



## extract: DODGING & BURNING CONCEPTS

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**DIGITAL RETOUCHING FOR FASHION, BEAUTY AND PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY  
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**GRY GARNESS**

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DODGING and  
BURNING concepts



## WHEN TO USE IT

This image has been retouched using only the dodging and burning techniques described in the tutorial. Removing freckles and birthmarks is not something I'd normally recommend it in a character portrait – but I wanted to show the full-on treatment on a natural face, in order to make my points about the workings of D&B. It's a great way to work when you have enough time, and with sensitivity and skill the result can be amazing. Without skill, time and patience the results can be appalling! It's very time consuming and isn't really something I employ much on press shots if I have 30 minutes per image. However, you'd be surprised at how quickly the image changes. Often I've heard a gasp of surprise from a client when I've turned off the layer eyeball after 5 minutes work. The progress is so subtle that to them it looks as if I've been doing virtually nothing, but when the difference is revealed it turns out there has been quite an impact. This is also the reason why it can easily go wrong, and why so many botched jobs have been the result of this technique. I tend to combine it with other steps in the workflow, where I need to refine with some extra control.

## THE IMPACT OF DODGE AND BURN

The term Dodging & Burning comes from **photographic printing**, where **dodging means selective lightening**, and **burning means darkening a local area of a print**. In Photoshop it means pretty much the same thing, but we can also add another dimension – **color**. We can influence the color at the same time as we lighten or darken. The good thing about retouching like this is that you're not actually moving pixels around, you're just modifying the pixels that are there in the first place. This seems to lead many to think that it's less destructive than cloning or healing, but that's not necessarily so. Judging from the amount of botched attempts, and over-retouched images I've seen, caused by over-enthusiastic D&B, it's fully possible to lose all

skin texture and even change the shape of the face. It's important to be aware of the limitations of this technique. It doesn't come with a built-in guarantee against over-retouching. If you don't know when to stop, **D&B can have pretty much the same effect as blurring**. Stop for a moment and think – what blurring actually does is average out the pixels, making them similar to each other. D&B aims at brightening the too-dark pixels and darkening the too-bright ones – in other words making them more similar. If you become too blinkered you'll find yourself taking hours to achieve what a simple blurring could do. I suppose the art is to know when to stop.

## TECHNICAL ASPECTS AND TECHNIQUES

You have to consider how much D&B the specific image can take. Typically you can see a **strange flat color** emerging when you brighten it too much in the shadows. Under the eye on this image there is definitely a borderline area. Often you'll see this with an underexposed image that's been pushed in the processing, and this will limit how much further you can lighten it. When you then try to lighten it, there is simply **no variation in detail**, so you end up with a really **flat area**, lacking in local contrast and pixel variety.

You can use both **airbrush** and non-airbrush for dodging and burning. It really depends on your technique and the task at hand. For small blemishes and small brushes you may not want to use an airbrush, but for bigger softer brushes and shading it makes sense to use it.

## WORK BIG OR SMALL

There are two main ways to work with D&B. One is to **work on a pixel level**, zooming right in, using a very small brush. The other is to use it as **shading**, and correcting areas of undesirable exposure – darkening some areas and lifting others. On [p.92](#) I use it to shape

and shade a face. In this tutorial we are using small brushes on a type of skin that has a lot of variation. Although I've exclusively used D&B for the whole image, this was for your benefit only. I'd never work this way. I tend to use the **Clone** and **Heal tools first**, zapping anything obvious, while preserving and improving the texture. I then use a **variation of the methods** described on the next page. I have to admit that I often merge them down into the **Retouch** layer, simply to avoid **layer conflict**. Other times I leave them editable. It all depends on the amount of time I have, and how confident I feel.

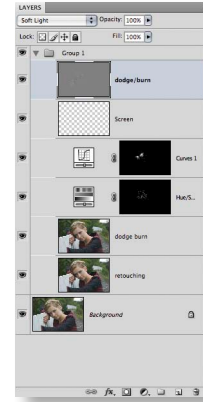
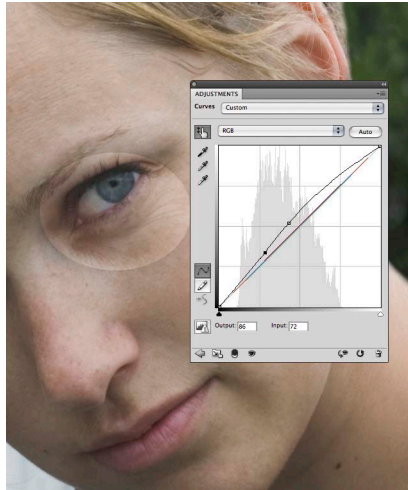
## THE LOCAL DODGE & BURN TOOLS

If you're going to use these tools, always work on a **duplicate layer**, avoid working on big areas, and use **low exposure** with **small brushes**. As you're working, turn the eyeball of the duplicate layer on and off at regular intervals. The changes may seem subtle but the effect when it all adds up can be dramatic. By setting the **History Source** at the state where you start dodging/burning, you can locally revert with the **History Brush** if it all goes pear shaped, brushing at a lower opacity, to reduce **some of the effect, but not all**. One rather unique thing about the D&B tools is the ability to target highlights, midtones or shadows, so you can afford to be a bit more sloppy in your handiwork than with the other methods, and are therefore suited to less skilled users. The tools also have a hidden function – you can temporarily hold down the **Alt-key** to switch between the two, so that if you're using the **Burn tool** and you need to do a quick **Dodge** you can give it a few strokes without actually switching tools. This is called **spring-loading** – something there's much more of in CS4.

*The background on this page is zoomed-in skin, slightly sharpened for your benefit, so you can really appreciate that skin is just a mosaic of pixels with a regular/irregular pattern.*

## USING CURVES

I tend to selectively lighten and darken with a **Curves adjustment layer** on virtually every image. It isn't strictly D&B but it can have exactly that function. With Curves you can control all the aspects of color, brightness and contrast. It's ideal for larger surfaces, but also for the smaller irregularities in skin – particularly good for toning down dark blemishes, eye bags and unwanted shadows. I always make a **test patch** first, applying the adjustment to the test patch in order to see how it affects the area that I want to adjust – as well as the area surrounding it. Sometimes, quite surprisingly the areas surrounding the patch and was going to adjust can also benefit from the adjustment. See also [p.81-84](#).



## USING A SCREEN LAYER FOR DODGING

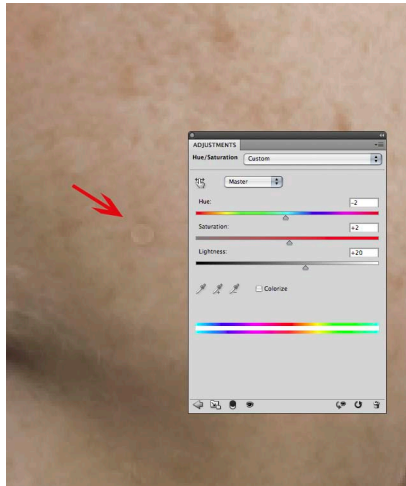
I generally find myself dodging much more often than burning, and this is definitely one of my favorite ways to dodge. By simply making a **blank layer**, and blending it to **Screen mode**, you can **sample the color of the skin nearby** and use this color to dodge with. Just find the right brush opacity, and it's really intuitive. If you have a pink blemish (or area) and you want to **drive it more towards yellow as you lighten it**, you simply sample a more yellow area of skin and brush over the pink. For this we work with very low opacities.

## SOFT LIGHT LAYER FOR DODGING/BURNING

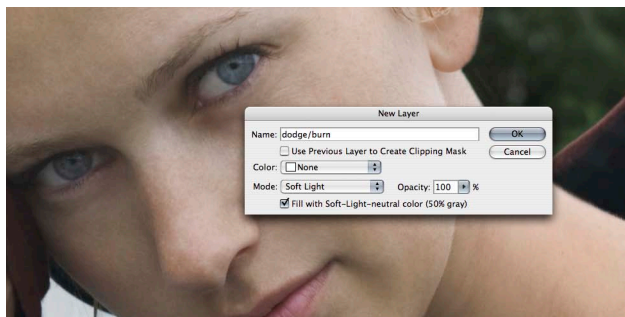
This is another way of separating the dodging/burning from the image layers, and is done with a **'neutral layer'** which can be lightened and darkened. I use this kind of layer for detailed skin work, but also for shading, as on [p.92](#). Go to **Layer>New>Layer**. In the dialog you set the following: Scroll from **Normal** to **Soft Light**. Then **tick the box** at the bottom of the dialog **Fill with soft-light-neutral color 50% gray**. For dodging I use a **white** brush at a low opacity. For burning I often make a slightly **warm dark color** to avoid greyness in the skin. A layer like this should sit on **top of the layer stack** to not interfere with any underlying cloning or healing. You also need to be aware of its impact if you continue to work on underlying layers.

## HUE SATURATION

I find that the following method tends to matte down the skin, and if that's the result you desire – fine. It's perfect for this image, where the skin is quite dry. Draw a **tight selection** around a dark spot and make **Hue Saturation adjustment layer**. Drag up the **Lightness** slider to match the area surrounding it, perhaps even a bit brighter. Add a couple of points of **Saturation** to compensate for the greying that may occur, and adjust **Hue** if you feel it needs it. **Edit>Fill** the layer-mask with **black**. Pick a small soft brush tool, and use 30% opacity, white. **Zoom** in so you don't strain your eyes. Aim to get a **regular pattern**, swiftly dabbing over the darkest patches, trying to avoid the rest of the skin.



*Some retouchers like to work in Quickmask with a black brush, then invert the mask, go to selection mode, and apply the adjustment. That does not work for me. I like to work visually, seeing the effect of what I'm doing straight away, without any guesswork. Having worked for years with film photography, I used to have to view my work upside down, back to front and mirrored, see my results as a negative with an orange overlay. You bet I appreciate an immediate result these days!*



## DRIVING A COLOR WITH HUE

For red ears, noses, and other extremities, we can use a quick trick which is not strictly dodging or burning, but I'll include it here anyway. On a pixel layer, grab a **soft edged Brush tool** and set it to **30/30 opacity/flow**. Scroll the mode to **Hue** in the options bar. For pink'ish skin, **sample a more yellow skin color**, by **Alt-clicking**, and then **brush over the pink zones**. This drives the pink color towards a more golden hue, making the skin color also more uniform. Here I used it on the nose, the ear, and below the eyes.

SCREEN  
LAYER in fore-  
head

CURVES on  
eyes & some  
of the skin

NEUTRAL  
LAYER on  
hand & detail

HUE  
SATURATION  
on skin marks

DODGE &  
BURN tools  
on chin

HUE BRUSH  
on nose, ear  
& below eyes