

Photoshop Elements SIG - January 11, 2006
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Emphasizing Color

We have all taken pictures that turned out very dull. The question is, what can we do to "punch" them up? That's what this month's write-up is all about. This month we will focus on how to use Selections to add color and a little drama to our pictures.

Photo #1

Here is a photo of a foggy day in a neighborhood. There are two things of interest: the haze and the stop sign.

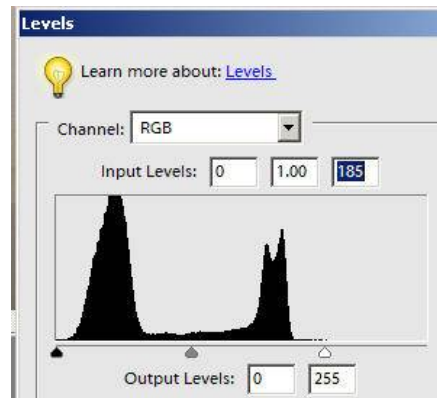


The first thing I want to do is crop the picture to eliminate the distracting foreground. To start, I save the file as a PSD file, and then crop. Here's what I get.



Now I want to add some intensity to the left side of the picture to balance out the foggy

area on the right. I make a copy of the background layer and rename that layer "stop sign". Then I choose the **Zoom tool** and zoom in on the stop sign to make it larger. I select the **Polygonal Lasso Tool** and click and drag around the outline of the stop sign until the red part of the stop sign is a Selection. To be able to use it more than once, I save the selection using **Select > Save Selection** and name the selection stop_sign. Now, with the **stop_sign selection still active**, I add a **Levels** layer to the picture and move the right triangle to the start of the data in the image.



For even more emphasis, I reload the "stop_sign" selection, and add a Hue/Saturation Layer with the Red Saturation at +50. This is the end result.



Photo #2

This is a photo of a yellow flower, growing through a sidewalk. The picture is very grey and dull. The goal is to add color to the flower and brighten the picture.



We first save a version as a PSD file and copy the background layer. Zoom in on the flower, and select the yellow flower and part of the upper stem using the Magic Wand Tool with the tolerance set to 30 and check marks in the anti-alias and contiguous boxes. Save that selection as "yellow_flower" using **Select > Save Selection**. With the selection still active, add a **Levels** layer and move the right hand triangle to the start of the curve. Then continue inside the leading upper edge of the curve until the flower is a brilliant yellow, but not so much that it washes out the detail of the flower. That brightens the flower. That looks pretty good, but we need to do one more thing to bring out the flower

Click on the copy of the background layer and select the tool for the **Elliptical Marquee**. Set the tolerance for 20 pixels and drag an ellipse around the flower and its stem. The tolerance setting can vary depending on the actual photo you are modifying.



To help isolate the flower from the background, we invert the selection using **Select > Inverse**. Then choose **Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur** with a Radius of 15 pixels. Trim away the extraneous material using the **Crop Tool** set to 8" x 10" and we have our final picture.

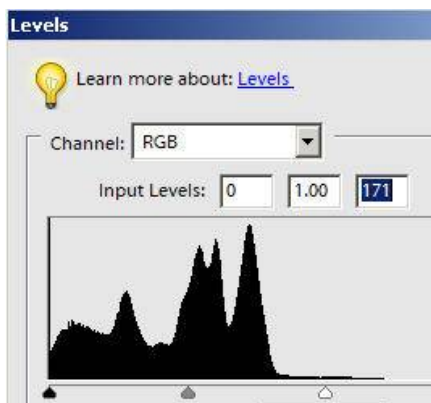


Photo #3

This one is fun and the end result is a surprise. Here is a photo of a Home Depot store on another grey day.

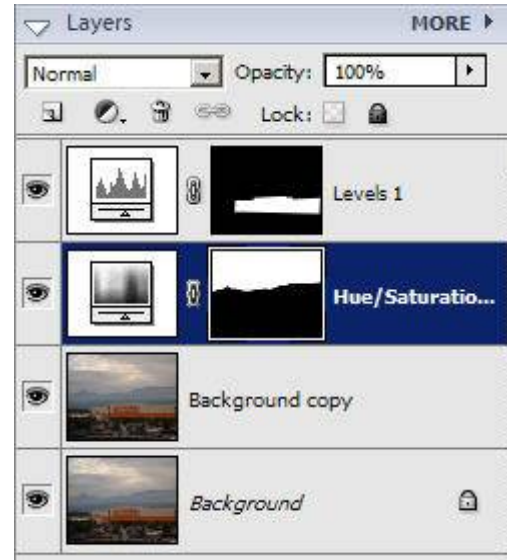


Save a copy as a PSD file and create a copy of the background layer. Then use the Polygonal Lasso Tool to select the outline of the upper portion of the Home Depot store. Save that selection using **Select > Save Selection** and make it "home_depot". To add some punch, add a **Levels** layer and move the white triangle part way down the start of the ramp on the right.



Next, use the **Magnetic Lasso Tool** to outline the sky above the mountains. Fill in the selection at the corners of the photo using the **Rectangular Marquee Tool** in the "Add to selection" mode.

With the selection still active, add a **Hue/Saturation** layer and increase the Saturation to + 60. Your layers palette will look like this.



The final image has some pop and color, and is shown below.



So the bottom line is: use selections to add color and punch to your photos. Experiment on your own, and have fun.



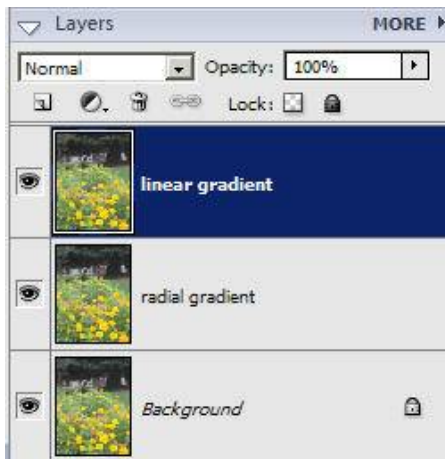
Addendum:

Photo #4

Gradients can add emphasis to your composition. The centerpiece of this photograph is the grouping of marigolds.



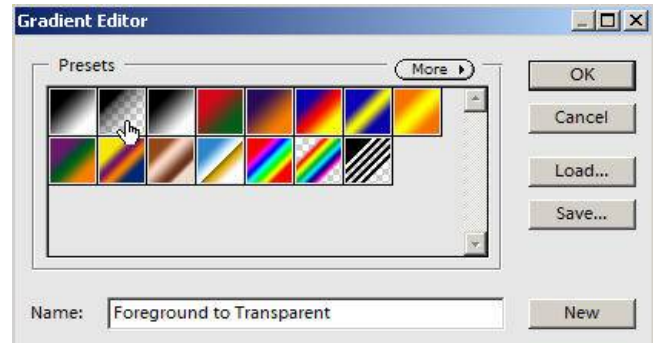
The background is fairly diminished, and we could settle for the picture as taken. But of course we won't. First we save a copy as a PSD file and then we copy the background layer twice. Name the first copy "linear gradient" and the second copy "radial gradient". Your layers palette will look like :



We need to work on copies of the background layer because using gradients changes the images on the layers. (Of course, if we applied the gradients to an Elemask, we could preserve the layers. That's for another time.) Select the Gradient Tool from the tool bar on the left, and click on the Edit button next to the picture of the Gradient in the options bar.



After the edit window opens, we need to select the Foreground to Transparent gradient from the gradient presets. You don't need to worry about the rest of the edit window; just click OK.



Now, look at your gradient options bar again. Be sure the icon is highlighted for Linear Gradient (it is the first icon in the group of five). Also, you should have Normal Mode, 100% Opacity, and check marks beside Dither and Transparent (these are the gradient default selections).

Now, turn off the visibility of your "radial gradient" layer and click on the layer you renamed "linear gradient" to make it the active layer. Crosscheck that your Foreground and Background colors are Black & White (type D to recapture the default colors). OK, after all that setup we are ready

to apply the gradient. Since we have a linear gradient that will go from Foreground color (which is black) to transparent, we should expect that where we start the gradient on the picture will be black, but the picture will begin to appear as the gradient is applied across the picture until the entire picture is showing after we stop the gradient. Since we want the trees at the top of the picture to "disappear", we will first click on the screen at the top of the picture and drag the gradient down to around halfway in the picture, where we want the flowers to be fully visible. Here's what the picture will look like after we apply the gradient.



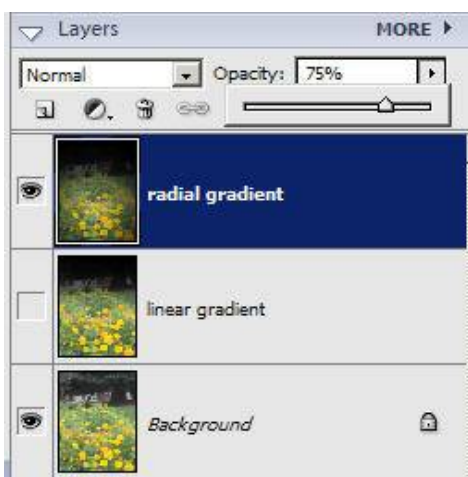
If you don't like the way it looks, just **Ctrl + Z** to undo and reapply the gradient and drag the end of the gradient to another position on the picture.

Now, we will set up for the radial gradient. Go to the options bar for the gradient and

select the second icon, radial gradient. Then turn off the visibility of the "linear gradient" layer and turn on the visibility of the "radial gradient" layer. Click on the "radial gradient" layer to make it the active layer. The radial gradient will give us a smooth transition from the start of where we begin our drag out to the completion of the gradient on the picture. The center of focus should be the center of the marigold bed, towards the bottom of the picture. Click on that center and drag your gradient all the way to the top of the picture. UGH! That's not what we want! The picture is now totally dark at the center of the marigold bed and transitions to show the picture at the borders radially where we are trying to hide the picture. No sweat. That's easy to solve. Look at the options bar for the gradient tool. Put a check mark beside the word Reverse. Now as you click and drag, the gradient will transition from transparent to black.



This is pretty good, but we can actually make it better. Note how the picture fades totally into black before we get to the top of the picture. That's not very attractive. To overcome the totality of the gradient, lower the Opacity of the "radial gradient" layer to around 75%. Since you still have the visibility on for the background layer, the background layer begins to show through and gives a better definition to the picture. Let's stop here. This is the layer set.



If you want to experiment, make another copy of the background layer and apply different gradients to that layer. Have fun.

And this is the final picture.