



Photoshop Is A Girl's Best Friend

by

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Extended Notes

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Introduction

Photoshop offers an exceedingly powerful tool to photographers. It is up to us to use or abuse it, keep it within bounds or go over the top. The fact that it allows us to do so does not mean that we should make every model's neck 4 inches longer, their eyes reminiscent of Japanese comic strips, with skin that looks more like electrically charged plasma devoid of texture. This series will explore the process for producing pleasing, plausible portrait photography of models, family, and friends. At the same time, we must not give in to the "power of the dark side" and make impressionable youngsters envy impossibly formed models in our photographs. Photography is a complex process that interacts with the environment, engages and uses the mind, our senses, needs the tools of the trade and the skills in using them. These interactions form our experiences and influence the development of our sensibilities, the tools we use or add to our arsenal, and the skills we learn from these experiences. Indeed, at this session today there will be a new set of experiences, a new way of looking at things, and you will each take with you different elements that will affect, positively or negatively, your sensibilities, the tools you use, how you learn them, and so on. Your photography in general, is the result of the interaction of the following elements:

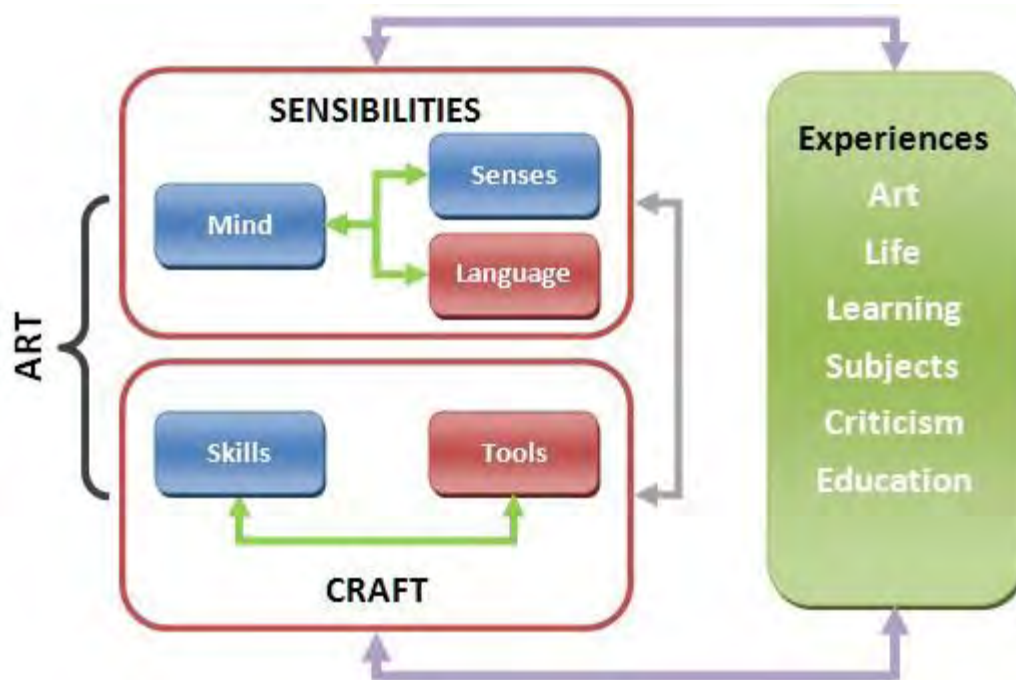


Figure 1 A Conceptual Model of Photographic Art

Your photographic sensibilities will guide you towards developing your style and lean you towards certain kinds of images and away from others. These inclinations will make you seek certain tools to learn and develop skills to achieve the results you like. Your experiences will strengthen your views or alter them. Although in this program, I will cover only the "Tools" section of this model, the relationships are very significant as they form and shape your style and skills. I should state the obvious at the outset: This presentation will reflect my sensibilities and my mastery of the tools you will hear. Photoshop is just

another tool to me and I strive to produce natural results that do not scream “*Photoshopped!*” The subjects should not look like a new kind of species from another planet with plastic skin, light-emitting eyes, and better than perfect teeth, that seem almost fluorescent. At the end of the session, I hope I will have made a case for the above and shown you the tools to accomplish that. Whether you like it or not, choose to use this approach or another, or even to consider this approach and this set of tools will depend on your photographic sensibilities.

Background

Model shoots and glamour photography have been around since the early days of photography. Of course, the high point in the history of this genre was the Hollywood glamour photos of movie stars and the best-known photographer of the era was George Hurrell. I am sure anyone interested in model shoots has seen Hurrell’s work, his dramatic lighting, and the unmistakable aura of the stars he photographed. Jean Harlow, Judy Garland, Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford, Errol Flynn, Clark Gable, Humphrey Bogart, and many more stood there on a piece of paper looking larger than life. Hurrell had a way of transforming the person into a persona, life to larger than life and his photography is still a benchmark for many who are interested in this genre of work.

Elements of Glamor Photography

Any photographic endeavor has two main parts: Technical excellence and artistic vision. Those photographs that rise above the crowd in their artistic vision and technical excellence in achieving that vision become memorable; they are striking, imitated, and inspiring. Although I will often acknowledge the artistic vision and allude to that during the program, the focus of this presentation will remain on the technical side of the process, more specifically the post-process. This is partially due to time limitations, but more importantly, the dimensions of artistic vision would entail discussing and exploring the subject at length. It is also important to accept the fact that this is not a workshop and you will not actually do anything or learn the intricacies of the tools I will present for your consideration; time is too limited for that. Instead, take this program as an “appetizer,” food for thought in your exploration of the tools and processes to bring your artistic vision to life. One 60-minute program will only scratch the surface in exploring a subject. I will feel very satisfied, rewarded in fact, if this short presentation piques your interest in exploring the tools in more detail.

Technical Issues in Glamor and Model Photography

Photography has always had a strong technical, some say mechanical, side. Glamour photography is no exception. The finished product is the result of a meaningful collaboration between three main players: the model, the photographer, and the equipment like the camera, light, and in these days the computer. In order to produce results that successfully translate the photographer’s artistic vision, all the participants in this process need to work together. The lighting must be just so, the model must have the right attitude and project that, the camera and the lens must record an image as faithfully as possible, and the photographer must be the master of all her or his photographic arsenal.

A Suggested Workflow

Today's digital photography relies heavily on information and information processing. The very essence of photographic process has become information driven, information dependent, and information rich. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the recommended workflow will favor capturing as much information as possible, process it in the best possible way, and using it to produce an output that yields the desired results for all.

1. Smart shoot
2. Restrained, well-tempered post process
3. High quality, natural looking, and pleasing output and presentation

Smart Shoot

In the excitement of the shoot and technical pressures, one of the most important steps gets the short shrift: White Balance Shot. It is so easy to do and it saves so much time later on, I cannot overemphasize its importance; especially with the availability of great tools at very affordable prices.

White balance shot

Clearly, nobody wants a “*dumb shoot.*” Yet, the stories I have heard about the model shoots in photo meets could use a few simple, low-cost, and maybe even no cost tools to add more information to the images captured. After the shoot, in post-production, when you look at a photograph you took earlier this morning or yesterday afternoon,



Figure 2 SpyderCube

how do you know that the colors are correct? Is the model’s skin color accurate or is there a greenish colorcast? Was the white hat she was wearing this cold or was it a bit warmer? Without

a known entity in the photograph, these decisions cannot be made to the best advantage of the photographer. The solution is extremely simple and takes practically no time: Include a simple device designed for this purpose every time the lighting setup changes. Tell all the participants to take a white balance shot that they can use in post processing. Today’s digital cameras record much of the meta-data from the date and time to the exposure, and they are very good in assessing the white balance to bring it into the ballpark. In order to maximize the

information value of the photographs and the photo shoot, a white balance shot will be extremely valuable, the first step in smart shoot. There are two such devices from the powerhouses of color management: *Datacolor's SpyderCube* and *X-Rite's ColorChecker Passport*. The latter is far more sophisticated in both the target it provides and the software solution it integrates with Adobe Photoshop and Photoshop Lightroom. It also fits comfortably in to your pocket. Don't leave home without it! The same hardware – software combination also allows for camera calibration under various lighting situations. This simple extra step makes a significant improvement on the color rendering of the photographs as they are now adjusted for the specific sensor on the camera you are using. It is particularly important if you shoot with multiple bodies as it will ensure to minimize the camera-to-camera color rendering differences.

Below are before and after white balance shots. There were three different light sources. Using the ColorChecker Passport makes it a one-click fix with equally easy warming or cooling the entire photograph.



Figure 3 X-Rite ColorChecker Passport



Check camera white balance

Although less important when shooting RAW, it is a good idea to make sure that the camera white balance is not set incorrectly during the shoot. This will serve as additional insurance if you have to quickly extract JPEG images from your RAW files to show the client, or for other technical reasons you switch to JPEG shooting in midstream. Your camera will do its best to give you the appropriate white balance, which you can modify in post processing. Auto white balance is a safe choice for an all-purpose setting, especially when shooting RAW with a white balance shot as described above. You can use the X-Rite ColroChecker Passport to create a custom white balance for your camera on the spot.

Avoid mixed lighting

Although the amount of lighting determines the exposure, the color and quality of lighting will determine the colors in the photograph. If you shoot under mixed lights, like fluorescent and tungsten, or daylight and fluorescent, they will throw a curve ball at your camera's white balance. Whenever possible, use light sources that have the same or similar color temperature. Flash and daylight are similar, whereas tungsten light and daylight are not. Most ordinary fluorescent lights may be a nightmare when mixed with other sources. Keep it simple!

Keep records

Keeping written information and simple diagrams that sketch the lighting setup and the lighting ratios will also add considerable value to the collected information and provide additional learning tools when

the memory fades and the excitement diminishes days after the event when you are all in front of your computers trying to remember the details of the shoot. This information may very well be prepared ahead of time by the model shoot organizers and provided to the photographers for note taking. In the studio, every photographer should develop record keeping habits that can be referred to later on, much later on.

Shoot RAW

There is also some debate, although I fail to understand the reason, on whether to shoot JPEG or RAW. With today's low storage prices, the argument of being able to store more images in JPEG format no longer holds any water. Every RAW image can be converted to a JPEG as if it was shot that way if necessary for quick processing. However, the amount of information contained in a RAW file is significantly, and substantively more than the pixel-based JPEG version. Where the JPEG is an 8-bit format, RAW carries 14-bits of information. If you like to eke out the maximum quality from your photographs, shoot RAW.

Well-Tempered Clavier

There are two schools of thought on the post-production process of digital images, including portraits and glamor shots. One school subscribes to “no further intervention after the shutter is released” and the second advocates “any tool is acceptable to achieve the vision.” Your personal position on this spectrum is obviously your choice. I will only submit to you that post production, or the work done on the computer is nothing more than another tool in the arsenal of the photographer. If it helps you achieve your artistic vision, learn it and use it; if it does not, ignore it. This is very much like having a dozen or more filters in your camera bag that you decide to use depending on the circumstances. The only point that I will strongly advocate in the use of these tools is one of restraint. In the end, the viewer should not be aware of the use of any tools, whether used during the shoot, or post-production. The tool must remain unnoticeable and unobtrusive.

Overall process

Postproduction needs to cover for imperfections brought in by:

- The photographer
- The equipment
- The model

The goal in this stage should be to retain plausible reality in all the elements of the finished product. The main environments I will present in the subsequent posts are Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Photoshop Lightroom and their associated tools to achieve the desired results, although you can carry the general concepts and principles to other postproduction environments.

Model Photo Editing Workflow

Objective

Produce a pleasing photograph of the model that looks realistic and natural, and free from editing artifacts

Tools to know and use

- Photoshop, Lightroom or Adobe Camera RAW for front end prep
- Layers (adjustment layers, pixel layers)
- Layer masks (add, edit mask, and mask edge control)
- Blend mode (overlay, soft light, multiply, screen)
- Fade (immediacy is important)
- Dodge and burn like a pro (overlay, brush, fade)
- Liquify (shape, build, BE GENTLE)
- Free transform tool (shape head, eyes, lips)

General artistic workflow (your sensibilities will guide you)

- Have a vision for the finished product
- Make sure it fits the subject
- Implement, experiment

General technical workflow (your tools and skills in using them will help you)

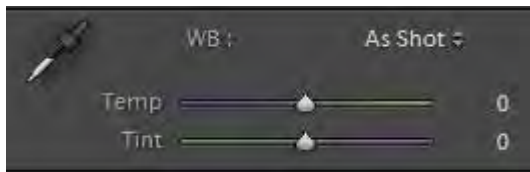
- Cover up for the equipment/shoot process
- Cover up for the photographer (we make mistakes, you know)
- Cover up for the model (subtle, natural, realistic corrections can go a long way)

Step by Step

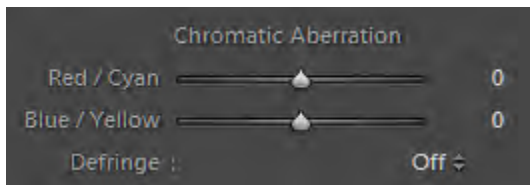
The overall editing flow goes from global adjustments to local adjustments. Often times global adjustments may even eliminate the need for localized adjustments, at least may reduce the need for micro level work. The steps I present using Adobe Lightroom will work exactly the same way in Adobe Camera RAW module; even JPEG and TIFF format files to some extent. I will demonstrate these steps in more detail that will allow you to take additional notes. Here, I will focus on the general outline of the workflow with the tools in use indicated. After the tonal adjustment, I will focus on a few important areas of corrections: blemish elimination, wrinkle reduction, skin smoothing, and eye enhancement. Other areas that may need addressing will necessitate a separate session and separate tutorial. Head and face alignment/sculpting, dealing with blotchy skin, adding stronger or even different make up, selectively saturating parts of the face, and many more are well within the reach with a little practice but not covered in this presentation/tutorial.

White Balance, First For Accuracy Then For Suitability

White balance is where I would like to start. Keep in mind that we are aiming for a natural look which, for portrait shots may very well be slightly on the warm side. Make the correction first for “accurate” white balance, and then adjust for the desired look. My tool of choice for this task is Lightroom, although you may use Adobe Camera RAW for the same controls. Open your RAW image in Lightroom (or ACR) and pick up the white balance tool. It is an eyedropper in both programs. Now, click on the neutral color portion of the target you included in your photo shoot. This will neutralize the color cast if any and may make the image slightly duller; that’s OK. Now, look at the image with “accurate” white balance; does it look inviting, pleasing? Most portrait photographs will look more pleasant with slightly warmer color balance. Using the “Temp” and “Tint” sliders (gently) try adding a touch of warmth until you are satisfied. Then move to the next step.



Defringe (Chromatic Aberration Correction)



Often overlooked, fringing around the high contrast edges of the subject can significantly degrade the overall sharpness and acuity of an image. Lightroom offers very easy to use tools to deal with what is known as “fringing” or “chromatic aberration”. Zoom in at least to 300% and look for a colored fringe on high contrast edges in the image. Remember, this is much more visible on the periphery of the frame. When you find the fringed edge, use the appropriate slider to remove, or at least reduce the color fringe you can see.

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Tonal Adjustments



Look at the overall exposure to see if there are any blown out highlights or blocked shadows. If you are shooting under the controlled studio environment, this will be less likely. However, in a large group model shoot, there may be need for some adjustments. In the develop module in Lightroom, move your cursor over the triangle on the top right corner of the histogram; this is the highlight warning indicator. You can click on it to turn it on while you are working, then turn it off when you are done. Any blown highlights will show as red on the image. So long as the overexposure is not extreme, the “Recovery” slider will tame that and bring the highlights under control. Slide it towards the right until the red blotches disappear. Keep in mind that extreme use of the recovery slider may make the highlights quite a bit duller. While you are in that area, if you see blocked shadows, you may use “Fill Light” slider to open them up. In all these adjustments subtlety is the key. The other sliders in this block will help you to get the tonal look you like from the photograph.

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Blemish Control (minor imperfections, sensor dust, etc.)

The Lightroom tool to handle spot healing or cloning seems much easier to use than the one in



Photoshop. The tools in Photoshop are more powerful for sure, but for general spotting, I prefer Lightroom, or

ACR. The tool, which can be used as either a healing brush or a clone stamp, is the second from the left in the top toolbar in Lightroom. Adjust the diameter to fit your needs and remove the pimples, nicks, and other obvious blemishes in the image. We will carry out the rest of the adjustments in Photoshop, because we need the power of layers, blending modes, fading, etc. Now, either open the file from Adobe Camera Raw, or in Lightroom right click on the image and select "Edit in/Photoshop". When the open file dialog window appears, choose "Edit a copy with Lightroom adjustments" so that all the tonal adjustment and other corrections will be applied to the image. When the image is opened in Photoshop, it should be tonally correct, free from blemishes. We have covered for the errors induced in the lighting, camera, lens, and some of the problems stemming from the model.

Skin Control

The purpose of this step is not to stretch a piece of plastic sheet on the model's face but to minimize some of the imperfections like pimples, uneven skin tone, wrinkles, and so on. The idea is not to create a Barbie head, but a pleasing and plausible portrait of the model; male or female. Since the blemishes are controlled in the previous step, we do not need to focus on that here. If there are some that slipped through, you can always use the Healing Brush tool to take care of them with relative ease.

Reduce Wrinkles





Wrinkle control in Lightroom does not have enough finesse, so this is best handled in Photoshop. The tool of choice here is again the healing brush most of the time. Remember: we are not trying to stretch the skin unnaturally; the purpose is to REDUCE the wrinkles. I prefer to make all my changes on separate layers. This gives me a great deal of flexibility in adjusting the intensity of the adjustments independent of one another. Start by placing a blank layer above the background layer, name it "Wrinkle control" and pick up the healing brush. Using the appropriate blend mode for the tool, generally "Lighten," and making sure that "This Layer and Below" is selected for sampling on the toolbar, go over the wrinkles around the eyes one long stroke at a time. After each stroke, before you do anything else, "Fade" the stroke to a reasonable level (Edit/Fade, or Shift-Ctrl-F.) This will add finesse to your wrinkle reduction efforts. Repeat as necessary. In these three photographs you see the original, wrinkles removed at 100% (Joan Rivers

effect!), and the wrinkles removed at 45%. You can see how unnatural the second photograph looks; it has lost facial sculpting and is beginning to scream "*Photoshopped!!*" The third image presents the model with appropriate facial features, eye depth, raised cheeks and young skin.

Smooth Skin

Skin smoothing seems to be the focus of many portrait/model/glamor photographers. Many times this practice goes to an extreme where the model looks like a person with electro-luminescent plasma skin. Photographers have used many tools and techniques to minimize the major blemishes like pimples, acne, and overly large pores. These ranged from dedicated soft-focus lenses to soft-focus filters attached in front of the lens, to nylon stocking stretched over the lens. They all did one thing, more or less effectively: spread the highlights over shadows. Most skin imperfections being darker than the skin, the method worked and became a tool for many.

The advent of digital photography and its grainless image structure compelled photographers to seek digital solutions to rendering skin in a more pleasing way. The typical method involves creating a pixel layer of the image above all the layers, applying some amount of Gaussian Blur to it and lowering the opacity of the layer for a pleasing effect. This method has many variations, like using the content of the red channel, changing the blend mode from normal to screen, making eyes and lips to show through with the use of masking, and so on. When used with care, this approach still produces acceptable results. However, one has to keep in mind that the process supposedly mimics the behavior of a soft-focus lens, which does not discriminate parts of the face photographed. Furthermore, a soft-focus lens never produces skin that you are afraid to touch. The main objective is to subtly hide most of the


imperfections without plasticizing the skin; it must remain touchable, delicate, sensual, and human. I would like you to consider a more flexible tool with greater finesse, which lies under a different filter. Try this:

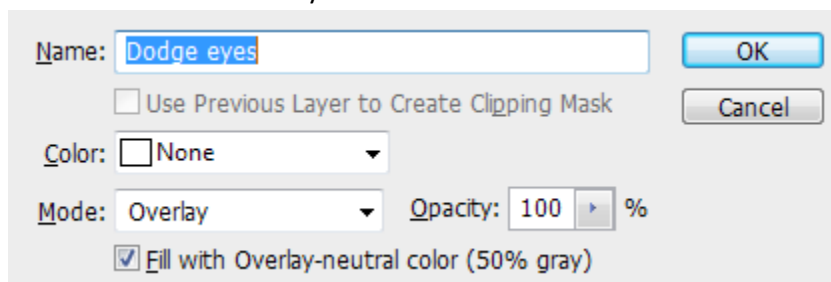
1. Create a duplicate of the background (or a merged layer if necessary)
2. Invert it to a negative (Ctrl-I)
3. Convert it to "Smart Filter"
4. Change blending mode to Overlay
5. Now apply Filter/Other/High Pass (yes, I know it is used for sharpening, but humor me!)
6. Try a radius around 5-10 pixels while you watch the effect. You will see the softening effect as you change the radius.
7. Since the layer has been converted to work with Smart Filters, you can always go back and change the radius. This will give you a much controlled softening, leaving most of the sharper edges intact.
8. Remember, you can always adjust the layer opacity to reduce the effect of skin softening; and whatever you do, leave the skin as skin. Don't make that soft skin look like hard plastic.

Eye Enhancement

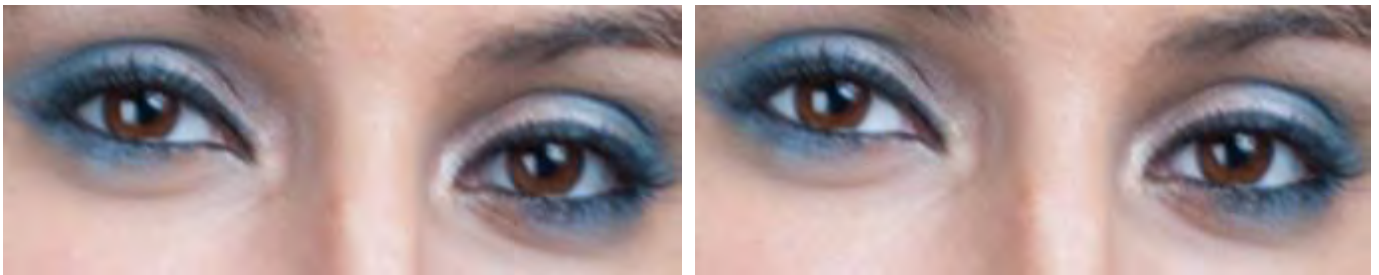
There are numerous tutorials and DVDs on enhancing the eyes. The purpose of this small and short tutorial is to cover the key issues, so I will mention only a few simple to use tools that will get the job done. Eyes are the most visible part of a human face and they may need extra attention. First, they need to be sharp unless they are rendered not so for a reason. Second, the white of the eye sometimes tends to record a couple of shades darker than one would want and may need to be brighter. This, again, needs a subtle touch so as not to make the eyes look like they are emitting light. If there are strong veins visible, they can be tamed down by desaturating the color and/or by carefully applying some healing brush strokes. My method of choice here will be to dodge the whites carefully. If you are using Photoshop CS5 the dodge and burn tools are perfectly usable. Earlier version users should resort to an overlay mode layer above the image. Here is the process; and this will work in Photoshop CS5 as well.

Dodging & Burning With Overlay Layer

1. Alt-Click on the new layer icon at the bottom of the layers panel , which will open a dialog window. Fill it with what you see below:



2. This will create a new layer, fill it with 50% gray, and change the blend mode to overlay. Since this mode affects only tones that are lighter or darker than 50% gray, there will be no visible change in the image
3. Pick up your brush tool (shortcut key B), and set your default colors black on white (shortcut key D), then swap them (shortcut key X) so that the brush color becomes white
4. Change the brush opacity to 50% (shortcut key 5), adjust the brush hardness to about 40%
5. Make sure the "Dodge Eyes" layer is targeted and the image is zoomed in to give you a comfortable painting area. Paint one brush stroke at one corner of the white of the eye. Do not make multiple brush strokes, click and hold the left mouse button and paint on the white part of the eye. You will do this one corner at a time. It will likely seem to be overly bright; that's OK.
6. Without doing anything else, press Shift-Ctrl-F to summon the Fade tool and using the slider reduce the dodging effect until it looks natural. If you err, do so on the brighter side (more on this later)
7. Now, repeat step 6 for the other 3 corners of the eyes
8. Review the image with this layer turned on and off. If it looks over done, reduce the layer opacity until the eyes look brighter yet normal. Below are the partial captures of before and after images of the eyes:



9. If the eyes have some veins showing, try to desaturate them first, and then carefully apply either the healing brush or the clone stamp tool as necessary.

Mouth and Teeth Adjustments

Mouth, lips, and teeth may need attention, but use restraint. After all, a slightly awkward smile need not discard an otherwise fine photograph. Overly corrected teeth may look like falsies, and lips unnaturally curved or plump may make the model look like the Joker from the Batman movies. The tools that may help here are Free Transform, Liquify, Clone Stamp, and even cut and paste. Always make these adjustments on separate layers; if anything goes wrong you can throw away that layer and start again.

Plugins

There are numerous plugins for Photoshop that will, or claim that they will give you one-click fix of a model's face. Or various Photoshop actions offer similar results with the same ease. I have seen results produced by some of these plugins and actions and I am amazed how unnatural they look and how accepting the photographers are when it comes to "smooth skin." The electro-luminescent plasma skin I mentioned earlier is their aim and they typically use a selection mode of some sort to select the skin color, make a new layer of this selection, and blur the megapixels out of it. The result: Two eyes looking through a plastic mask!

There are two excellent products if you are in a spending mood. I have tried both and can comfortably tell you that they both work to produce the results I would approve.

The first one is the Portraiture plugin from ImageNomic.com and it comes in flavors to serve Photoshop, Lightroom, or Aperture users. They promised to offer 20% discount to NECCC participants by using the discount code PSRI2010.

The second product is Anthropics Portrait Professional (<http://www.portraitprofessional.com/>). It comes in three flavors at three price-points. Look and decide. They offered to NECCC 2010 participants a 10% discount by using the discount code CL8960. They have a sale going on and I am not sure if the discount will still apply.

Each product offers training guidance, tutorials, videos, and the like. I think you can do all that in Photoshop but it is a matter of time efficiency, which will improve with repeated use. Plugins should not be a substitute to learning how to achieve a result in Photoshop or Lightroom they just save time.

If you want to take this session to a higher level, you may consider getting a subscription to KelbyTraining.com where they have extensive series of training for portrait retouching as well as a variety of other subjects. It is well worth paying about \$0.60 per day for all that material. I am a big fan of NAPP and KelbyMedia in general and their online training is top notch for photographers.

Closing

After all is said and done, the photographer and the subject are the ultimate arbiter of what constitutes a pleasing photograph. However, it is up to all of us to improve our photographic sensibilities and our mastery of the tools we use so that we can also educate both the models and other subjects as to what makes a better result and explain why.

May all your models be beautiful, with smooth skin, perfect teeth, bright eyed, and with great attitude.

Appendix - Before-after Photographs with Tools Indicated



Have a Vision

Lightroom: white balance, tonal adjustments, crop, rotate, adjustment brush, gradient fill





Have a Vision

Lightroom: white balance, tonal adjustments, crop, rotate, adjustment brush, gradient fill

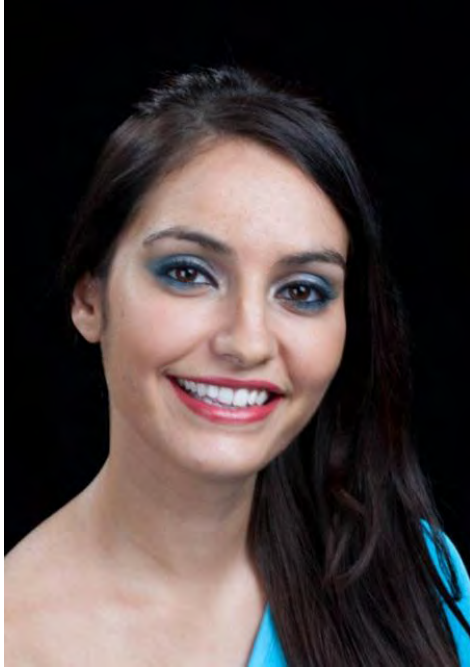




Decide What Needs Fixing

Photoshop: liquify filter around waist,
on her right hip,
slight breast augmentation





Your Vision May Take You Far

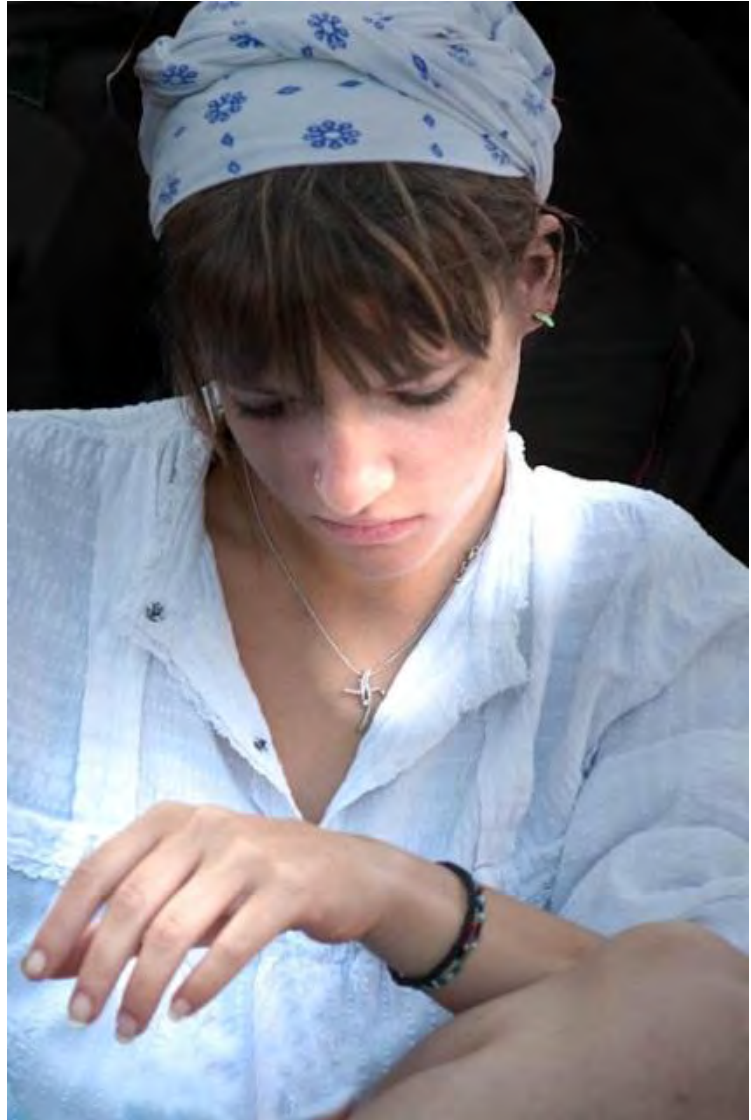
Lightroom: tonal control, blemish reduction, crop. Photoshop: wrinkle reduction, skin smoothing, head and facial sculpting, mouth and lip reconstruction, make up and dress color change.





Street Photos Can Become Dramatic

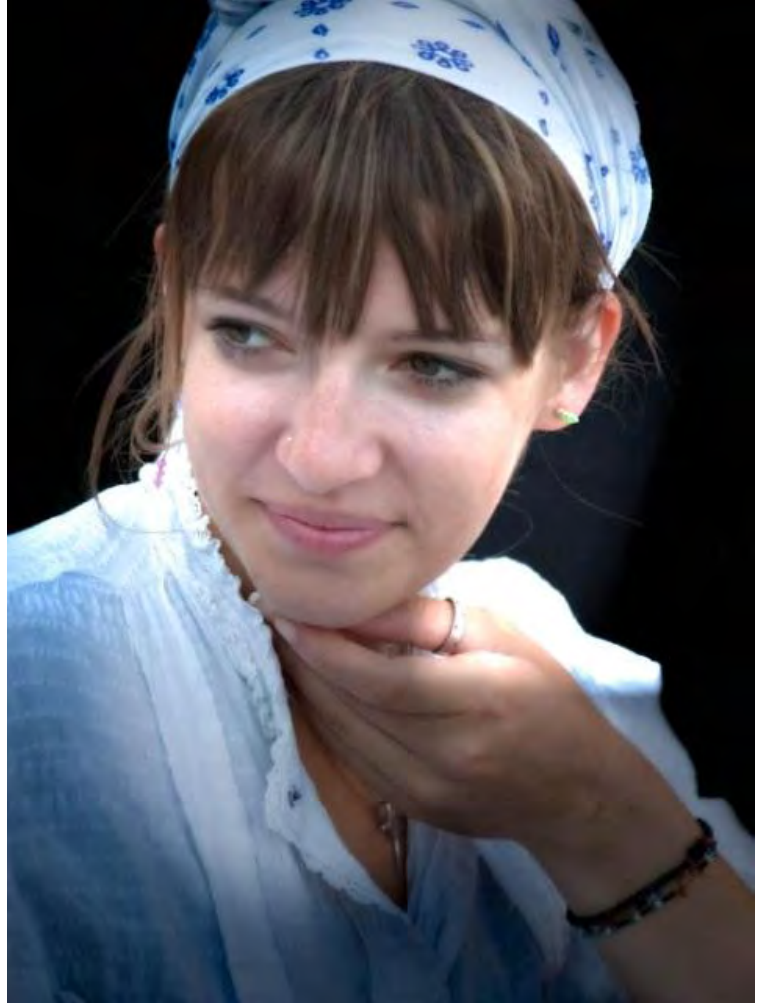
Street shot. Photoshop: remove bottle, minor tonal adjustment, lighting effects for a beam of light look.





Street Photos Can Become Dramatic

Street shot. Photoshop: crop, minor tonal adjustment, clean background, lighting effects for a beam of light look.





Casual Shot to Portrait

This original yielded the cover photographs. Edited version is below.





Photoshop is Gender-Neutral

Male portraiture will benefit from suitable and creative post-processing.

