

PHOTOSHOP TUTORIAL: DIGITAL DARKROOM TECHNIQUES

STEP BY STEP TRAINING

Learn by doing step by step exercises.

Includes downloadable class files that work on Mac & PC.

EDITION 1



AUTHORIZED
Training Center

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Table of Contents

INFO & EXERCISES

SECTION 1

Exercise 1A: Photoshop Tutorial: Digital Darkroom Techniques 5

Topics: Adding selective focus by blurring shadows & highlights

Correcting color casts & re-interpreting color

Adjusting lighting & shadows

Advanced selection techniques

And much more!

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Noble's Other Workbooks 15

Photoshop Tutorial: Digital Darkroom Techniques

Exercise Preview



Exercise Overview


In this exercise you'll transform an ordinary photo into something more memorable with a sense of magical light, subtle organic/painterly textures, and three-dimensionality through tonal and color changes, as well as selective focus.

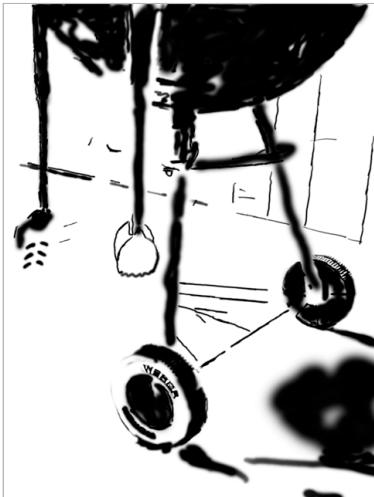
Getting Started

NOTE: These instructions were written for Photoshop CC 2017 but should work the same or similarly in recent versions of Photoshop.


1. To download the files you'll use in this exercise, go to:
nobledesktop.com/goodies
2. Under **Photoshop Digital Darkroom Techniques**, click the **Class Files** button to download the compressed files.
3. Once the file is downloaded and uncompressed you should have a folder named **DigitalDarkroomFiles** containing two images: **bbq.psd** and **bbq-finished.jpg**.
4. In Photoshop, go to **File > Open**.
5. Navigate to the **DigitalDarkroomFiles** folder and open **bbq-finished.jpg**.
This is a flattened version of how the finished image will look.
6. Close it after you've had a good look.
7. Go to **File > Open**.
8. From the **DigitalDarkroomFiles** folder, open **bbq.psd**.
9. Choose **View > Fit on Screen** to make the photo fill the screen.

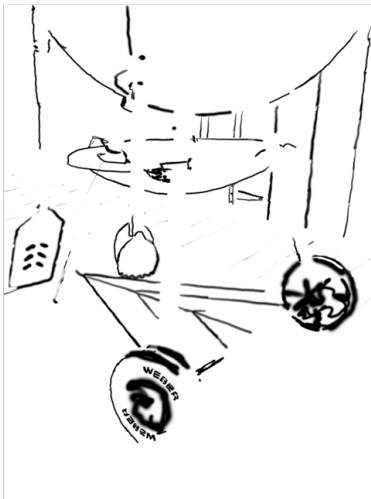
Adding Selective Focus by Blurring Shadows & Highlights

1. To select the top half of the image's histogram (midtones through highlights), press **Cmd-Option-2** (Mac) or **Ctrl-Alt-2** (Windows).
2. We want the bottom half of the histogram (shadows through midtones), so invert the selection by hitting **Cmd-Shift-I** (Mac) or **Ctrl-Shift-I** (Windows). That's the letter i, not a 1.
3. Duplicate only the selected pixels to a new image layer by pressing **Cmd-J** (Mac) or **Ctrl-J** (Windows) (or choosing **Layer > New > Layer Via Copy**).
4. Name the new layer **blurred shadows**.
5. With the new layer selected, go to **Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur**.
6. Set the **Radius** to **2** to make a soft halo around the shadows.
7. Click **OK**.
8. To intensify the effect, change the layer's blending mode from **Normal** to **Overlay** (at the top left of the **Layers** panel).
9. Some of the shadows have become too dark. Choose **Layer > Layer Mask > Reveal All** to add a layer mask to the blurred shadows layer.
10. Choose the **Brush** tool  (press **B** to select the tool).
11. To bring back some of the lost shadow details, paint **black** (with a soft brush) to hide the blurred shadow areas where you want to preserve sharpness (e.g., around the "WEBER" letters on the foreground wheel and other areas of fine detail). Use the example below as a rough guideline.



12. Lets do the same type of selective blurring for the highlights. Hide the **blurred shadows** layer.

13. Press **Cmd–Option–2** (Mac) or **Ctrl–Alt–2** (Windows) to select the top half of the image's histogram.
14. Select the **Background** layer.
15. Hit **Cmd–J** (Mac) or **Ctrl–J** (Windows) to copy the selected pixels to a new layer.
16. Name the new layer **blurred highlights**.
17. Move the **blurred highlights layer** so it's the top layer.
18. With the new layer selected, choose **Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur**.
19. Set the **Radius** to **2** and click **OK**.
20. To slightly lessen the overall effect, reduce the layer's **Opacity** to **80%**.
21. Choose **Layer > Layer Mask > Reveal All** to add a layer mask to the blurred highlights layer.
22. Show the **blurred shadows** layer.
23. Select the **blurred highlights** layer mask.
24. Use the **Brush** tool  with **black** paint to hide the blurring in areas where you want to preserve sharpness. Using the example below as a rough guideline, we suggest keeping the background elements blurred (wooden deck, wall, door) to effectively make the sharp foreground elements stand out.



Why Two Blur Layers?

Splitting the blur across two layers gives us more creative control (we can independently change opacity and blend modes). If both layers are the same opacity and blend mode, the entire image would be blurred equally (so we would not need two different layers).

Re-Interpreting the Overall Colors in the Image

1. Select the topmost layer.
2. Choose **Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Color Balance**.
3. Name it **overall color** and click **OK**.
4. In the **Properties** panel, set the following:
 - Change the **Tone** menu to **Shadows** and enter these 3 values: **+4, 0, +22**
 - Change the **Tone** menu to **Midtones** and set them to **+29, -4, -11**
 - Set **Highlights** to **+13, 0, -41**
 - Make sure **Preserve Luminosity** is checked.

NOTE: Why are we using Color Balance (as opposed to Curves, Levels, etc.)? We felt the visual feedback of its sliders make it easier for people to learn, and it gives us enough control. Curves could do the same type of adjustment, and can even give us some additional control, but it's not as intuitive when getting started.

5. The layer mask thumbnail of the color balance layer you just added should currently be selected. To add some texture to this adjustment layer's mask, choose **Filter > Noise > Add Noise** and set the following:

Amount: **50%**

Distribution: **Gaussian**



6. Click **OK**.
7. Let's make the texture more subtle and organic. Go to **Filter > Filter Gallery**.
8. Choose **Brush Strokes > Angled Strokes** and set:
 - Direction Balance: **75**
 - Stroke Length: **33**
 - Sharpness: **1**

9. Click **OK**.

Giving the Greenish Wall & Slate a More Interesting Color

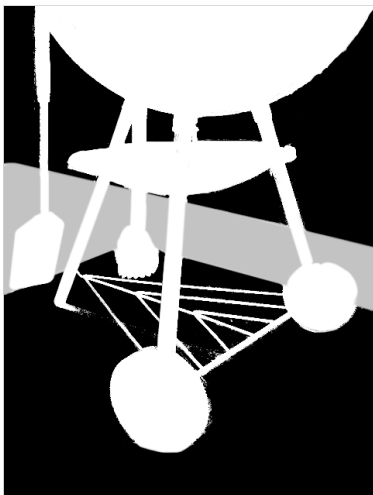
1. Select the **Background** layer (otherwise the selection we are about to make could accidentally alter the mask of another layer).

Photoshop Tutorial: Digital Darkroom Techniques

2. Selecting the slate floor slab and the wall slats (without selecting much of the floor planks) will be a bit tricky because the floor planks are a similar color. Go to **Select > Color Range** and:
 - Set **Fuzziness** to **48**.
 - Click the eyedropper on the green door in the upper left corner.
 - Hold **Shift** and click the eyedropper on the slate floor and the wall slats to the right of the grill. **Shift-click** in additional places as needed. This selection won't be perfect, but we'll adjust it manually next.
3. Click **OK**.
4. Double-click the **Quick Mask Mode** button  at the bottom of the Toolbar to bring up the Quick Mask Options.
5. Set **Color Indicates** to **Selected Areas** and click **OK**.
6. You should now be in **Quick Mask Mode**. If not, click the button to switch into **Quick Mask Mode**.
7. Choose the **Brush tool**  and:
 - Paint **white** over any shadow areas of the grill (to remove it from the selection).
 - Paint **black** over any wall or slate areas (to add it to the selection).
 - Paint **50% gray** on the wood flooring so it will be partially selected. Use the example below as a rough guideline for the selection.


NOTE: As you paint you won't see white and black, you'll see the original image (not selected) or a color overlay (will be selected).

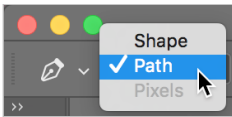
In the simplified example below, the **black** indicates **selected** areas, the **white** indicates **deselected** areas, **gray** is **partially selected**. (Your selection won't be as clean as this simplified example.)




8. Press **Q** to exit Quick Mask Mode.
9. Select the topmost layer.
10. Choose **Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Color Balance**.
11. Name the adjustment **green slate, door, wall** and click **OK**.
12. In the **Properties** panel, set the following:
 - **Shadows** to **+5, +3, 0**
 - **Midtones** to **+2, +23, 0**
 - **Highlights** to **-4, +8, 0**
 - Make sure **Preserve Luminosity** is checked.

Punching Up the Reds Latent in Bowl, Tools, & Rust on Lower Grill Bars

1. Press **P** to select the **Pen** tool .
2. In the **Options** bar at the top, choose the **Path** option as shown below. Instead of making a Shape Layer, this will create a path that we'll later turn into a selection.



3. Draw a path to encompass the bowl.
4. In the **Paths** panel, double-click the **Work Path** and rename it **red bowl** for later use.
5. With the **red bowl** path highlighted, at the top right of the **Paths** panel go into the **panel menu**  and choose **Make Selection**.
6. Set the following:
 - Feather Radius: **2 pixels**
 - Check on **Anti-aliased** (to soften the edge of the selection slightly).
7. Click **OK**.

8. Press **Q** to enter **Quick Mask Mode** and:

- With a medium-size brush set at low opacity, paint **black** (gray) over rusty parts of the tools. Refer to the example below as a rough guideline.
- With a small brush set at 50% opacity, **click** and then **Shift-click** on the struts to add them to the selection. Refer to the example below as a rough guideline.



9. Press **Q** to leave **Quick Mask Mode**.

10. Choose **Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Color Balance**.

11. Name the adjustment **reddish bowl, tools, & struts** and click **OK**.

12. In the **Properties** panel, set the following:

- **Shadows** to **+21, -3, -7**
- **Midtones** to **+35, -10, -17**
- **Highlights** to **+10, -13, -20**
- Make sure **Preserve Luminosity** is checked.

Brightening Some Elements

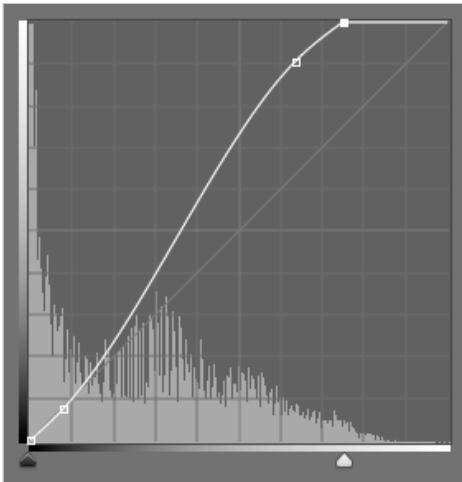
We want to add more emphasis to parts of the grill by brightening the red bowl, struts, foreground wheel's whitewall, and shadow sides of the hanging tools.

1. Press **Q** to enter **Quick Mask Mode**.

- Using the example below as a rough guideline, paint **black** (to select) over the bowl, tools, and wheels.



- Press **Q** to leave **Quick Mask Mode**.
- Choose **Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Curves**.
- Name the adjustment **brighten bowl, etc.** and click **OK**.
- In the **Properties** panel, brighten the highlights with a curve as shown below.




Balancing the Color Saturation


- Some colors have become over saturated. To adjust them, choose **Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Hue/Saturation**.
- Name the layer **balance color saturation** and click **OK**.

3. In the **Properties** panel, make sure **Colorize** is **not** checked and:
 - Set **Saturation** to **-40**.
 - From the menu that says **Master**, choose **Reds**.
 - Make **Saturation -5** and **Lightness +3**.
 - Change the menu to **Yellows** and make **Saturation +23** and **Lightness -15**.
 - Change the menu to **Blues** and make **Saturation +20**.
4. Too much of the tools' color saturation was lost. Paint **black** on the layer mask to give them back a more vibrant color. Refer to the example below as a rough guideline.




Adding Vignetting to Focus on the Subject

1. Choose the **Elliptical Marquee** tool .
2. Drag from the upper left to the lower right corner of the image.
3. Choose **Select > Select and Mask**. (This was called **Refine Edge** in older versions of Photoshop.)
4. Click on the **View** menu and double-click **On Black** so we get a better preview of how the effect will look.
5. Set **Opacity** to **100**.
6. Set **Feather** to **70**.
7. Click **OK**.
8. To invert the selection hit **Cmd-Shift-I** (Mac) or **Ctrl-Shift-I** (Windows).

9. **Cmd–Option–click** (Mac) or **Ctrl–Alt–click** (Windows) on the layer mask on the **reddish bowl, tools, & struts** layer to subtract those areas from the selection.
10. Choose **Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Curves**.
11. Name it **vignette** and click **OK**.
12. In the **Properties** panel, drag the **White Point** (at the top right) straight down to **Input 255/Output 138**. If you don't see the Input and Output values, you may have to resize the Properties panel, making it taller.
13. With the layer mask still selected, use the **Brush** tool  to mask out the vignetting on other foreground elements whose tones you want to preserve, like the hanging tools and wheels.
14. Your image should be looking good! Save and close the file.

Masking Tips

- When creating a mask select the parts of a layer you want to see. Then, when you click the **Add layer mask**  button in the **Layers** panel, you'll see what was selected and everything will be masked out (or hidden).
- **Shift–click** a mask thumbnail to disable it without throwing it away.
- **Option–click** (Mac) or **Alt–click** (Windows) a mask thumbnail to view only the mask, not the image.
- **Option–Shift–click** (Mac) or **Alt–Shift–click** (Windows) a mask thumbnail to view it as a shaded color overlay, much like a Quick Mask.
- Remove a mask by dragging the mask thumbnail to the trash. Photoshop will ask if you want to **Apply mask to layer before removing**. In most cases, you'll want to choose **Discard**, to throw away the mask without affecting the image layer. (If you click **Apply**, Photoshop will delete the areas of the layer that had been hidden by the mask.)

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