

Non-destructive dodging and burning

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This info sheet can be thought of as a digital version of the classic “dodging and burning technique” that has been in use by film photographers for years. Think of this as more of a “cheat” that gives you the effect of better dynamic range.

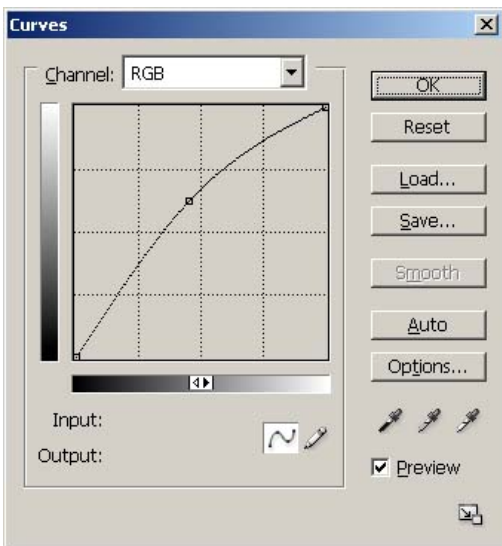
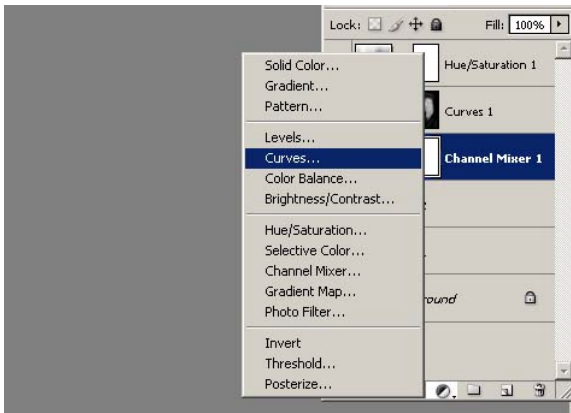
There are multiple ways to do this, however the method am going to show you today is a non-destructive means to “dodge and burn” your photos. Personally, I stay away from the actual dodge and burn tools in Photoshop. They are permanent unless worked with upon duplicated layers (which even then is inefficient). To begin with, we will first need a photograph of our choice. In this case, I have used a photograph I took in the summer of '06.

Open your photo in Photoshop.



The first thing we need to do is decide the overall contrast for the intended photograph. The overall contrast will be dependent upon your photo and your personal preferences.

To get our contrast, the first thing we need to do is setup a curves adjustment layer.



For this image I gave it a slight overall curve to increase brightness. By adjusting curves it is not only adjusting contrast but also the colors of your image. So be careful with your adjustments. You do not want to clip out important image data.

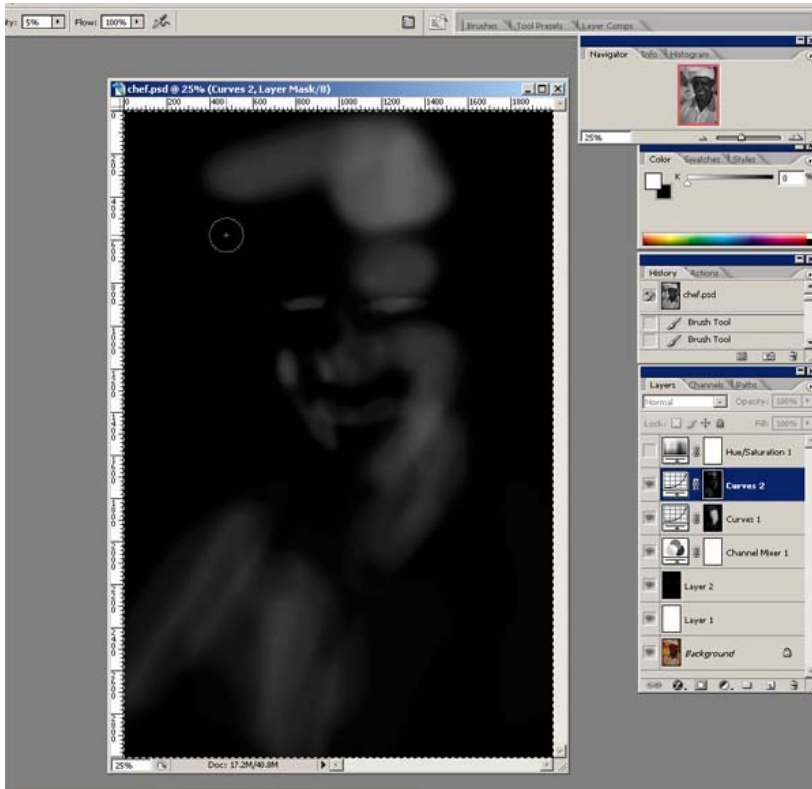
Now that we've adjusted the contrast/brightness, chances are that our photos have some areas we are going to want to increase or decrease the light/darks of the image.

First, create another curves adjustment layer. The first layer we are going to create will be what we use to lighten our image. Raise the curve until the overall brightness of the image has been increased.

Next we need to invert our layer mask. To do this, alt-click on the layer mask and pressing CTRL+I. The reason for this is that we are going to paint in the areas where we want our adjustment mask to show through with white. This will give us more control over our "dodged" areas.

Once your layer mask has been inverted it is time to start painting. First, Alt+Click once more on the layer mask to view the mask on top of the actual photograph. This will allow you to see changes as you paint. For painting I suggest using a soft round brush with a low opacity. I personally use anything from 1% to 5%. By layering your strokes you will end up with a much

more natural looking photograph. By the end you should have a layer mask that looks something like this:



From this point on it is just a matter of tweaking areas you want to lighten, etc. In order to darken areas just follow the same steps however adjust your curves in the negative direction (effectively darkening the image). Keep in mind that this is not a cure-all for under exposed images. This will simply help lower light areas and bring out dark areas (at the expense of noise) in your photos. Below is an example of my final retouching on this photo.

Before:



After:

