THREE
COLOR WORKFLOWS

An extract from the DIGITAL RETOUCHING FOR FASHION BEAUTY AND PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY by Gry Garness, here are three examples of color workflows using adjustment layers. The book is full of step-by-step tutorials. These workflows are examples where the different approaches and many smaller steps come together to give rich dynamic color. The possibilities and limitations of color adjustment is carefully considered, and the image quality should always be our top concern. These examples are pretty straightforward, with no special effects. They reflect how we work with 'normal' images – first a global correction, then a few local corrections – all on adjustment layers, so that the adjustments are totally editable, and available for blending modes and masking.

If you find it too subtle, remember that however gratifying it may be, big colour adjustments in Photoshop will always degrade an image, even when applying adjustment layers.

RESHAPING FEATURES

This sample tutorial demonstrates step-by-step how you can subtly reshape features using a Warp graft and a bit of clever shading, while maintaining top image quality for those hi-res print images. The tutorial also uses Smart Objects and Refine Edge; both are features which have emerged in the last two versions of Photoshop. You'll never use the Liquify again!
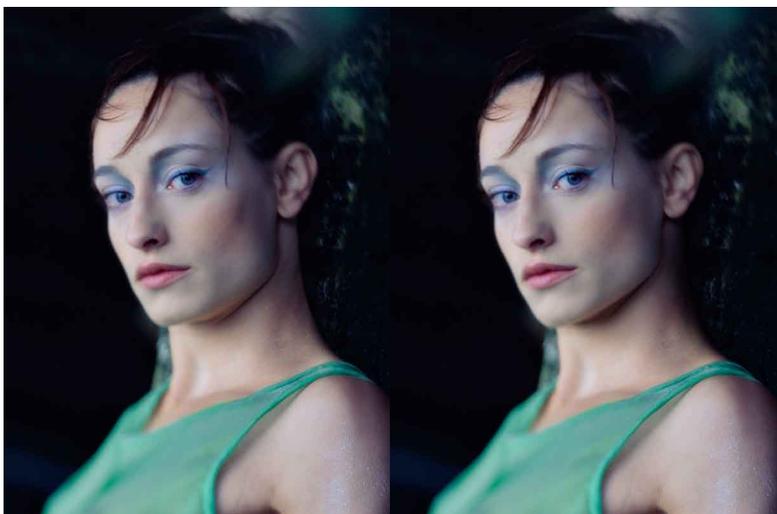
Image 1: The progression from dark and dull capture – to a warm glowing image.

This underexposed image may be rather gratifying to work on, but that may not be such a good thing. It's dark, dull, and rather too cold for its natural style. The global adjustments could have been done in the Raw converter, where they are much less destructive, but I want to give you an example where the difference really shows, so I'm taking it into Photoshop without making any Raw corrections. In Levels, the **Red Channel highlight** is remapped to **248**, and the **RGB highlight** to **203**. That means we **expand the tonal range with 52 levels.** The fine transitions in the midtones will suffer a bit, but that's the cost of 8-bit manipulation.

Putting the cursor in what I know to be neutral subject whites (while in the Curves dialog) I can read in the **Info Palette** that there is a **slightly lower Blue in the white wall –** in other words, we have a **Yellow cast**. To make the wall crisp and neutral, yet retain the warm skin tone, I lift the **Blue** in the **highlights** and take it slightly **down** in the **face shadow**. The **Info Palette** below shows the color numbers before/after. The **RGB Curve** lifts up quite flat in the highlights and midtones, which keeps the skin texture smooth. It then **steeps down towards the shadows**, giving the most contrast and texture in the midtone-to-shadow area.

In the last stages some further finessing is done. The image has had a subtle **darkening Curve** revealed through a **gradient mask** on the left hand side, to firm up the edge. See more about Gradient Masks on p.61. A general brightening **Curve** is applied through a **gradient mask** into the hair from top right, and also applied some more, through brushing the layer-mask with White in the hair area.

The **eyes** have a small amount of *Hue Saturation Lightness* applied in the whites, and some **Saturation** in the blue of the eye. The lips and cheek are given a subtle **Red Channel** Curves adjustment.

Finally a **Hue Saturation** with a strong positive **Lightness** adjustment is blended to **Soft Light,** and painted in **selectively** – mostly in the hair. At no point has the original pixel layer been retouched, but the adjustments have improved the image greatly.
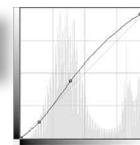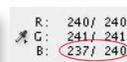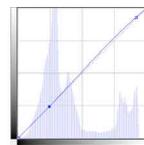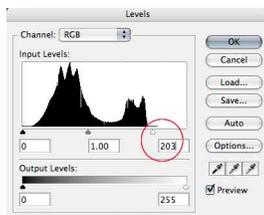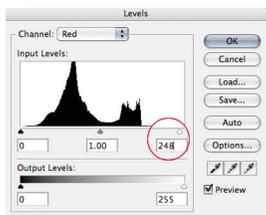
Image 2: From flat and murky original to a shimmering contrasty image with boosted color.


This is a fairly good capture, but it's in 8-bit, which is not ideal for major color changes. See a **slight breakup in the Histogram**, which would not have shown up in 16-bit. Although the image is fairly well-exposed, it's flat and uninteresting, and will need a boost in both tonal contrast and color contrast. There's an overall murky cast which is slightly hard to define. I need to clean up the colors and make the water more shimmery.
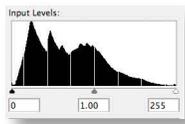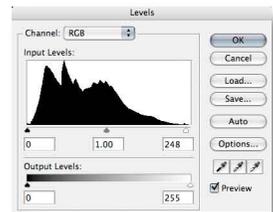

The Levels were remapped only in the highlights – to 248. This is an acceptable amount of remapping, yet still causes some Histogram breakup. If the image had been in 16-bit the breakup would not have been visible in the resulting Histogram.

The white clothes have two different casts – a **Red cast** on the left side, and a **Blue cast** on the right. The cast is lifted a bit overall through the **color Curves** (below), and the rest left for correction selectively. The first is a very subtle adjustment, knowing that the RGB S-curve will bring out the saturation and contrast in the next stage. Look at the shape of this slack **RGB S-curve** – how it lifts the highlights but hardly darkens the shadows at all.
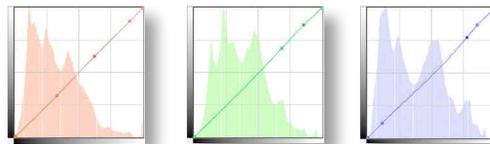
Above: The Curves individual color Channels
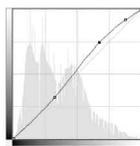
Left: The slack RGB S-Curve

So – to the **local adjustments**. In the left image the water is given a **selective Curves** adjustment that makes it bluer and brighter – more water-like. Flare is reduced in the left pillars through a local darkening and **Curve**, reducing the brightness of the flare slightly in that area.

Finally, in the far right image, the jacket and top are selectively desaturated in **Hue Saturation**, and a **contrast-enhancing Curve** is test-patched, filled and brushed into the background selectively through a layer-mask. This gives the image a bit more 'crunch'.

This image is taken beyond just color correction. I've taken liberties with the colors and the tonal relationships – heightening the contrast and boosting the atmosphere as much as possible, but it still looks fairly natural.

Excerpt from Digital Retouching for Fashion, Beauty & Portrait Photography ©*Gry Garness 2008*

Image 3: From washed-out scan to richer tones

Here's a good but slightly flat 16-bit scan where there is also some **leeway for correction**. This is ideal if you want freedom to play with the tonal relationships within the image, without clipping or losing too much quality. You won't see a massive difference in the first two stages of this high-key image, despite a **remapping of 8 levels in the highlights and 1 in the shadows**. The clouds are a bit brighter and the highlights appear somewhat crisper, but the image will need some Curves modification in the midtones to give it the contrast it needs.
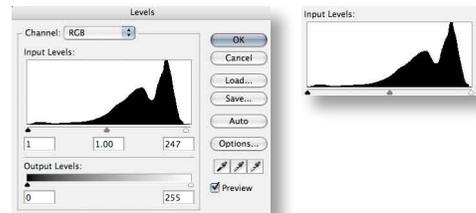
The Levels were remapped slightly in both the highlights and shadows. Note how it has no breakup in the resulting Histogram. This is because the image was scanned in 16-bit.

Here I apply a **composite RGB Curve** first, because the image needs beefing up a bit. I let the sky do all the work for me; by choosing a bright point in the sky to **lift up the Curve**, and then a darker cloud, to **take it down slightly**, the whole image is given the contrast and richness that it needs, and it's no longer looking bland or washed-out.

In the **color Curve, the Blues** (and Greens, to an extent) are **lifted** in the sky tones, and **lowered** in the shadows – which helps separate the pebbles into **warm/cold**. Notice how the image now looks sharper.
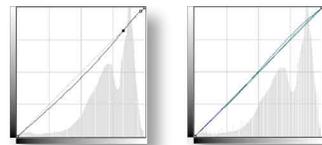
Above left: The composite RGB Curve, with (right) the composite view of the color Curve in the Blue and Green Channels. CS3 now lets you see this composite view, so you don't always have to look into the individual Channels to see what's done there.

The above left version has a simple **darkening Curve** revealed through a **Gradient mask** in the sky, to add a bit more drama. I mask it off with a Brush where it affects the model's head. I also mask off the corners where it's going too dark, and make sure it's applied fully in the middle of the sky, where it's needed most. All the sky masking is done with the **Gradient Tool** to ensure smooth falloffs.

A **Curve** is applied to the denim skirt, making it brighter and more blue. As the skirt covers quite a defined area, it can be masked in simply by selecting the skirt with the **Magic Wand, feathering 2px** and filling the mask with **White**.

A **Hue Saturation** adjustment to make the **warm stones more vibrant** is applied through a **gradient mask** at the front, adding a bit more interest where the image is blurry.

As a result of the corrections, the **warm colors are warmer, the cool blues are crisper**, and there's more richness in the sky and the pebbles. Although this was a logical way to go, I can easily think of 12 different interpretations for this image. Have a look at those other color alternatives on p.43.

RESHAPING features

Before even considering reshaping features, I suggest you ask yourself whether it's necessary and ethically correct. When retouching a commissioned portrait, the person to whom the features belong should be consulted before you reshape their nose or jaw. A model would usually be chosen for their existing features, but on occasion an unfortunate angle – or in this case, strain of the muscles make the jaw too square, and the neck muscles bulge. Here, the model's femininity is enhanced without changing the appearance of her face. These techniques can also be used for reshaping noses, for double-chins and for body parts.

In fact you can apply this method to any part of a persons body or face-shape, and that's why it's important to study the individual's characteristics before you start, so you don't distort these too much in the process. To take an example: I have worked several times with this model, and I never considered her jaw as being particularly prominent. Therefore she looks more like her good self *after* the retouching than she did before. As it was originally, the image couldn't be used, and had been shelved for several years. It was a 5x4 film capture, and I kicked myself for not shooting more variations of the shot. With this easy and subtle reshaping, the image regained its worth.

As well as using a Warp transformation, I've redistributed the lighting under the chin and at the back of the neck. Sometimes you don't have to transform at all; you might solve the problem just by shading alone. For an example of this, see also p.69.

Before reshaping

After reshaping

1. CREATE SELECTION AND LAYER VIA COPY
Make a **Pen Tool** or a **Lasso** selection around the chin and jaw area – big enough to give some fall-off when joining it in afterwards. Press **Command+Enter** and then **Command+J** to make a Layer via Copy.

2. CONVERT TO SMART OBJECT AND LOWER OPACITY
In the Layers Palette flyout menu, choose **Convert to Smart Object**. This lets you make several transforms without degrading the image. **Turn the opacity of the Smart Object layer to 70%**. Be sure to do it in this order, or you will be stuck with 70% opacity when you later want it back to 100%.

3. FREE TRANSFORM THE SMART OBJECT
Press **Command+T** to *Free Transform* and then press the **Warp button** in the Options bar. You can **pull the handles and the bars**, giving the jaw-line a less angular shape. The 70% opacity lets you see through to the original. In this example I also transformed the neck slightly inwards. Try to not overdo it. You can easily go back and transform some more on the Smart Object. If you're dealing with a double, chin, stretch the neck up to overlap the chin slightly.

4. RASTERIZE THE SMART OBJECT
When you're happy with the transformation, turn the **opacity back up to 100%** and go to **Layer>Smart Objects>Rasterize**, thereby making it a normal layer again. By doing this we lose the ability to continue transforming lossless, but we regain the ability to retouch on the layer.

5. MASK OFF AND THEN SELECTIVELY REVEAL
Go to **Layer>Layer Mask>Hide All** and pick a big soft **Brush Tool**, with a **White** color at **100% opacity and flow**. **Reveal** the new transformed jaw and neck, **making sure the joins are perfect** and the gradient of the skin is smooth.
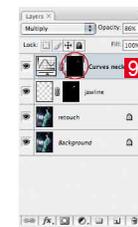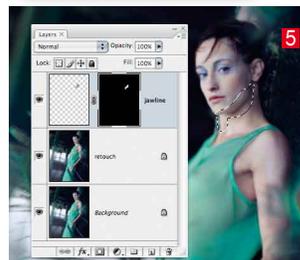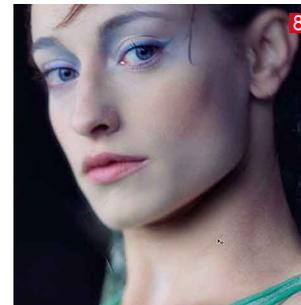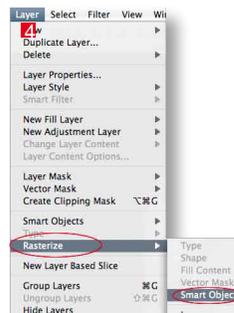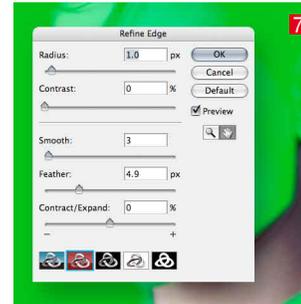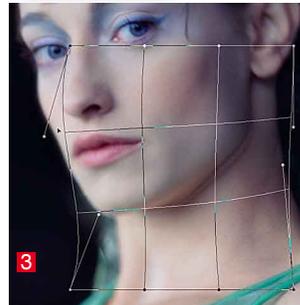
6. SHADING AN IDEAL JAW LINE
For the shading we need to make a **selection of the ideal jaw-line** with the **Pen Tool** or **Lasso Tool**. The Pen is always best at this, because you can make a perfectly smooth line in a very swift operation. Sometime the jaw-line is weak and almost impossible to determine. In this case it's quite strong, but with a highlight underneath that makes it look as if the model has a slight double-chin – which she certainly hasn't got in reality.

7. REFINE THE SELECTION
The softening of the selection depends on the above-mentioned strength of the existing jaw-line, Go to **Select>Refine Edge** to soften it in the **Quickmask** view, and try to match the strength of the existing jaw line, but making it perhaps a touch stronger. You can soften it later if necessary. If you're using non-current Photoshop versions you may use **Quickmask.**

8. MAKE A MULTIPLY CURVES LAYER
With the selection active, make a **Curves** adjustment layer and just press **OK** without doing anything. Blend this layer to darken the selection by scrolling from Normal to **Multiply** in the **Layers Palette**. You will now have a dark neck, which needs some masking.

9. MASKING THE DARKENING LAYER
Use a **very big soft Black Brush Tool at 100% opacity and flow**. Start from **below** and **brush away the edges**. You may reduce the opacity once you've got rid of the hard edges, but the beauty of a soft big brush is that it gives a low opacity at the edges. A shadow under the chin always helps define the jaw-line.

On review I found that the back of the neck needed some deeper shadow, so I used a white brush in the mask to apply the darkening effect here. This had the effect of seemingly narrowing the neck – a good example of how we can reshape without actually transforming.

Excerpt from Digital Retouching for Fashion, Beauty & Portrait Photography ©*Gry Garness 2008*

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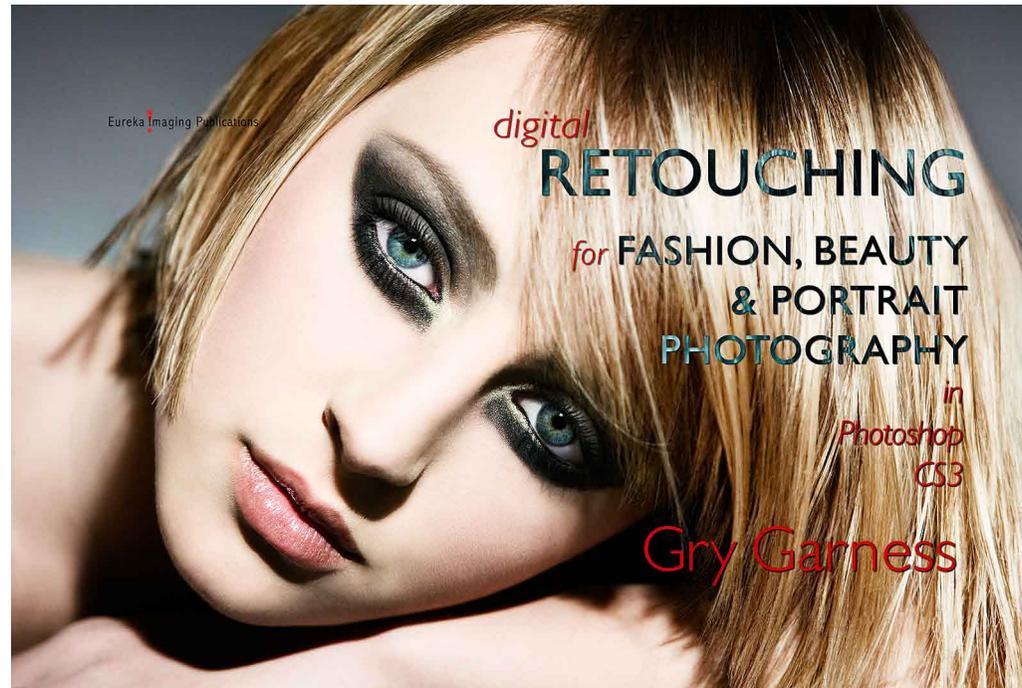
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