

CREATIVE TECHNIQUES #1: ADDING TEXTURES AND REPLACING SKIES BY MICHAEL SMYTH

In this tutorial we will look at some of the most common and creative techniques available to enhance images and add a touch of creativity to photography.

ISN'T THIS CHEATING ?

Manipulating images and using creative techniques to create images that reflect your vision of the world are nothing new and have been practised since the beginning of photography. In-camera double exposure can create similar effects to the texture technique and darkroom techniques that replace elements of an image have been used for well over a hundred years by skilled photographers. The new digital techniques arising from digital capture and processing have made these techniques more widely accessible. In other words, *no, it isn't cheating !*



Above: In-camera double exposure.



Above: Replaced sky or montage

TECHNIQUE #1 ADDING TEXTURES TO IMAGES

Note: for further information on some of the Photoshop techniques using layers, refer to the tutorial called ["Introduction to Layers"](#) available elsewhere on the Phototutor website.

Adding a texture to an image can often add a sense of age, character or abstraction to an otherwise traditional image.

To use this technique you will need suitable images to use as the base, or background for the photograph, plus a series of texture images to use as the textural element. Textures can be photographed from almost any background and can be macro images, close up images of small textures, or larger scale textures of walls, concrete, fabric or the like. The image should be evenly lit and equally in focus across the image area you intend to use. You can crop the texture image during processing to eliminate any unwanted elements or out of focus parts prior to opening the image.

To begin, first select your candidate image for the background and process the RAW file using your normal settings, to give a good sharp image. Open in Photoshop (or Photoshop Elements) using your default size. For best results open your image at the printer resolution – 360 dpi for Epson printers and 300 dpi for Canon and HP printers. Starting with an image at the correct size for printing will save resizing later.

TECHNIQUE #1 ADDING TEXTURES TO IMAGES continued

For this technique, it is desirable but not mandatory that the two images be similar in size. Therefore a small area of texture can be stretched to cover a larger background.

Secondly, choose your texture image, process, crop and open in Photoshop. You will have two images open and we will be adding the texture image as a layer on top of the background image.



Above: The background image

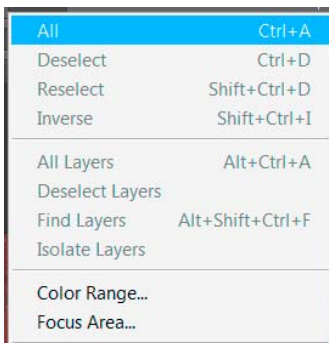


Above: the texture image to be used

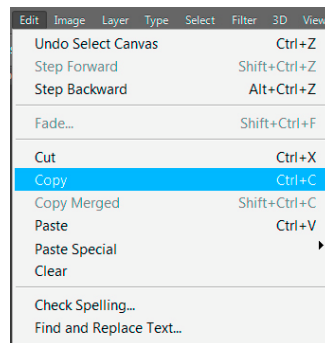
Next: Click on the texture image to make it active and go to the **Select** menu header and choose "**All**". You should see a line of "marching ants" (called a **Marquee**) around the perimeter of the image area. This shows that the image has been selected.

Next: go to the **Edit** menu header and choose "**Copy**". This copies the selected image to the clipboard.

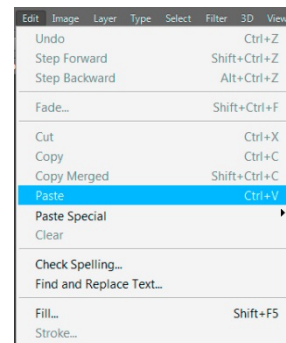
Next: click on the background image to make it active (or you can close the texture image as it is no longer needed). Now go to the **Edit** menu header and choose "**Paste**".



Select>All to make a selection of the texture image.



Edit>Copy makes a copy of the texture image



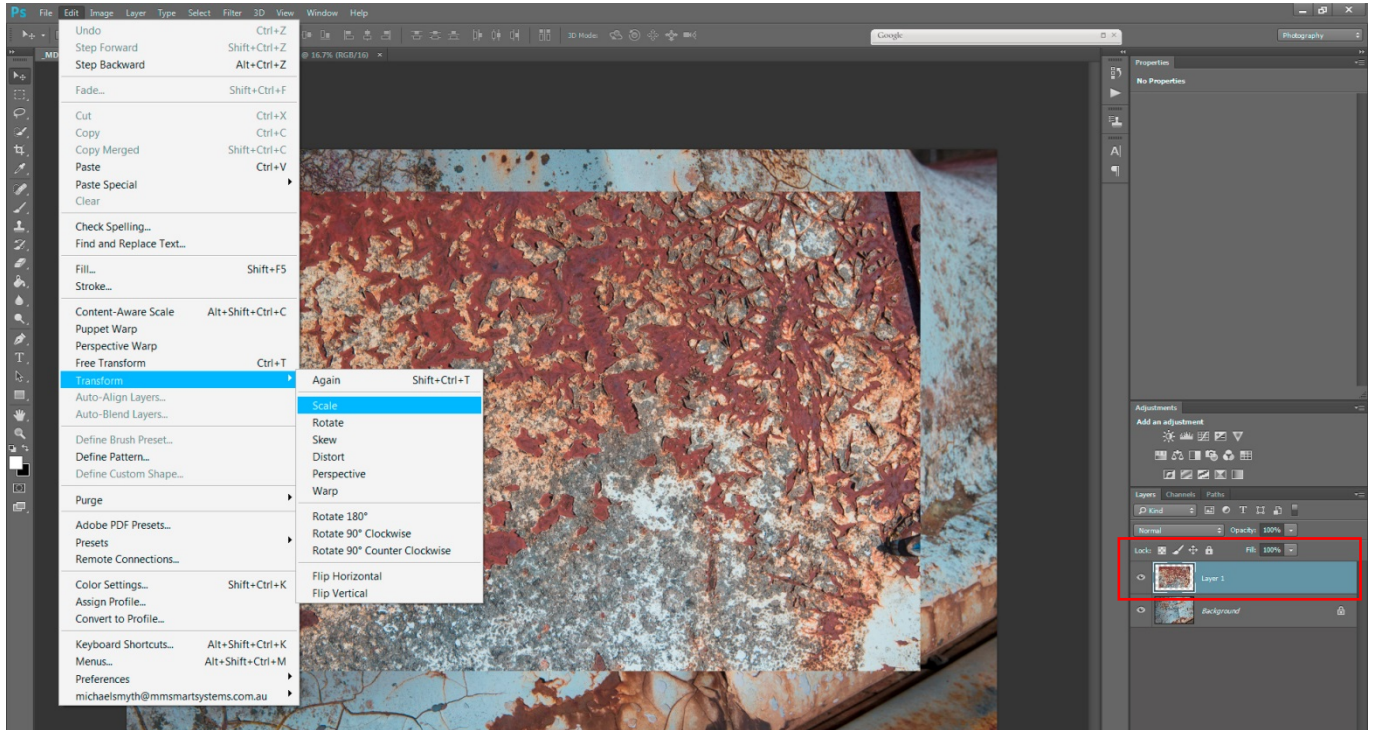
Edit> Paste adds the Selected copy as a new layer on top of the background image.

The background should now be totally obscured by the texture image. It might be that the texture layer is either larger or smaller than the background image. We will address this next.

If your texture image is larger or smaller than the background image we will need to resize it before proceeding. Check in your layers palette to see that the texture layer is selected – it will be highlighted. If you can't see the layers palette, go to the **Window** menu header and make sure that the "**Layers**" label is ticked.

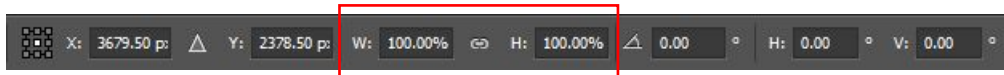
TECHNIQUE #1 ADDING TEXTURES TO IMAGES continued

Having checked that you have selected the texture layer, next go to the **Edit** menu header and choose "**Transform**" and then from the fly out menu, select "**Scale**" (see below).



Above: the **Edit>Transform>Scale** menu. Note at bottom right the texture layer is selected – i.e. highlighted.

With this option selected you have two options: (1) To retain the proportions of the texture layer, you will need to go to the contextual menu panel that will appear at the top of the image area. In between the boxes for "W" (width) and "H" (height) click on the chain symbol to lock the proportions together.



Above: The transform options panel.

If it is not required to lock the proportions together (it isn't always necessary), ignore the step above and go to the image area. You will see a **marquee** around the texture image area. At each corner and in the centre of each edge there are small "**handles**". Grab one of the corner handles (Click and hold with the left mouse button) and then drag the corner of the image until it reaches the corner of your background image. By default Photoshop will snap the image to the boundaries. Do this with each corner until the texture image covers the background image. (To turn on snap modes, go to **View>Snap to>** and tick **Document Bounds**)

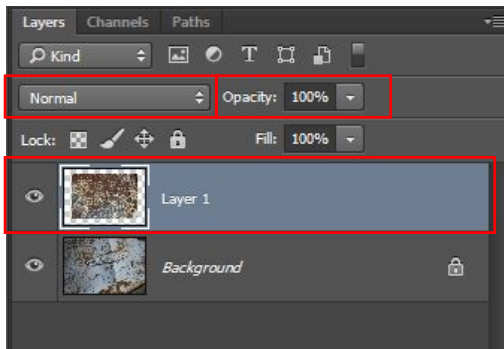
When complete, either hit the **Enter** key, or click on the tick icon in the options panel (later versions of Photoshop only). The texture image is now the same size as the background and we can now adjust the blending to complete the process.

To blend the texture with the background image we will use a combination of two layer adjustments:

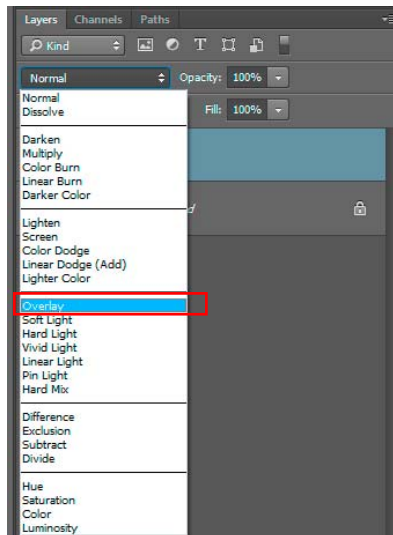
The Blend mode (which determines how the image information is combined with the background layer (see "[Introduction to Layers](#)" for a detailed explanation), AND The **Opacity** of the texture layer.

TECHNIQUE #1 ADDING TEXTURES TO IMAGES continued

To adjust the blending of the texture Layer, I suggest you start by using the "**Overlay**" blend mode. Make sure your texture layer is still selected (it will be highlighted in the layers panel). Then click on the drop down menu that will be labelled "**Normal**" (This is the default blend mode).



Far Left: Layers Palette with texture layer active and "**Normal**" blend mode.



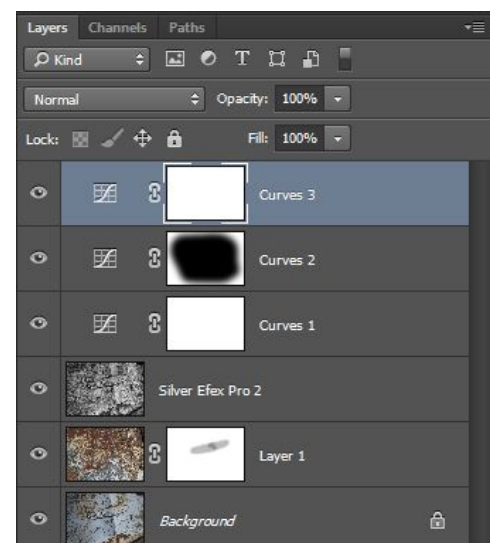
Left: Blend mode drop down menu and "**Overlay**" selected.

Having selected the "**Overlay**" Blend mode, part of your Background image will now be visible.

Next: to "fine tune" the blending, select the **Opacity** slider (located to the right of the Blend mode drop down menu). Slide the slider to the left, from 100% towards 0%. Note: 100% opaque means the top layer is fully opaque (depending on the blend mode) and 0% means it is completely transparent.

By choosing an opacity and selecting from a suitable blend mode (usually **Overlay**, **Soft Light** or **Hard Light**) will give the best results. Try different blend modes by clicking on the drop down menu and choosing one of the other methods. **You will need to adjust the opacity for each different blend mode.**

To refine the image, you can add a layer mask to the texture layer and paint black onto the mask with varying opacity to selectively apply where the texture is added. In the image below the name badge was partially masked to keep the lettering clear. (See "[Introduction to Layers](#)" for more details on applying and using masks).



Above: The final image using Overlay blend and showing the layers stack including special filters.

The image can be further refined with adjustment layers and special effect filters to personal taste. When complete, save as a Photoshop (.PSD) or TIFF file with layers intact to allow for future editing.

TECHNIQUE #2: REPLACING SKIES (OR OTHER ELEMENTS)

Often the image we capture has a poor or overcast sky that would benefit from adding a more dramatic element from another image. This technique dates back to the beginning of photography and has been made more accessible with modern digital processing techniques.

When selecting an alternative sky to add to an image it is important that the new sky is similar in lighting and colour temperature to the base image. Adding a sunset sky to a background obviously captured in the middle of the day is going to look very wrong. Likewise the direction of the lighting and shadows needs to be consistent.

To begin, first select your background image and a suitable sky to replace the original.



Above: Base image with a plain sky
Old church in Puerto Varas, Chile



Above: The sky and background to replace
the sky in the church image – note the different
Image orientation. Volcano Osorno in Southern Chile

The base image was taken in the morning with a strong side light illuminating from the left hand side of the building. The volcano and sky were photographed on another day in the same region, although this does not have any real relevance to the final image.

To begin: first process your images in your RAW processing software and include sharpening, noise reduction and other processing as you would for a normal image. Open both images in Photoshop (or Photoshop Elements).

Next, choose the background image – in this case the church. Duplicate the background layer by dragging the background layer to the new layer icon at the bottom of the layers palette.



Left: The new layer icon is the icon that looks like a folded over sheet of paper.

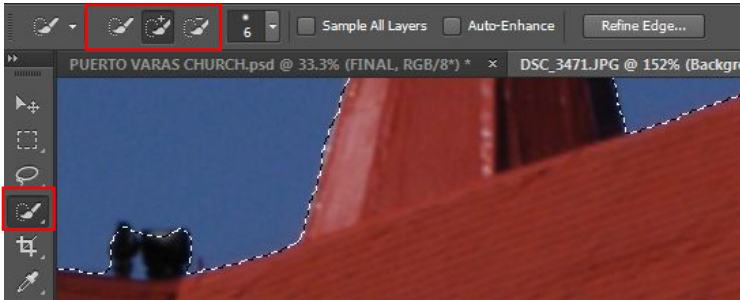
Alternatively, go to the **Layer** menu and choose **Layer>Duplicate Layer**, then click **OK** on the pop up menu box that asks you to name the new layer. By default it will be called "**Background copy**". This is fine for our purposes.

Note: Duplicating the background layer helps us by enabling us to have a copy of the background layer in case we need to repeat the step. **Advanced users can work directly on the Background layer.**

TECHNIQUE #2: REPLACING SKIES (OR OTHER ELEMENTS) continued

If working on the background layer and not working on a duplicate, first click on the padlock icon on the background layer (double click if using older versions of Photoshop) to enable editing of this layer.

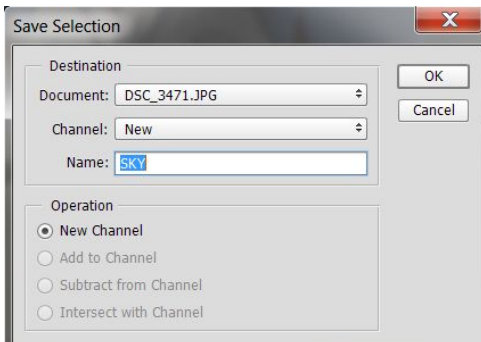
Next, we need to make a selection of the sky in our background layer so we can mask it out and allow our new sky to be visible. The most effective tool for making a selection of the sky is the **Quick Selection tool**. This is the tool that looks like a paintbrush with a dotted line around it.



Left: the **Quick Selection tool**. Use a small radius for more accurate selections and use the + or - brush buttons in the contextual toolbar at the top of the image to add to or subtract from the selection, in order to get a good selection.

Making an accurate selection is critical to the effectiveness of the process, so take time to get it right.

Once you have a good selection of the sky, make sure you save this selection for possible reuse by going to the **Select** menu and then **Save Selection**, (**Select>Save Selection**). In the pop up box, make sure that under Channel the word "**New**" is showing and in the Name box, type "**Sky**" or something else meaningful. Then click **OK** to save the selection.

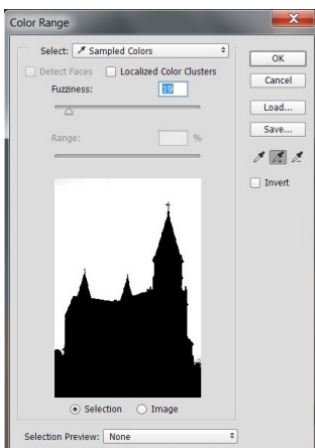


Left: The **Save Selection** menu box. This saves your selection in case you need to use it again. If you make further refinements to the selection (see below) you can re save this selection by repeating the steps above, except that instead of "**New**" as the Channel, click on the drop down menu and choose "**Sky**" as your previously saved selection. Ensure the option "**Replace Channel**" at the bottom of the box is selected.

You will need to refine the edge of the selection, depending on how clearly defined the boundary is between sky and the base of the image.

As an alternative method of making the selection, if your image has a clearly defined sky, you can use the **Select>Color Range** tool. This tool allows you to make a selection using the colour or tonal range in the image. This is effective where the sky is the only or majority part of the image that is blue. (*To see more on using the various selection tools, see the separate tutorial called ["Making Selections in Photoshop"](#) on the Phototutor website*)

Under the options, choose "**Selected Colors**" and select the + eyedropper. Set the "**Fuzziness**" slider to a low value – around 15 (this determines the range of colours outside of the selected colour that will be included in the selection). Use the + eyedropper and click on parts of the sky in the thumbnail view in the menu box. You will see progressively larger parts of the sky selected. Do not click on anything other than the sky, otherwise your selection will include other colours and you will have to select the - eyedropper to de select these areas.



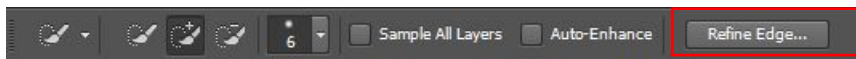
Note: regardless of which selection method you choose you will not be able to make a perfect selection without refining the selection.

Once you have a good selection, click OK and you will return to the image. You will now see the dotted line of the selection around the edge of the sky.

TECHNIQUE #2: REPLACING SKIES (OR OTHER ELEMENTS) continued

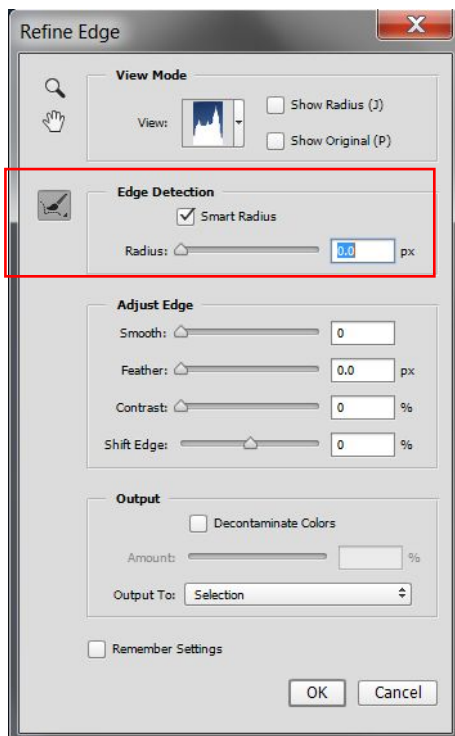
After making your selection, it will be necessary to refine the edge of the selection, in order to make it as seamless as possible.

With your selection active having used either the *Quick Selection tool* or the *Color Range* tool, first choose either the "*Quick Select*", "*Lasso*" or "*Rectangular Marquee*" selection tool to activate the contextual menu at the top of the image. Next, choose the "*Refine Edge*" tool by clicking on the box called "*Refine Edge*". *Note: if you are using an older version of Photoshop or Elements, you may not have this option – this is one of the many useful tool available in later versions of the software and is a good reason to upgrade.*



Left: The Selection contextual menu.

Once you have the "Refine Edge" menu activated, you will see a new menu box. Click on the option for "*Smart Radius*" and then zoom in on the edge of your mask to paint along the boundary of the selection.



Far Left: The Refine Edge dialogue box.

You can use the *Smart Radius* tool to refine the edge of your selection. Click on OK when completing a part to see the effectiveness. Click on *Refine Edge* again to continue.

Using the other tools allows fine control over the selection.

Use *Smooth* to smooth out jagged selections,

Use *Contrast* to increase the sharpness at the edge of the selection

Use *Feather* to soften the selection edge, or *Shift Edge* to move the edge of the selection inside or outside of the edge. When done, click OK and then re save the selection (as noted above).

Now we have the selection complete, except that the sky has been selected, when what we really want is everything else. To invert the Selection, go to **Select>Inverse**. This inverts the selection so that what we have selected is what we want to remain visible.

Next, with the selection still active on your background layer (or Background copy) click on the "*Add Layer Mask*" icon on the Layers palette to add a layer mask to the active layer.



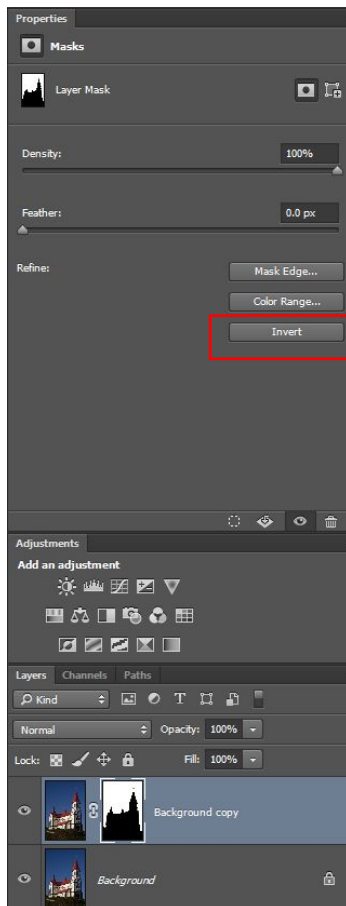
Left: The "*Add Layer mask*" icon - This is the rectangle with a black circle in the centre.

This loads the selection as a mask onto the active layer.

TECHNIQUE #2: REPLACING SKIES (OR OTHER ELEMENTS) continued

Once the layer mask is added to the layer, the sky should appear as black and the base of the image should be white (" *White conceals and Black Reveals is the mantra for using masks*").

We want our sky to show as black, so if the mask is the opposite way round, go to the properties tab, click on the mask icon and then choose "**Invert**" to reverse the masked areas. (This is in case you missed inverting the mask, as noted above).

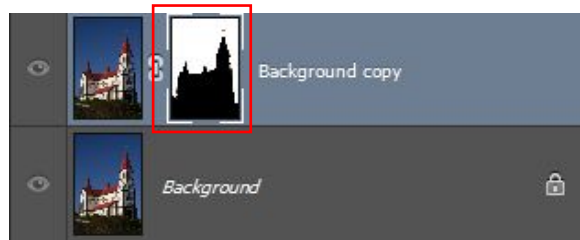


Left: The layers properties tab. Choose "**Invert**" to change white to black and black to white.

Once the selection has been loaded into the mask, you can access the **Refine Edge** tools directly from this panel, should you need to make further changes to the mask.

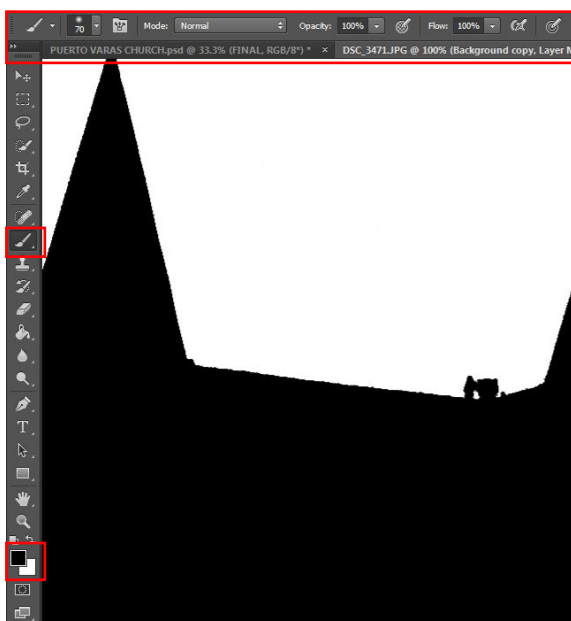
Note: You can also paint directly onto the mask in the layers palette using the brush tool and either black or white to add or remove parts of the mask, or even more simply, load the mask over the image for a more magnified view of the mask.

To load the mask over the image, first select the mask by clicking on the layer mask box next to the image thumbnail –this is the box showing black and white. When selected it will show a fine line around the mask icon.



Left: The layer mask selected – note the line around the icon.

To load the mask over the image, hold down the **Alt** key (Mac: Option) and with your mouse, click on the mask icon. The mask is now loaded over your image and will appear as a black and white.



To modify the mask, you will need to choose the brush tool and either black or white as the active colours from the left hand tools palette.

Left: The brush tool, the Foreground and background colours and the contextual menu.

Note that the opacity of the brush can be modified to make a partially masked area. To swap between black and white, use the "**X**" key.

When you have finished modifying the mask, if in fact you need to modify it further, move your mouse over the mask icon in the layers palette again, hold down **Alt** and click on the mask icon to remove it from overlaying the image.

If you are unsure of doing these modifications, I suggest you make a duplicate of this layer by repeating the steps outlined above for duplicating layers.

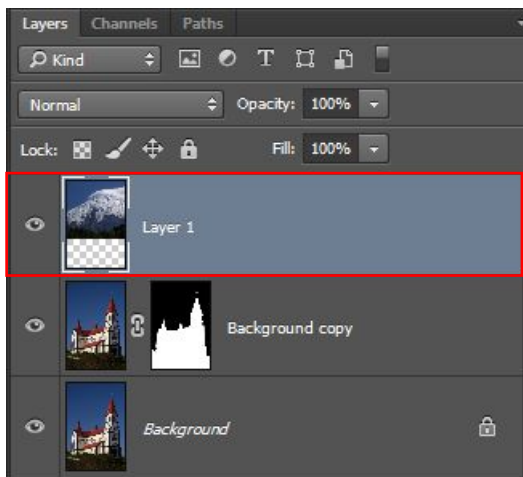
TECHNIQUE #2: REPLACING SKIES (OR OTHER ELEMENTS) continued

Now that we have an accurate mask on our background image, it is time to add in the replacement sky. I suggest you save your background image file with a new name at this stage, to ensure that everything is available in case of any problems during the next steps.

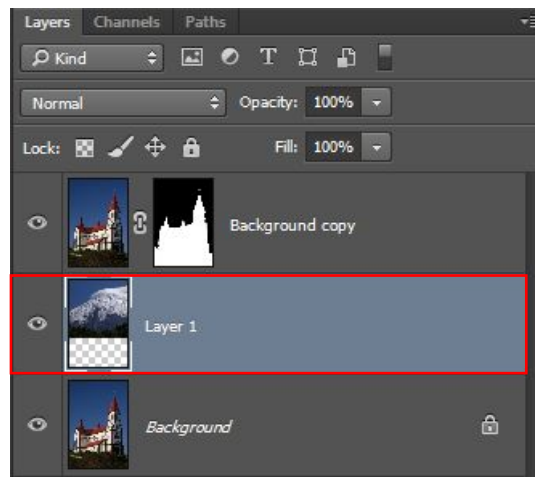
The next step is to go to the sky image we are going to add to replace the existing sky. Go to the sky image, then go to the "**Select**" menu, choose "**Select All**", then go to **Edit>Copy** to load the image onto the Clipboard. These are the same steps as used for the adding a texture layer – see page 2 of this tutorial. You can also simply drag the sky layer onto your background layer using the "**Move**" tool

Next go back to your background image and then go to **Edit>Paste**. This adds the sky as a new layer in your image. Depending on which layer you had selected when you pasted the new layer, chances are the sky layer will be sitting on top of your background layer.

We want the sky to be sitting below the background layer with the mask. Now go to the layers palette and click on the sky layer. Next, drag it downwards until a line appears below the background layer and release the sky layer. The sky should now be sitting below the masked background layer.



Above: original layer order after pasting



Above: The new layer order after moving

Once the sky layer is in place, select the **Move Tool** (top tool in the tools menu - it looks like a 4 directional arrow). Use the move tool to drag the layer around to position it where you want it in the image. To modify the size of the layer, use the transform tools as outlined in the Texture tutorial above.

At this point you might find that your mask on the background layer is not perfect. Go back to the layer mask and modify as noted above.

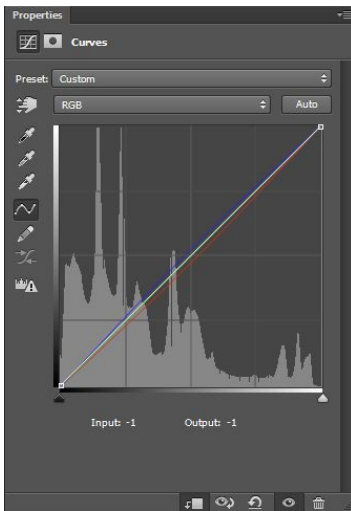
Once you have the position of the new sky and the masking complete, you can further refine the layers by applying adjustments to either all layers (the new adjustments sit on top of all layers) or to individual layers (by putting the adjustment above that layer and adding a **Clipping Mask**).

Applying adjustments to all layers: Regardless of how many layers you have in an image, applying an adjustment layer to the top of the layers stack will generally apply that adjustment to all layers below. There are exceptions, however. If your layer is blended to anything other than Normal blending, the adjustment may have a different effect. Blend modes such as Luminosity will not be affected by any colour adjustment, as the layer is only contributing Luminosity (brightness) information to the image.

TECHNIQUE #2: REPLACING SKIES (OR OTHER ELEMENTS) continued

Applying adjustments to selected layers: If you only want to apply an adjustment to a particular layer, and not those above or below that layer, you will need to position the adjustment layer directly above the layer being adjusted and then apply a **Clipping Mask** to confine the adjustment to that layer only.

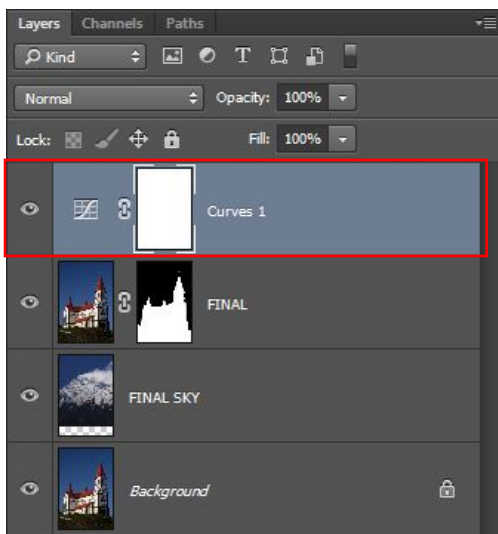
A **Clipping Mask** (the icon is a small square with a downwards pointing arrow, is found at the bottom of the layers properties panel) applies the adjustment only to the layer immediately below that adjustment.



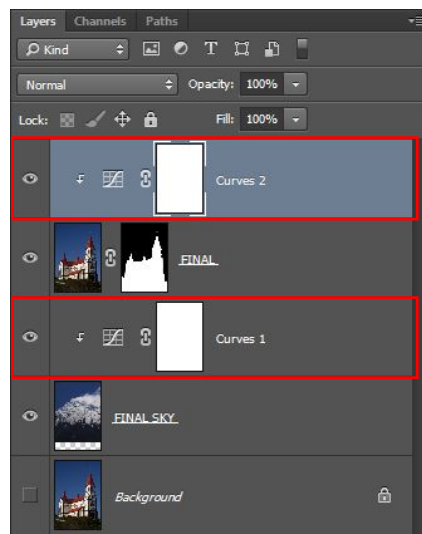
Left: An Adjustment layer with the **Clipping Mask** activated.

The **Clipping Mask** restricts the effect of that adjustment to the layer immediately below.

The Clipping Mask Icon is the small square with a downward pointing arrow that is at the bottom of the adjustment layer properties window (CS6 and Photoshop CC only. The clipping mask on older versions of Photoshop can be found by Right Mouse clicking on the adjustment layer itself and selecting it from the drop down menu.)



Above: An adjustment layer applied to all layers



Above: An adjustment clipped to the layer below.

When complete, save as a Photoshop (.PSD) file or TIFF to retain layers for any future editing.

By saving as a layered Photoshop or TIFF file you have the option of re editing at a future date. If you no longer require the layers, you can flatten all layers by going to **Layer>Flatten Image** and then saving in your preferred file format.

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