

CLIP NO MORE

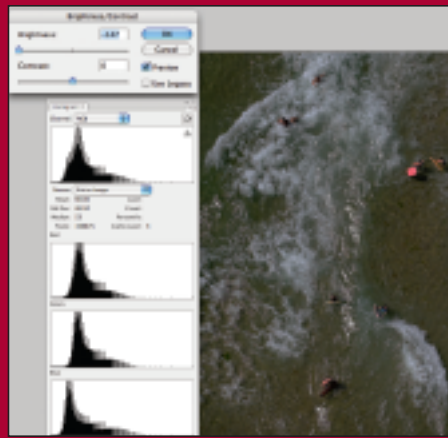
Brightness/Contrast adjustment tool in Photoshop CS3 works without blasting your bits.

One of the least understood and most misused tools in Photoshop has been the Brightness/Contrast image adjustment (Image > Adjustments or Layers > Image Adjustments). As Martin Evening pointed out in "Adobe Photoshop CS2 for Photographers," the control should have been called the "how to ruin your brightness and contrast image adjustment." Its name seemed to imply that it worked like the Levels adjustment, and it sort of did, but in a crude way. Unlike Levels, it would severely clip shadow and highlight detail.

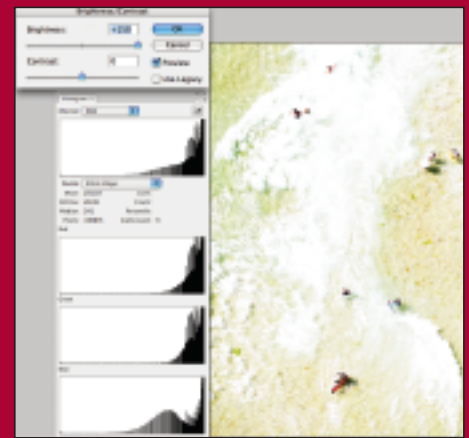
The way the Brightness control made the image lighter or darker was to simply force all of the pixels to shift. The Contrast slider evenly moved the Input Levels sliders inward to increase contrast, or evenly moved the Output Levels sliders inward to decrease it. In every case, the move destroyed image detail, even in 16-bits-per-channel mode.

CS3's new and improved Brightness/Contrast adjustment tool still lets you work that way, if you choose, by clicking on the Legacy option, but my advice is *don't*. Brightness now works by adjusting only the white point, while preserving the black point and the distribution of shadow tones. The new Contrast slider adjusts both the black and white points to either expand or compress the image's contrast range. This method is far less destructive. You can still clip the dickens out of an image, but you have to work a lot harder to do it.

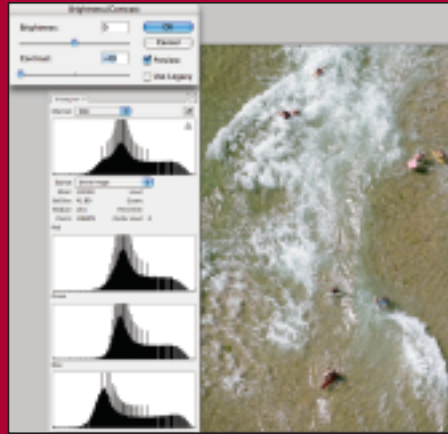
If you're an experienced Photoshop user, this tool still won't be a substitute for the more precise control of tonal relationships you have with Levels and Curves. But for newer users, it's an intuitive introduction to using a histogram to understand tonal relationships. —Ellis Vener



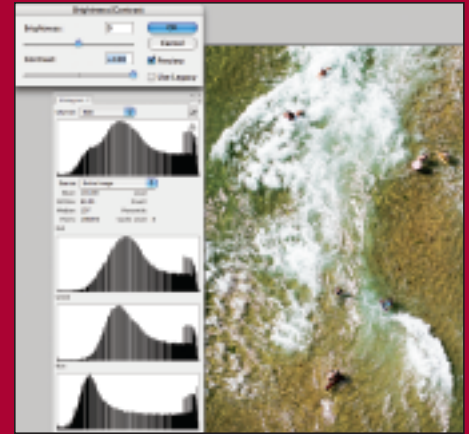
Brightness -150 in Photoshop CS3



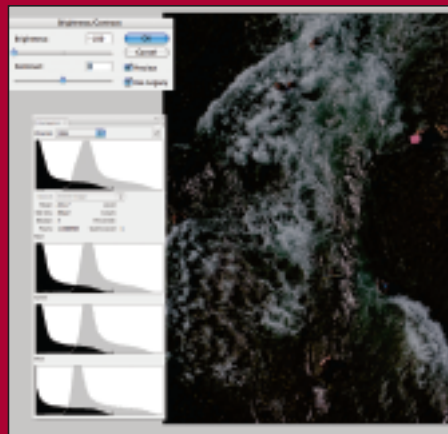
Brightness +150 in Photoshop CS3



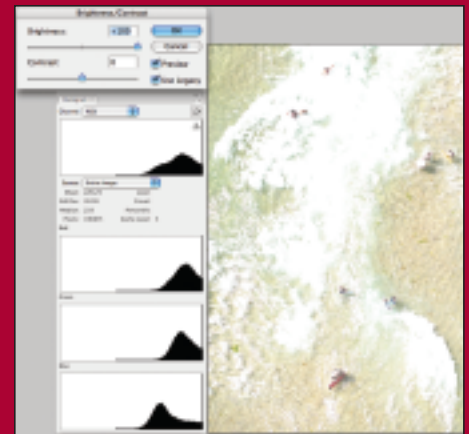
Contrast at -49 in Photoshop CS3



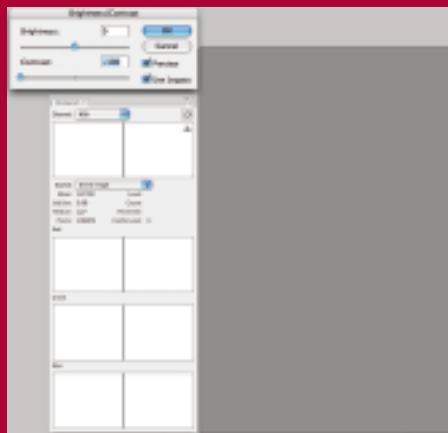
Contrast at +100 in Photoshop CS3



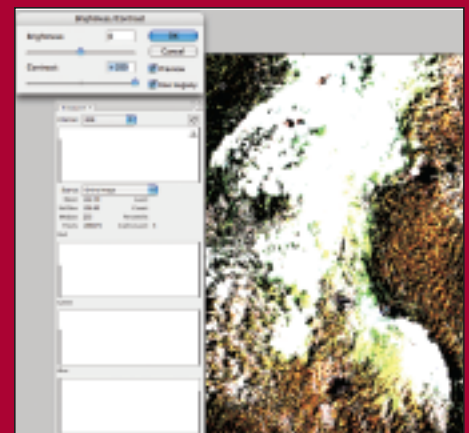
Legacy brightness control at -100



Legacy brightness control at +100



Legacy contrast at -100



Legacy contrast at +100