Selective Enhancement and other Tips

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Though these were written using CS3 – most of the techniques however will work with earlier versions and Elements

Whenever possible use adjustment layers and layer masks – as these give the opportunity to adjust modifications at a later stage.
It is possible to 'feather' layer masks by applying *Gausian Blur* to the mask.- The level of feather can be increased at a later time but can only be decreased by a small amount.

On the layer mask icon in the layers palette –
ALTclick brings up a full size' version of the mask which can be edited by painting on with black or white. – clicking another layer returns you to the main image.
CTRLclick brings up the marching ants to show your selection

Copying layer masks between layers or adjustment layers can be done in a number of ways –
Use CTRLclick on the mask to bring up the marching ants (select inverse if required) and -then apply an adjustment layer to the selection
or CTRL J to make a new layer to show the adjustments
To apply the layer mask to an already existing adjustment layer the easiest method is to CRTLclick the wanted mask, then ALTclick the 'new' adjustment layer, then EDIT- FILL the selection with BLACK (You may have to invert the new layer mask)

Enhancing the Main Subject
Carefully select the main subject –
Modify the selection so it is a few pixels inside the outline of the main subject then apply sharpening – this technique prevents fringing allowing higher level sharpening to be applied.
Invert the selection, then slightly darken and/or slightly desaturate the background - Using *Hue and Saturation* (this allows the brightness and saturation levels to be controlled in one process) or *Curves* or *Levels* to get the desired effect.
Make the background appear slightly out of focus by using either *Guassian Blur* or *Lens Blur* – but be careful as colours can bleed into and out of the main subject.

Enhancing Detail
Copy the layer – de-saturate – change blending mode to MULTIPLY.
Go to *Levels* and move the right hand slider until the desired effect is achieved
To apply multiple versions of this to an image – make selections then new layers from the selections (CTRL J), then change blend to MULTIPLY then apply the levels adjustment.
Another similar technique involves copying the layer then applying the MULTIPLY blend. This considerably darkens the image which can be controlled by adjusting the opacity. Application of a layer mask plus the use of opacity can be used to selectively increase detail on parts of the image.

Taking this idea a stage further - use BLACK AND WHITE or HUE AND SATURATION adjustment layers to create a high quality monochrome image (see notes on monochrome conversions on page 4). Then make a copy layer of the original image, turn off the original base layer and combine your copy layer with the adjustment layer to create a monochrome layer, turn on the original base layer and apply MULTIPLY blend to the monochrome layer. The opacity of the monochrome layer can be varied as required and if some colours need to have the saturation increased a HUE AND SATURATION adjustment layer(s) can be applied to the base layer.

Cloning Out Small Details

Copy the layer and then switch the layer OFF.

Return to the base layer and clone out any unwanted parts using a large soft edged stamp.

Go back to the upper layer, create a layer mask and paint out the unwanted details using a small hard edged brush to get a sharp edge and a larger soft edged brush to merge textures in.

Finally combine the two layers

Merging in an Effect using masking

The obvious way to try to merge in an effect is by feathering this can be applied to a mask by applying Gaussian Blur to the mask However if you are applying the mask by painting on the layer mask - paint in/out the bulk of the area at 100% opacity using a hard brush, then change to a soft brush at a lower opacity to paint the edge to create a 'feather'. If this not does not achieve the desired effect, reverse the brush colour and using a low opacity - instead if painting out the mask start to paint the edges back in.

Sharpening

It is not always necessary to sharpen the whole image especially as the latest DSLRs already produce high quality images similar to that achieved from 35mm film without having to apply additional sharpening.

Unsharp Mask is probably the most used process and can be used on the whole image or a selection of the image There are 3 controls - *amount* sets the level of sharpening, *radius* sets the width of sharpening along edges; the wider the greater the chance of fringing, *threshold* selects the tonal difference a low figure affects all edges a high figure only those with significant tonal difference. Selecting too low a threshold figure can make noise appear particularly in skin tones.

Use of *Unsharp Mask* over the whole of an image with amounts of about 100%, 0.8 radius and 32 threshhold however can be very effective at enhancing detail in large areas of grass and leaves.

A variation on using unsharp mask that lends itself to selective sharpening is to copy the layer or a selection from the layer and apply unsharp mask to the copy and change the blending mode to LUMINOSITY. The level of sharpening can then be adjusted by changing the opacity of the layer and the area adjusted by painting on a layer mask.

Using the High Pass Filter

This is found under FILTERS>OTHER.

To Sharpen –Copy the layer then apply the *High Pass* radius 2-6 pixels, change blend to *Overlay* or *Soft Light*.

To Soften - Copy the layer then apply the High Pass radius 6-15 pixels, then IMAGE> ADJUSTMENTS>INVERT, change blend to *Overlay* or *Soft Light*

Selective sharpening/softening of the image can be achieved by applying a layer mask to the HIGH PASS layer, or by making selections and creating new layers for the *High Pass* filter (CTRL J)

Altering the contrast of the grey *High Pass* layer will alter the degree of sharpening/softening achieved. The sharpening/softening effect can be increased by stacking a number of *High Pass* layers

Fringing and the appearance of over-sharp edges

Over-sharpening of images usually becomes obvious by the presence of fringing or edges of elements that appear very sharp when reality they would not be ie birds. If you use selective sharpening or a form of sharpening in which a layer mask can be applied, this can easily be avoided by sharpening the inside of the element and leaving the outer edge unsharpened - make your selection or mask to about a millimetre inside the edge.

Pseudo HDR

For this you need two versions of the image one light one dark. Stack the versions with the dark image on top. Copy the lighter version so it is in the middle of the stack.
De-saturate the light copy later then -SELECT ALL- then EDIT>COPY.
Go to the top dark layer add a layer mask. ALTclick the layer mask then EDIT>PASTE.
Switch off the middle layer and click on the base layer – the altered image should appear.
This technique can be inverted so the dark layer is on the base in which case the desaturated layer needs to inverted.

High Key type effects

Using a suitable relatively low contrast image make a new layer fill with white then change blend to *Soft Light* The effect can be increased by copying the white layer, or by using Levels or *Hue/Saturation* adjustment layers. Localising of tone can be achieved by the use of layer masks.

Soft Focus Light Images (Irene Froy style)

This is similar to the above method except that a copy layer of the original image is inserted between the original and white layers and a *Multiply* blend applied.

To make more dramatic skies

On the top make a new layer and fill with white. Apply a black-white gradient on to this layer so the sky is covered in black, then apply *Multiply* blend and use *Opacity* to control the effect. Adjust along the horizon with a layer mask.

White Balance the best time to adjust the white balance of an image is at the in camera stage or in the conversion from a RAW image. It can be altered by using a Photo Filter adjustment layer and then adjusting the strength of the filter and the opacity of the adjustment layer. This also enables white balance corrections to be applied to selected areas of an image.

Monochrome conversions

To make effective monochrome conversions you need to pre-visualise what you are trying to achieve by deciding if a colour is going to be rendered as a dark or light tone.

In CS3 use adjustment layers and the *Black and White* filter – this allows you to adjust the tone that individual colours will convert to in monochrome. It is possible to apply several corrections in the same layer. Sometimes however a global adjustment will not always give a suitable result over all the image – (a good example is if blue and cyan are adjusted to create more contrast in the sky any shadows areas containing a cyan component will also be darkened which is undesirable.) A mask can be applied to the *Black and White* adjustment layer to leave a monochrome sky with the rest of the image still coloured. If a further a Black and White adjustment layer is now applied with a different adjustment it will not affect the area that has already been converted to monochrome.
Using a series of *Black and White* adjustment layers and masking it then comes possible to exercise very great tonal control over the image.

If you do not have the black and white filter HUE AND SATURATION can be used. Make aHUE AND SATURATION adjustment layer, and desaturate the image. Then choosing the individual colours from the drop down box adjust the lightness control to give the desired tonal effect. If you create different tones for a colour in different parts of the image paint a mask to that part to bring back the original colour. Then apply a further HUE AND SATURATION layer in a similar manner- it will not affect the area that is already monochrome.

If you are converting from RAW using ACR - a similar type of process can be achieved using Smart Objects and layer masking. Open the image in Camera Raw and make the first tonal conversion required then SHIFT Open to open it as a Smart Object; apply an appropriate layer mask to this layer. Then FILE>PLACE to reselect and then reopen the RAW file, apply adjustments to this file and then click OK and then the TICK on the top tool bar, apply appropriate masking to the new layer. Double clicking the layer icon will reopen ACR allowing further editing of the tones.

A similar type of process can be achieved from other RAW to monochrome converters in which multiple adjusted images are imported and stacked and then treated with layer masks or the use of the eraser tool to create the final image – though this process is very memory hungry.

To get the best out of any of these techniques experiment with them and please let me know if you find any effective variations on them.

<u>Some other useful tips</u>

[and] alter the size of brushes, and cloning stamps etc.
SHIFT [and SHIFT] alters the softness of their edges
When using CURVES or LEVELS as an adjustment layer, changing the blending mode to LUMINOSITY will prevent changes in the colour saturation.
When using the HIGH PASS filter for selective sharpening/softening changing the blending mode to NORMAL can make editing easier.
To combine all your layers into one new layer on top of the stack SHIFT+CTRL+ALT +E.
To disable/enable a layer mask SHIFT click.

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