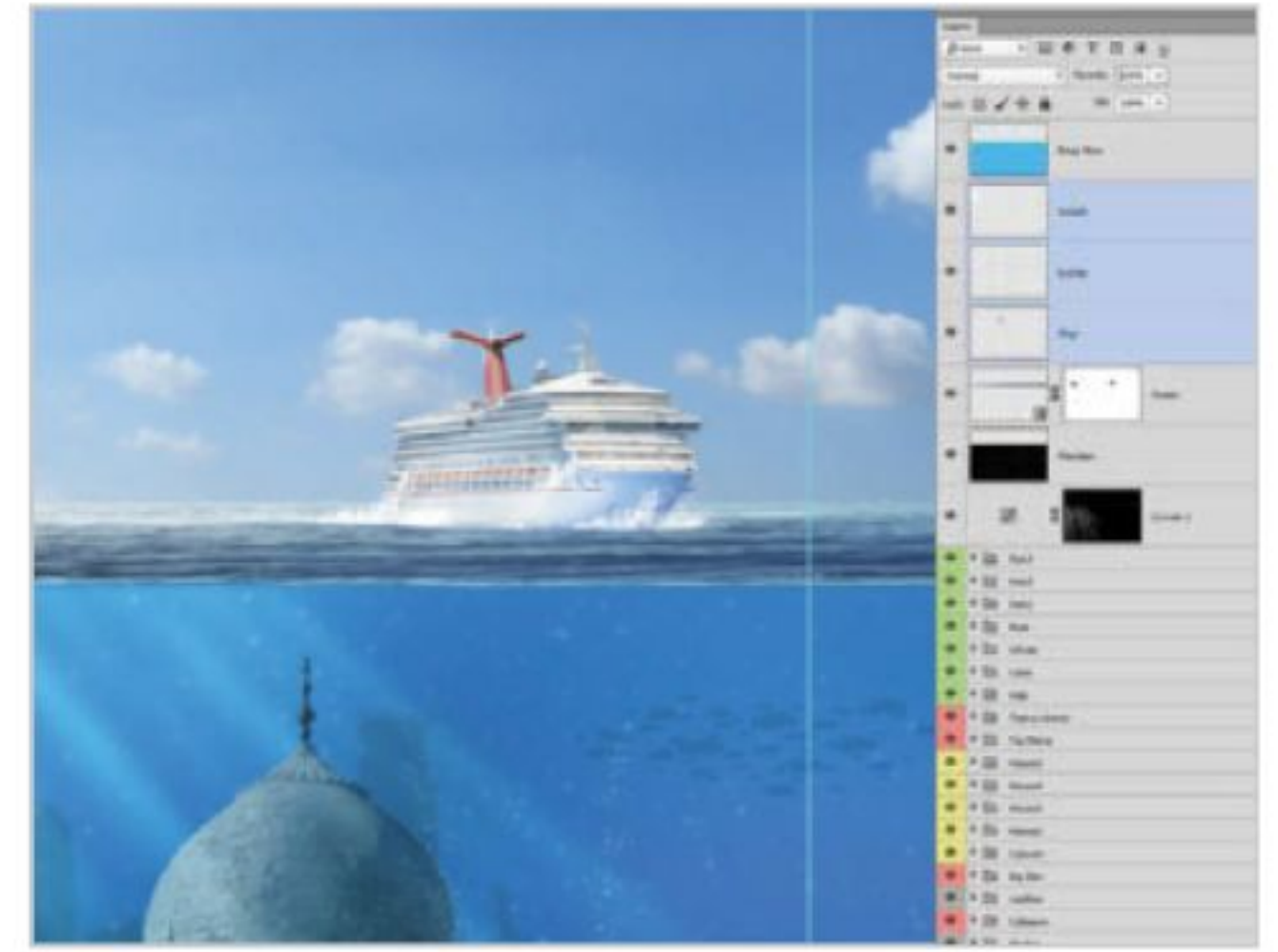
Genius Guide



16 Change the blend mode
Open the Levels (Cmd/Ctrl+L). Drag the input levels until you see the white dots, then hit OK. Now change the blend mode to Screen. Go to Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur, set the Amount to 5px and hit OK. Finally change the layer's Opacity to 50% and move it below the sky.



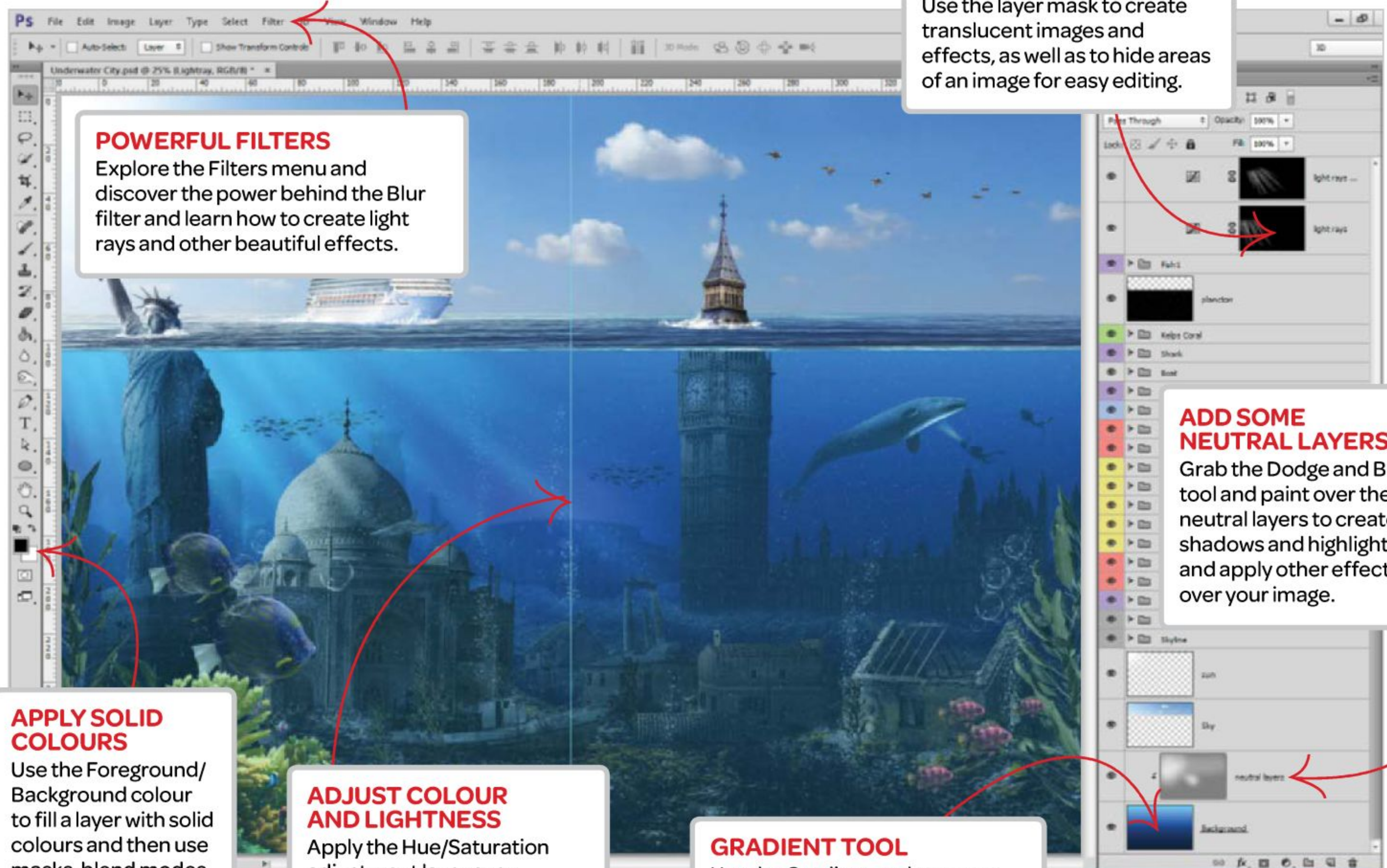
17 Mask it
Go to File>Place 'Ocean.png'. Drag the handles to scale the image. Now for a little trick: create a layer mask. Hold Cmd/Ctrl and click on the Statue of Liberty layer to select it. Grab a brush, and paint over the Ocean's layer mask in order to reveal the face and shoulders.



18 Load brushes
Place the 'ship.png'. Grab the Brush tool and hit F5. Open the top-right menu. From there, choose Load Brushes>Brushes124.abr, and click Load. Paint the bubbles and splashes. Create a new layer, fill with colour #147eec and set the Opacity to 25% to make the whole image bluish.

What you'll learn Indispensable techniques

Sharpen your skills with these essential tools



POWERFUL FILTERS
Explore the Filters menu and discover the power behind the Blur filter and learn how to create light rays and other beautiful effects.

EASY EDIT
Use the layer mask to create translucent images and effects, as well as to hide areas of an image for easy editing.

ADD SOME NEUTRAL LAYERS
Grab the Dodge and Burn tool and paint over the neutral layers to create shadows and highlights, and apply other effects over your image.

APPLY SOLID COLOURS
Use the Foreground/Background colour to fill a layer with solid colours and then use masks, blend modes and the Opacity slider to create interesting effects.

ADJUST COLOUR AND LIGHTNESS
Apply the Hue/Saturation adjustment layer over the image to control the saturation and lightness intensity, and change colours.

GRADIENT TOOL
Use the Gradient tool to create a background image and apply a gradual transition over a layer mask to create very cool effects.

