



## **Smoothing and Fixing Skin**

- 1) Open the image and duplicate the layer.
- 2) With the duplicate layer active select "image", "adjustments" and then the "Shadow/Highlight" Tool. When the toolbox opens set the shadows to 30%, the shadow tonal width to 60 and the shadow radius to 35. Then set the highlights to 10%, the highlight tonal width to 40, and the radius at 30 (that is the default in PS I think). Also in this toolbox set the color correction to -10 and the midtone contrast to -20. Then click okay.
- 3) Duplicate the shadow/highlight layer and work on this duplicate copy. Select "filter", then "other", then high pass. Set the high pass filter to 4 and click okay. Change the layer blending method to screen and the opacity to 30%, then merge this layer with the layer below (make sure you only merge this layer and the shadow/highlight layer - you want to leave your original layer alone.)
- 4) Duplicate the resulting layer and work on this for removing the larger spots. This will be a combination of heal/fade or clone/fade. You'll find some areas (in this image specifically the area of the forehead along the outside) will become either gray or green using the healing tool, so in these areas you'll want to switch to the clone tool. The tools were set at about 45 pixels in size, and smaller for areas around the mouth.

When cloning/healing be careful not to clone over the hairline. Any work at the hairline should be done with a small brush size and the image zoomed in to 200% so you can clone/heal just the areas that are necessary.

Once you've completed this to your satisfaction you can move onto the next stage.

## **Restoring Colour and Contrast**

5) This instruction is likely to have PS experts yowling, but it is the easiest way to handle this without a lot of time. For some images it won't work - particularly images that have a lot of areas of colour similar to the facial tones, but if you've evened out the overall facial tones, it should work well enough. I used it on this image satisfactorily.

Using the magic wand (yes I know, not the best selection tool in the box but it works for this purpose) set to "antialias", tolerance 50 and make sure contiguous is deselected.

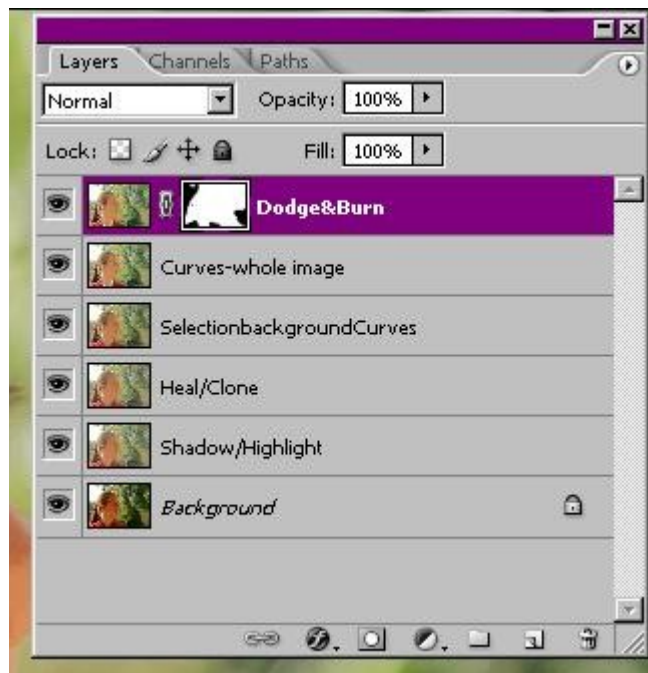
Then choose the "select" menu and select "inverse" - this reverses the selection so that you actually have selected everything except the face.

6) With the selection still active choose "image", "adjustments" and "curves" (or levels if you don't have a curves function). Adjust the curves of the image to restore colour and contrast to everything but the face. Then deselect.

7) Duplicate the layer and do another curves or levels adjustment, this time on the entire image.

The two separate curves processes allow you to restore the contrast using the dark, mid and light tones to the background, without re-darkening the face (that was the first curves step shown in #6). That may not be a necessary step if the original image does not have a lot of shadowing or is not underexposed.

8) Duplicate that layer (we're almost there) and select the layer mask button from the layer palette. Click on the mask on the palette (it will show beside the image thumbnail) so that you are working on the mask. Use this layer (if necessary) to dodge and burn.



If you want to reserve this for later, then flatten the image at step 7 instead.

From this point, you can post-process the image however you choose to. Keep in mind though, that when you start with an image that is underexposed or has a lot of shadows, there is likely to be some noise evident after processing. Sharpening will the entire image will increase any noise or artifacts. If there are areas you just need to sharpen, use a selective sharpening process rather than over the entire image.

This sample image was provided by Kathy Burns-Millyard. The girl in the photo is her lovely daughter. Many thanks to both of you.



Stage 1 begins with the original UNEDITED photo  
The technique can be made easier and less time consuming  
by making sure exposure is correct at the photograph  
stage, and avoiding as many shadows as possible.  
Using a reflector can be helpful at this stage.



Stage 2 takes you to the point where you have evened  
out the shadows and highlights and cloned away  
imperfections in the skin.



Stage 3 is where you restore colour and contrast.  
At this point the tutorial concludes, and your own  
processing choices take over - you can now repair  
colour balance, or add a boost to your colour and  
other processing procedures you would normally do.



The final image using my own processing.  
This image will look different when you  
follow your own methods - since the result  
you want will be your own choices.

## General

This tutorial was created to help with portraits where the person has a lot of facial discolouration or other skin issues where you'd like to reduce that prominence and even out the skin tones. Skin that has a few minor blemishes doesn't require this type of correction. Simple healing or cloning should handle it.

If you begin with a properly exposed photo, a number of the steps in this tutorial can be avoided, like shadow/highlight. In this case, it was used to create an image that reduced the shadow more than anything else.

If you want to add saturation to specific areas, use the sponge tool, making sure it is set to "saturate".

There are a number of other processes that smooth out skin with only slight issues - a skin paint technique can be used.

There are as many skin-fix techniques as there are photographers - most of them very good, and some of them a lot easier than this tutorial. This one avoids the use of blur tools, and is meant for images that are soft, or less sharp. While it will work on sharp images if you can use a less time-consuming method to get the same result, then you should. For most photographers and photo editors, time is money - the less time you spend 'fixing' photos, the more time you have to take photos.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [tutorials@photographyofgrace.com](mailto:tutorials@photographyofgrace.com)

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