

# Notes for BCC Workshop

## Bringing Pictures to Life


### Curves

Using Curves to bring a picture to life is much more powerful than using Brightness / Contrast or even Levels. And best of all, it can be largely automated after a bit of initial setup.

#### Curves Setup (you'll only ever do this once)

- Bring up the curves window (Image → Adjustments → Curves or Ctrl+M);
- Double Click on the left-most eye-dropper (Black Point). In the colour picker window, enter R=10, G=10 and B=10. This is a very dark grey but not quite black. Press OK to dismiss the colour picker window.
- Do the same for the right-most eye-dropper (White Point), this time entering R=245, G=245 and B=245 (not quite white).
- Finally, for the middle eye-dropper (Grey Point) enter R=133, G=133 and B=133 (mid-grey).

#### Using Curves (on an adjustment layer of course)

- Create a Curves Adjustment Layer (Layer → New Adjustment Layer → Curves or use the  at the bottom of the Layers palette);
- Click (once) on the Black Point and then click on an area in the picture that should be black;
- Then do the same for an area of the picture that should be white by clicking on the White Point eye-dropper and then on a white part of the picture.

Your picture should now have a wide range of tones. If there is an apparent colour cast, repeat the above procedure with the Grey Point, this time clicking on a area that is mid-grey.

#### Finding the lightest and darkest areas

With some images, it is difficult to tell which areas are the lightest and darkest. If this is the case, use Threshold (Image → Adjustments → Threshold) and adjust the slider to locate the brightest and darkest areas.

You must "Preview" to see this effect and of course don't press OK!

## Using LAB Colour

Lab Colour is simply another way of describing the colours present in a picture. However, by choosing just one channel, some interesting enhancements are often discovered.

The way in which we'll use the LAB Colour channels is using Apply Image (blending one channel with another). It is easier than it sounds.



To see if one of the LAB channels provides interesting results:

- Convert your image to LAB colour (this is non-destructive) using Image → Mode → LAB Colour;
- Then blend using Apply Image (Image → Apply Image);
  - Set Blending Mode to Soft Light;
  - Look at the different LAB channels to see if you like any. Usually A or B will look best. If the effect is too pronounced, reduce the opacity;
- Don't forget to switch back to RGB afterwards (Image → Mode → RGB).

## A Note about Masks

Masks provide a method of creating an effect layer and then applying the effect selectively. This is great for enhancing specific parts of a picture with the additional benefit of being able to adjust the opacity of the layer later so that the strength of the effect can be increased or decreased.

### General Mask concepts

- If a Mask is all black, no part of the layer shows through. If the Mask is all white, then all of the layer shows;
- To create a Mask which reveals the layer, press the  button at the bottom of the Layers palette (or Layer → Layer Mask → Reveal All);
- To create a Mask which hides the layer, press ALT + the  button (or Layer → Layer Mask → Hide All);
- Once you have a layer with a mask, be careful to make sure that you are painting on the right bit (click on the mask or the picture as required);
- To Invert a Layer (change it between hidden and revealing), select the Mask and press Ctrl+I.

### Using a Mask to Dodge and Burn

- Duplicate a layer (or create a new layer and copy all visible layers into it using Ctrl+Alt+Shift+E);
- Set new layer's blend mode to Multiply (Burning) or Screen (Dodging);
- Add a Hide All mask (as above);
- Make sure that the mask is selected and paint onto it with white. Make sure that the brush is very soft and reduce opacity;
- Slightly overdo the effect and then reduce the layer opacity to taste.

## **A couple of my favourites to finish**

The final two enhancements are a couple that I really like. But the secret here is to use them gently so that it is almost impossible to tell that they've been applied.

Don't forget, as always, create the effect (forcefully) on a separate layer and then reduce the layer's opacity to create the subtle effect that you want.

### **Enhancing Detail**

This is a bit like providing a broad but mild sharpening across your whole picture. It manages to enhance the detail in a rather subtle way and is great for images that have lots of detail in them:

- Duplicate the layer you want to enhance (or use Ctrl+Shft+Alt+E as above to copy all visible layers into the current layer);
- Set the Blend Mode of the new layer to Soft Light;
- Apply a High Pass Filter (Filter → Other → High Pass);
- Play with the slider to get the effect you are after.

### **Soft Glow Effect**

This creates a sort of misty, dreamy effect to a picture and also reduces detail somewhat. It can be good for smoothing out a surface and making it look perfect and can also be effective when used sparingly on some landscapes.

- Duplicate the layer you want to enhance;
- Set the Blend Mode of the new layer to Soft Light;
- Blur the new layer using Filter → Blur → Gaussian Blur (or any other type of blur you fancy);
- Play with the slider to get the effect you want.