

Photoshop CS3 for Photographers

Creative Contrast

BY SEÁN DUGGAN

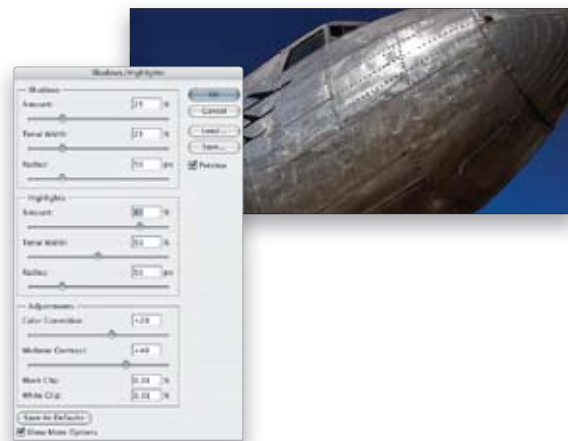


Contrast is a key element in any photograph. If there's too much of it when you're taking the photo, then you're faced with extremely challenging lighting conditions and you run the risk of either clipped highlights or blocked-up shadows (or both!).

Not enough contrast and the image can look dull and flat. In this tutorial, we'll take a look at some interesting techniques for improving contrast using the Shadow/Highlight command, empty adjustment layers, blend modes, and the Blend If sliders in the Layer Style dialog. These techniques work particularly well for subjects made of reflective polished metal. We'll finish by taking a look at a classic technique for using the High Pass filter to boost contrast along the midtone contours of an image.

[If you'd like to download the project files used here to follow along with this tutorial, visit <http://layersmagazine.com/downloads.html>. All files are for personal use only.]

Control Highlights



STEP 1 Convert to Smart Object

The photo of the old DC-3 was taken in full afternoon sunlight and the bright, reflective aluminum of the fuselage is pretty washed out. The biggest problem, however, is the hot spot reflection on the side of the plane. We'll explore a couple of techniques to fix this, as well as give the old bird

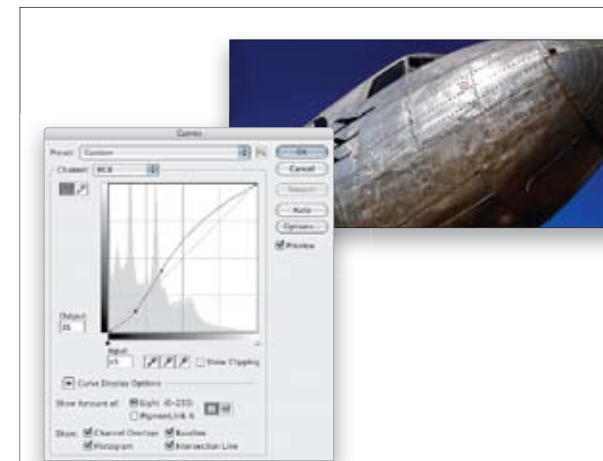
a good polish and buff job. To apply our changes nondestructively, we'll take advantage of Smart Filters. Control-click (PC: Right-click) on the Background layer in the Layers panel and choose Convert to Smart Object. You can also choose Filter>Convert for Smart Filters.

STEP 2 Tame the Highlights with Shadow/Highlight

Now choose Image>Adjustments>Shadow/Highlight. This feature uses the image's own tonal "map" to create a virtual mask through which it applies the corrections. Because we're not really concerned with the shadows in this shot, set the Shadows Amount and Tonal Width to 25% and the Radius to 50 pixels

(check the Show More Options box). In the Highlights section, set the Amount to 80%, the Tonal Width to 50%, and the Radius to 50 pixels. This does a pretty good job at taming the bright highlight on the fuselage. To boost the contrast a bit, set the Midtone Contrast to +40. Click OK.

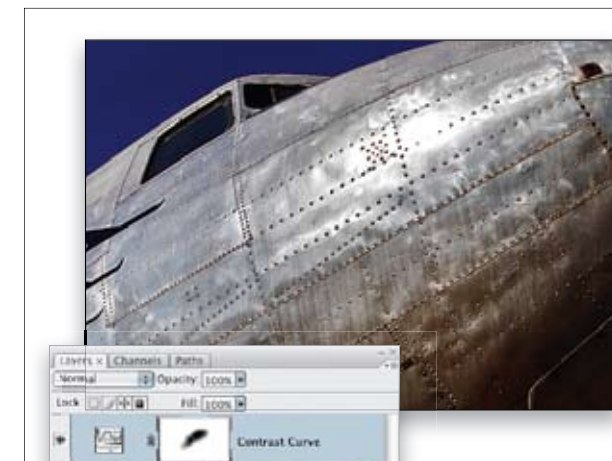
ALL IMAGES SEÁN DUGGAN



STEP 3 Polish with a Contrast Curve

Things are looking much better after the Shadow/Highlight adjustment. The highlight is not so out of control and the aluminum surface is even starting to look a bit polished. Now we'll polish further with a simple contrast curve. Click the Create a New Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the

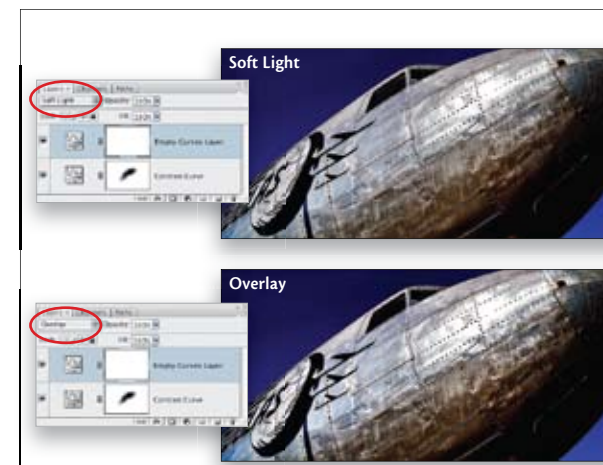
Layers panel and choose Curves. In the Curves dialog, add a curve like the one shown here. For the upper point, the Input value is 90 and the Output is 105. For the lower point, the Input value is 45 and the Output is 35. Click OK.



STEP 4 Modify the Layer Mask

After the contrast curve, the metal is taking on a nice shine. The problem, however, is that now the highlight is too bright once again. We can fix that with a few brush strokes on the layer mask for the Curves layer. Choose the Brush tool (B) from the Toolbox. Press D then X to make black the Foreground

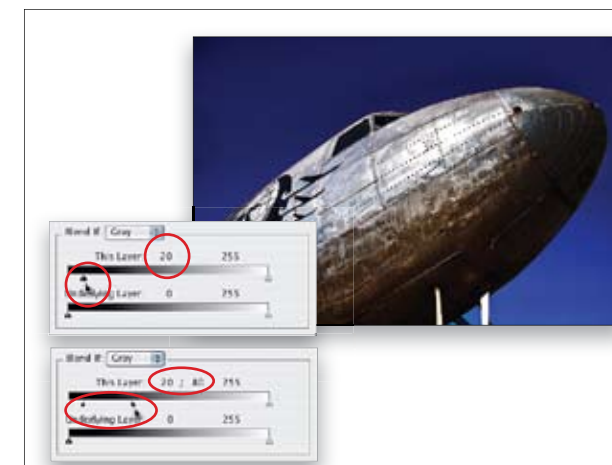
color. Choose a 125-pixel soft-edged brush tip and set the brush Opacity to 30% in the Options Bar. Brush over the highlights a few times to lessen the brightness.



STEP 5 Add an "Empty" Adjustment Layer

Now it's time to apply the final coat of polish and make this old plane look like new. Add a Curves adjustment layer and in the Curves dialog, click OK without making any changes. I refer to this as an "empty" adjustment layer. At the top of the Layers panel, set the blend mode to Soft Light. You might

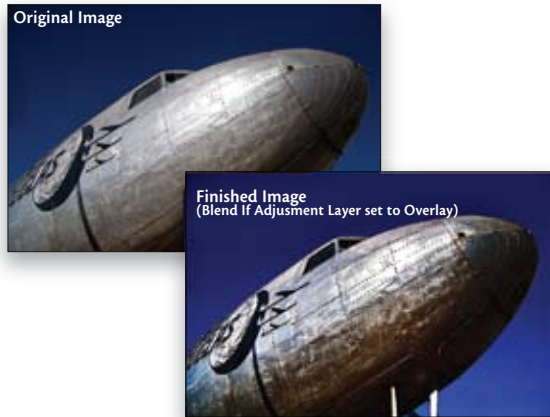
also give Overlay a try, although it will be much stronger than Soft Light. This looks pretty cool, but it's a bit heavy handed. In the next step we'll use the Blend If controls to modify the effect.



STEP 6 Blend Modes and Blend If Sliders

In the Layers panel, double-click on the empty adjustment layer to bring up the Layer Style dialog. At the bottom of the dialog in the Blend If section, move the black slider for This Layer to 20. Then, Option-click (PC: Alt-click) on the slider and drag to the right to split the

slider into two halves. Move the right half of the slider to level 80. You can also try the Overlay blend mode in the General Blending section at the top of the dialog. Click OK to apply the change.

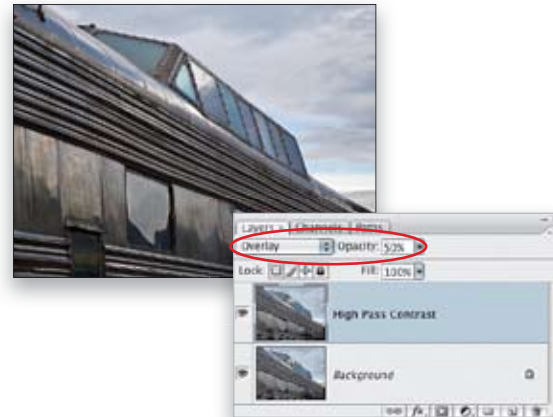


STEP 7 The Blend If Sliders Explained

The Blend If sliders control what tonal areas of the active layer (This Layer) or the Underlying Layers are visible in the image. This adjustment made in the previous step means that the effect of the Curves layer set to Soft Light begins to gradually fade out at level 80 and is completely

gone by level 20. Although the Blend If sliders are a great tool for image compositing, they're also quite useful for tonal or contrast adjustments, as this example illustrates. For the final version, we used the Overlay blend mode for the empty adjustment layer.

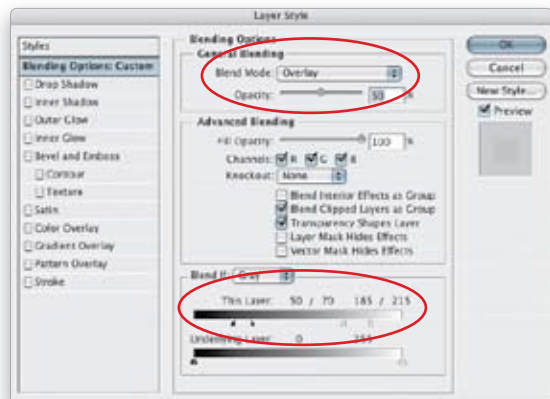
High Pass Contrast



STEP 1 High Pass Contrast Layer

Blend modes and the Blend If sliders are also key to a classic technique that applies a contrast boost to the visual contours of an image. Copy the Background layer by clicking-and-dragging it onto the Create a New Layer icon. (If your image already has adjustment layers, make sure

that the topmost layer is active, hold down the Option [PC: Alt] key, and choose Merge Visible from the Layers panel's flyout menu.) Double-click the name of the new layer and rename it "High Pass Contrast." Set the blend mode to Overlay and the Opacity to 50%.



STEP 2 Set Blend Mode and Blend If Sliders

Double-click the area to the right of the layer name to open the Layer Style dialog. Adjust the Blend If sliders for This Layer to 50/70 for the black slider and 185/215 for the white slider. Use the Option (PC: Alt) key to split the sliders, as described in Step 6. The Blend If values target the contrast boost to the middle

part of the tonal range, and these values will protect the darkest shadows and brightest highlight details from clipping that could be introduced by the Overlay blend mode. Click OK.



STEP 3 Apply the High Pass Filter

From the menu bar, choose Filter>Other>High Pass. Move the Radius slider and watch how the contrast along image contours changes. There's no one "right" radius value to use, but a setting between 25 and 50 is a good place to start (you can also adjust the layer Opacity after applying the effect). The

High Pass filter creates a more "contoured" layer that serves as a mask through which the Overlay blend mode contrast boost is applied. In some ways, this is a manual method for applying a technique that's very similar to the new Clarity slider in Adobe Camera Raw and Photoshop Lightroom.

Seán Duggan is the co-author of Photoshop Artistry (New Riders, 2006) and Real World Digital Photography, 2nd Edition (Peachpit Press, 2004). He teaches regular workshops on Photoshop and digital photography. Check out his photographs, as well as his musings on digital imaging, at his photo blog, www.f1point4.blogs.com.



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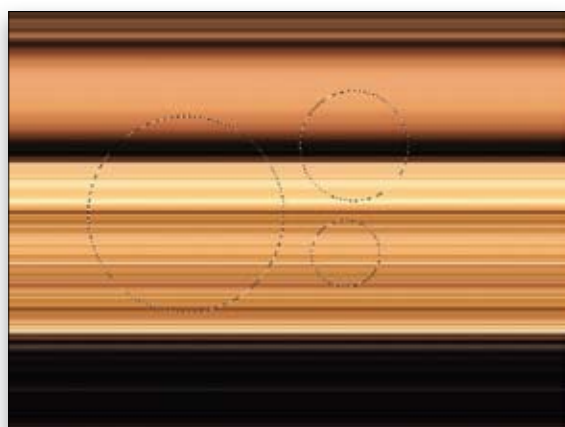
BY DAVE CROSS



At first glance, adding a stroke to a layer—either using Edit>Stroke or with the Stroke layer style—might seem pretty basic (approaching boring), but with a little imagination, things can get considerably more interesting in the world of strokes. First we'll see how using smart objects can add amazing options to your stroked creations and then we'll learn how to create dashed lines using strokes with patterns.



Creating Multiple Strokes



STEP 1 Start with a Selection

With a background document open, click on the Create a New Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel to add a new layer, and use the selection tool of your choice to add a selection. In this example, we added three circles using the Elliptical Marquee tool (hold down the Shift key to add more than one

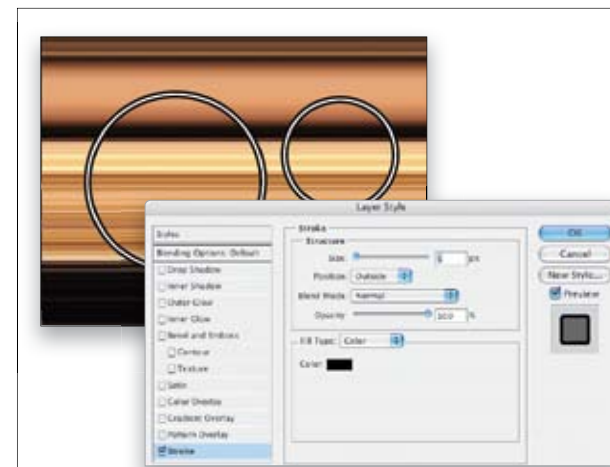
selection on the same layer). Later, we'll see how you could also start with a custom shape.



STEP 2 Add a Basic Stroke

Although layer styles provide more flexibility, we'll start with a basic stroke and build on that. From the Edit menu, choose Stroke. In the Stroke dialog, choose the Width and Color, and set the Location to Center. (If you started with a rectangular selection, you may want to use Inside as the posi-

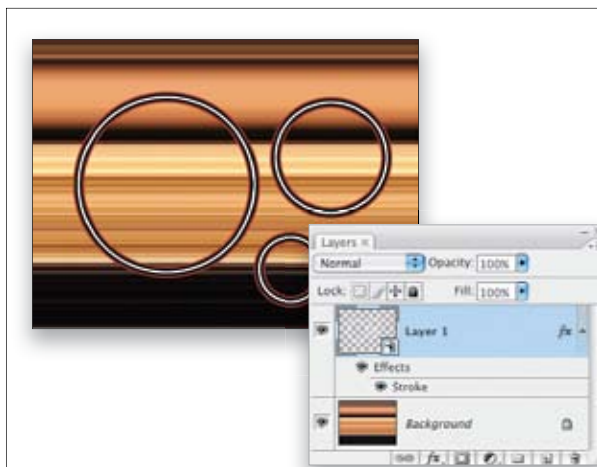
tion, although that will affect all the other steps). Click OK.



STEP 3 Add a Stroke Layer Style

Click on the Add a Layer Style icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choose Stroke from the pop-up menu. In the dialog, change the position to Outside and then experiment with the Width and Color to get the look you want. Here we created a black stroke around our original white stroke. Click

OK. To create a different look, you could change the Fill opacity in the Layers panel to 0 to remove the original stroke color, leaving only the outside strokes.



STEP 4 Make a Smart Object; Add Another Stroke

Control-click (PC: Right-click) on the stroke layer in the Layers panel and choose Convert to Smart Object. (When you do this, the Stroke layer style can only be edited by double-clicking on the smart object to get to the original information.) Converting the layer to a smart object also means that we can

now add another Stroke layer style to the white and black strokes (which we did), effectively creating multiple strokes on the same layer.



STEP 5 Rinse and Repeat

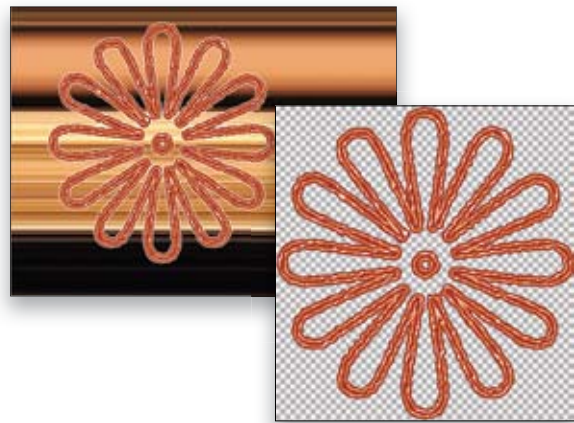
In theory, you can repeat the same operation several times: Convert the smart object to a smart object and add a Stroke layer style. (I know it sounds strange, but you really can convert a smart object into a new smart object.) In practice, the strokes will start to look a little odd if you repeat this proce-

dure too many times. Here's an example of applying the same techniques to a type layer (making a selection from the type and then using the same steps outlined above).



STEP 6 Experiment with Gradient Strokes

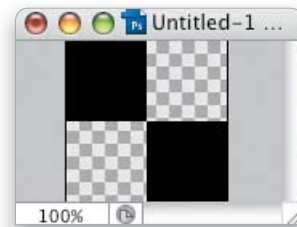
You can also get some interesting results if you use a gradient instead of a solid color for one or more of the Stroke layer styles. The procedure is the same; just choose Gradient from the Fill Type menu in the Layer Style dialog.



STEP 7 Edit the Smart Object for More Possibilities

In this example, we started with the Custom Shape tool and created a path. After turning the path into a selection (Command-click [PC: Ctrl-click] on the Path thumbnail in the Paths panel), we followed the same steps to add multiple strokes through smart objects. By double-clicking on the smart object in the Layers panel, we can edit the "original" but, because we made several smart objects, we had to double-click several times to get back to the very first object. Then we applied a couple of filters from Filter>Brush Strokes and closed and saved each smart object until our main document updated.

Creating Dashed Lines



STEP 1 Create a New Pattern

Start by creating a new document that's 100x100 pixels, then add a new layer. Select the Rectangular Marquee tool (M) and in the Options Bar, set Style to Fixed Size, with a Width and Height of 50 pixels. Click in the top-left corner of your document to add a selection and fill it with black (press D then Option-Delete [PC: Alt-Backspace]). Repeat for the bottom-right corner and deselect (Command-D [PC: Ctrl-D]). Hide the Background layer by clicking on its Eye icon in the Layers panel, then from the Edit menu, choose Define Pattern and name your pattern.



STEP 2 Add a Stroke Layer Style to a Layer

In this example, we extracted a person from a white background and added the stroke to that layer. In the Stroke options, choose Pattern from the Fill Type menu and select the pattern we just created. Use the Scale option to get the kind of dashed line you want. (Note: The pattern will display differently at different scales, so keep experimenting.)



STEP 3 Experiment, Experiment, Experiment

There are many possibilities using these two techniques: Experiment with the built-in patterns, combine a pattern with a smart object stroke—so many creative opportunities!

Dave Cross is Senior Developer, Education and Curriculum, for the National Association of Photoshop Professionals. He is the author of Photoshop Finishing Touches and The Photoshop CS2 Help Desk Book, and is featured on a series of Photoshop training DVDs.

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