



Faster portrait enhancement History Brush a la mode

When we converted our portrait studio to digital, we were confident with our film and traditional photographic art enhancement tools.

Converting to digital forced us to find new ways to accomplish the photographic corrections and enhancements that we had done for years. We are constantly learning and looking for new means to become more efficient at these tasks. This is the story of how we got to know Adobe Photoshop's blending modes and the History Brush. It is excerpted from the "Wackers' Digital Cookbook and CD," which show how we apply them to portraits for highlight and shadow enhancements and artistic oil painting effects.

We tried many of the commercial digital techniques in Photoshop, most of which required making careful selections, masks, numerous layers, and more. Then we'd apply various adjustments at different settings, edit the selections, and finally tweak the adjustments until everything looked good. This process works, but people come in fairly complex shapes, and skin tones and clothing shades vary widely. What used to take minutes to adjust would take many minutes, hours even, to digitally correct. Not exactly the improvement we'd hoped for.

Then, we met the Mode family. Photoshop's tools and layers have settings called blending modes (Figure 1) that control how the pixels in the image are



Figure 1

affected. They are found on the Options bar for the tools and at the top of the Layers palette. We'll focus on using the tool blending modes here. One Mode family member is Normal. Some can be obnoxious (Color Burn & Vivid Light). Some are pretty laid back (Hue). Some are just plain weird (Difference & Exclusion). One is monotonous (Luminosity), and some are practical (Lighten & Darken). Now, we feel that blending modes are the single most important settings for a portrait photographer to learn for efficiently correcting and enhancing their images. These adjustments help reduce the touch-up process from minutes to seconds.

Beyond Normal, the Lighten, Darken, and Hue blending modes were our first favorites, and the most straightforward. For example, if you use the Clone Stamp in the Lighten mode, only the parts of the target area that are darker than the parts of the source area will be lightened (vice versa for Darken). This is quicker and yields much more

natural results than using Normal only. Using the Brush tool in the Hue mode with carefully selected colors quickly and accurately corrects unwanted discoloration in areas such as skin, without having to make time-consuming selections and masks. We developed our own batch of swatches for flesh tones, teeth, and lip colors, which we call Jean's Digital Makeup Kit.

The Multiply and Screen modes are the stronger twins of Darken and Lighten, respectively. When applied at low opacity (less than 20%) to portraits, they are very effective in building highlights and shadows. Tools that have the blending mode option know color. As a tool is applied in Multiply or Screen mode, the color base is accurately maintained, as opposed to the muddy monotone results of applying Dodge and Burn, which don't have a Mode pull-down in the Options bar. The Brush tool works well for adding density to shadows or brightening highlights, but you must be careful to use the best foreground color to match the existing flesh tones.

We discovered the History Brush has Mode settings as well. This discovery has saved us a significant amount of time, and has improved the accuracy of our image enhancement, because, if properly wielded, the History Brush magically knows the base coloring, shading, brightness and more about the image. It makes the difficult selections for you. The process is so easy that it's almost too good to be true.

Step 1: Building highlights

Before brightening highlight areas, complete all retouching and color correction. Go

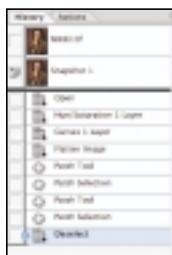


Figure 2

to the History palette and click the camera icon at the bottom to create a new snapshot. Click the box to the immediate left of the new snapshot so that the History Brush icon appears in it (Figure 2).

If you skip these instructions or do not complete them accurately, blemishes and color problems may reappear. Choose the History Brush (Y) from the Tool palette, pick an appropriately sized, soft-edged brush, change its mode to Screen (shift-opt/alt-S) and set the opacity to 5%-10%. Look at the direction of the main light source and simply brush in highlights to enhance the existing light areas as needed (e.g., the Rembrandt patches on the cheeks, along the side and tip of the nose, the chin under the lip, and sometimes along the tips of the upper lip and along the vertical grooves between the nose and the lips (the "angel's touch"). Be careful not to over-brighten the highlight areas. Watch the Info palette RGB values. We generally aim for red values of about 220 for diffused flesh tone highlights on Caucasian skin. You can also use this technique to enhance the eyes by adding catch lights and crescent glows, and to brighten the whites, but not all the way to the top lids.

Step 2: Building shadows

Follow the method above for building highlights, but use the History Brush in the Multiply mode (shift-opt/alt-M) in the shadow areas. Look at the direction of the light and brush to darken existing medium or dark areas (e.g., the shadow side of the face on the cheeks and forehead, especially near the hair, along the side of the nose, and the pupil of the eye). Be careful not to over-darken shadows; none of the RGB values should fall below 10. If you created a snapshot for building highlights on an image, you can use the same snapshot for the shadows. (Figure 3)



Figure 3



Figure 4

Step 3: Oil paint effects

Taking the magic of the History Brush one step further, we use it to create a line of fine art portraiture with the look of oil paintings. Build your facial highlights and shadows as described above, but continue to enhance the entire image with the History Brush, following the highlights in Screen mode, the shadows in Multiply mode. For clothing (especially silk, satin



and velvet), props, background, and other scene elements, approach the work in a paint-by-number fashion (the History Brush opacity may need to be increased to as much as 40%). (Figure 4)

To finish the image, select the Smudge tool (R) set to the Lighten mode, Opacity=50%, and check or uncheck the Finger Painting box on the Tool Options bar. Smudge with various brush sizes and

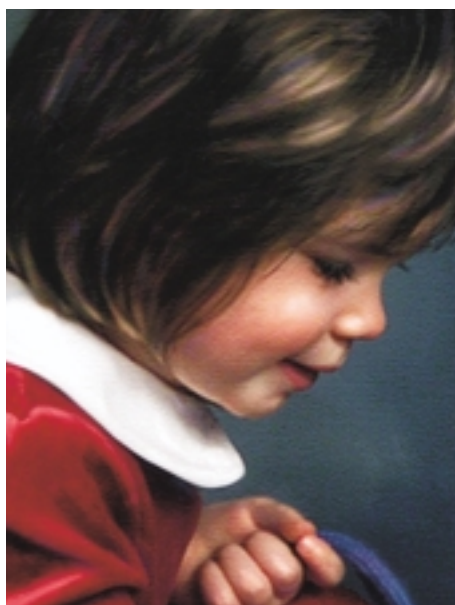


Figure 5

shapes to move detail around and create a "brushy" oil-painted look. (Operating systems react differently. Use the setting that blends the image colors with each other, without adding the foreground color. Adding new colors may create a more impressionistic look, which you may like, especially for medium- to high-key images.)

To further enhance the painterly effect,

you can add a texture to the image, such as canvas (Filter>Texture>Texturizer: Canvas). Add texture to a copy layer and then adjust the layer's opacity to make the effect more realistic. (Figure 5) □

The Wackers—Dave, Jean, and J.D.—are the owners of Photography by J.D., a full-service, 100-percent digital, family portrait studio in Clintonville, Wis. Known as "The Family" of photographic instructors, the Wackers are Kodak-sponsored speakers. Go to www.photobyjd.com and click on "For Photographers." to see their current speaking schedule.