Editing doesn’t always mean you need to use complicated techniques; we show you four easy ways to make your images pop.

**REMOVING OBJECTS**
Master the art of eliminating unwanted items from your photos.

**THE CONTENT PALETTE**
Get the most out of Elements’ little-known treasure chest.

**PLUS**
- Retouching: The Nose Reduction
- Quick Collage with Blend Modes
- Subscriber Showcase
Editor’s Note

It’s hard to believe that 2010 is upon us. It seems like only yesterday that we were all worried about “Y2K,” Photoshop Elements didn’t exist, and digital cameras were expensive—and ineffectual—toys. These days, film is a distant memory, most photos are on our computers, and we share them via Web sites like Flickr, Facebook and SmugMug.

As we get older, technology is supposed to make things easier, and to a degree, I think that’s been true. Computers are certainly easier to use than they were a decade ago, and every Elements update adds some new “quick fix” feature that purportedly makes it easier for you to edit your photos. To be fair, Adobe’s not always successful in this regard, and editing photos can still be a chore.

In this issue, we have a study in contrasts regarding photo editing. We have Mike Rodriguez’s article on four quick and easy photo fixes, and Matt Kloskowski’s simple technique for effectively retouching someone’s nose. We also have a more complicated tutorial from Diana Day, which covers one of our most frequent requests: “How do I remove objects from my photos?”

I think Diana did a great job dealing with this complicated and often time-consuming process, and therein lies the rub: sometimes, you have to roll up your sleeves and dig in to get the best results. Many people don’t want to take the time to do this, but if you really want to move to the next level in your editing skills, mastering Diana’s techniques will get you going quickly. And, with a little bit of practice, they become second nature. Trust me.

On a different note, this month’s cover photo, “Quilted,” is by a subscriber, Clifton Jones of Cambria Heights, New York. One of the finalists for the Subscriber Showcase, it seemed a perfect fit for our cover. Clifton took the photo in Manhattan last spring with his Canon 50D. He told me that he loves taking architectural photos, especially reflections, and that this is one of his favorites from last year. (It’s one of mine as well.) Congrats, Clifton!

We’re always on the lookout for great photos and creations from you: I love going through the hundreds of entries we get for each issue’s Showcase and we always have a great discussion about the various entries. Keep it up, and remember that the next deadline is February 8.

The March/April 2010 issue will begin mailing to subscribers around March 9. I’ll be working on the issue as pitchers and catchers report to spring training, which is my harbinger of spring. I can hardly wait.

Happy shooting!

Rick LePage
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FEATURE

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EXTRAS: LOG ON AT PHOTOSHOPELEMENTSUSER.COM

Every month, in our exclusive subscriber-only area, we post new videos and tutorials from some of the top Photoshop Elements gurus. Here are the most recent postings:

NEW VIDEOS
■ Create a Composite Silhouette
■ Getting True Symmetry in Your Photos
■ Correcting Too Much Flash
■ Punch-Through Effect

NEW TUTORIALS
■ Making a Calendar Frame
■ Making a Double-Framed Image
■ Creating a Pearl
By Mike Rodriguez  |  Editing a photo doesn't always need to be a time-consuming task: sometimes, just a minor tweak or adjustment will take a photo from good to great. To that end, here are four quick-and-dirty tricks that you should have in your toolbox. Not every image needs each trick, but as you look at a photo, thinking, “It needs something,” look to these techniques as possible fixes.

1. Cast Off That Color Cast

Digital cameras are very good at analyzing a given environment and making some decisions regarding light and exposure, but they’re not always perfect. One of the decisions most cameras make automatically is choosing the white balance, which controls the overall color temperature of an image. A cooler color temperature will create an image that is bluer in tone; a photo with a warmer color temperature will have more yellows and red tones in it. If your camera is set to automatically choose the white balance, it evaluates the scene and tries to choose a white balance that provides the truest representation of the color temperature. Many times, the camera guesses right, but when its guess is a bit off, the resulting image has something called a color cast—an overall shift in the image’s color. There are several ways to eliminate this problem in Elements.

The easiest way is via the Remove Color Cast command, which is accessed via the Enhance menu. In this dialog box, you’ll see one tool: an eyedropper. Move the eyedropper out to your image and click on an area in your image that should be white, black or gray. When you click, the color cast will be removed. If you like the result, click OK. If not, simply click on another area of the image.
Sometimes, however, an image might prove a bit more difficult to work with, you will want more control, or you don’t want to edit the original photo. In those instances, I’ll use a Levels adjustment layer and its opacity to fine-tune my photo’s color cast.

1. With the uncorrected image open, add a Levels adjustment layer from the Layers palette.

2. On the right side of the dialog box, you’ll see three eye-droppers. Select the one half-full of white (the one on the right).

3. Move out to your image, find an area that is supposed to be white, and click. (In my image, I clicked on a light area of the bowl). The color cast will be removed. If you're happy with the look, click OK. To try a different area of the image, simply move the eyedropper and click again; there's no need to undo the last click you made.

   If you find that you don’t have an area that’s supposed to be white, no worries: click on the black eyedropper and select a part of your photo that should be pure black, or click on the middle (gray) eyedropper and choose a portion of the image that should be neutral gray.

4. If you’d like to bring back some of the original image, make sure the Levels adjustment layer is the active layer in the Layers palette and lower the opacity until you’re happy with the look.

   **NOTE:** You can still use the Remove Color Cast command without harming your original photo. First duplicate the background layer by pressing Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J), and then go to Enhance>Adjust Color>Remove Color Cast. After applying the adjustment and clicking OK, lower the opacity of the duplicated layer as desired.

**EXTRAS: GET MORE ONLINE**

The Levels command is one of Elements most powerful features, and can be used for all sorts of image enhancements. For more info, see “Learning to Love Levels” (March/April 2009), which you can download from the Print Extras section at PhotoshopElementsUser.com.
Selective Sharpen

Most digital images need some level of sharpening. Elements offers several tools for applying sharpening. One that works very well is found at the bottom of the Enhance menu, called Adjust Sharpness. I will take it one step further here, by selectively applying sharpening, leaving the purposefully out-of-focus areas untouched.

1. Open your image, and duplicate the background layer by pressing Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J). The effects of sharpening are best seen when viewing your image at 100%, so double-click the Zoom tool in the Toolbox to quickly zoom in to 100%.

2. Make sure the duplicated layer is the active layer in the Layers palette (click on it once to highlight it) and choose Enhance>Adjust Sharpness. There are four options in the dialog box. From the Remove menu, select Lens Blur. This is the type of blur often present in digital images. (If there was movement on part of either subject or the camera, using the Motion Blur option can sometimes help.)
3 In the Layers palette, pull down the blend mode menu and change the blend mode of the sharpened layer to Luminosity. This will cause the sharpening effect to be applied to the lightness values of the image and not the color values? Why is this important? It's a subtle thing, but sharpening can cause slight shifts in color tones. Applying the sharpening to the lightness values only prevents this shift.

4 I usually start with a Radius setting of 1 pixel and occasionally move it to 2 or 3, depending on how much sharpening I need. The higher the number, the more noticeable the sharpening effect.

4 In the Amount box, I experiment with the setting. What I do depends on several criteria: the photo subject, its resolution, where the image is headed (will I print it, or put it on the Web?), and even personal preference.

Regardless of your intent, always place the part of the image you most want to sharpen in the preview window (in this case, it's the center part of the flower). Position your cursor over the word Amount and "scrub" the Amount all the way to 500% by clicking and dragging to the right (500% is way too much, in most cases). Then, keeping your eye on the preview, slowly scrub to the left, stopping when you like the appearance. Alternately, you could start at 0% and increase the sharpening by sliding the slider to the right.

5 We've applied sharpening to the entire image, but in many cases, you may only want it applied in certain areas, such as someone's eyes, detail in a building, and so on. In this case, I'd like the sharpening applied to the center of the flower, but not on the rest of the image. Just click on the Eraser tool (E) and, making sure you are still working on the top layer (the one we just sharpened), erase the areas that shouldn't be sharpened.

6 In the Layers palette, pull down the blend mode menu and change the blend mode of the sharpened layer to Luminosity. This will cause the sharpening effect to be applied to the lightness values of the image and not the color values? Why is this important? It's a subtle thing, but sharpening can cause slight shifts in color tones. Applying the sharpening to the lightness values only prevents this shift.
How many times have we stood in a scene, armed with the right lens, our camera dialed just right, knowing that we’re on the cusp of capturing the perfect image, only to download the images later and gaze, crestfallen, at a series of dull, drab, uninspiring shots?

The truth is that today’s wonderfully advanced cameras pale in comparison to those even more wonderful light-capturing devices called our eyes. Our eyes see a much wider range of brightness levels than do our cameras, meaning that often what comes out of our camera isn’t quite what we saw as we were standing there peering through the lens. So, what can we do about it?

When looking to add some contrast and richness to an image, many people reach for Levels, or perhaps Curves. However, one other quick fix that can add some contrast and clarity to a photo that’s a little bit off is to use the combination of an adjustment layer and blend modes.

Boosting contrast via blend modes is another great way to add a little bit of “oomph” to a photo.

1 Open an image in Elements and add a Levels adjustment layer from the Create Adjustment Layer menu at the top of the Layers palette (it’s at the bottom of the Layers panel in Elements 8). This technique will also work with a Brightness/Contrast or Hue/Saturation adjustment layer as well. Don’t change any of the settings. Simply click OK. Instead, we’re going to experiment with some of the layer blend modes in the next step.

2 Pull down the Blend Mode menu at the top of the Layers palette and change the blend mode of the adjustment layer to Soft Light. This blend mode will affect both the light and darker areas of the image, adding some contrast as well as some color depth, depending on the image. If the effect is too intense, try lowering the layer’s opacity a bit. (I set the opacity to 70% in my shot, bottom left.)

The big advantage to this approach is the mask that comes along with the adjustment layer. If there are areas of the image where you’d like to fully or partially hide the effect, make sure the adjustment layer is highlighted in the Layers panel and use the Brush tool (B) to paint with black or gray on the layer mask. Black will completely mask the adjustment’s effect, and shades of gray will partially hide the effect. (Click the top color chip in the Toolbox to set the foreground brush color.)

Feel free to experiment with other blend modes as well. For a similar but more dramatic effect, try Overlay or Hard Light. The Screen blend mode will lighten the image, and Multiply will darken it.
All in Favor, Say Eye

For most people, a person’s eyes are one of the most noticeable things in an image. Eyes reveal so much about a person—their emotions, their mood—that it’s important to emphasize that feature in our portraits. Here’s one way to do that:

1. Open your portrait in Elements. Click the Create Adjustment Layer icon in the Layers palette and add a Levels adjustment layer.

2. In the Levels dialog box, slide the white triangle to the left. This will likely wash out your subject rather severely, depending on how far you drag the slider, but that’s OK. You’re only concerned with the eyes. When the eyes look brighter (but not too bright) click OK.
3 We’ll now apply the affect only to the eyes, by using the adjustment layer’s mask. First, we want to hide the Levels adjustment completely, so we will fill that mask with black. (Remember, with masks, “black conceals, white reveals.”)

Press D on your keyboard to set the foreground and background colors (shown at the bottom of the Toolbox) to their default black and white. If black shows as the background color, press X to flip it to the foreground color and press Alt-Backspace (Mac: Option-Delete) to fill the mask with black. This will hide the Levels adjustment.

4 To apply the adjustment only to the eyes, zoom in on the eyes using the Zoom tool (Z), then select the Brush tool (B) and press X to make white your foreground color. Using a soft-edged brush, paint white on the mask over each eye. Painting with white on the mask lets the adjustment show through the layer.

5 If the affect seems a bit too intense, try lowering the opacity of the adjustment layer. In my example, I used an Opacity setting of 80%.

If your subject is smiling, you could also try whitening their teeth using the same technique. Just create another Levels adjustment layer and apply settings for the teeth in the same way you applied settings for the eyes, then fill the mask with black, paint with white over the teeth, and lower the opacity as necessary.

Mike Rodriguez holds a masters degree in Educational Technology and is an Adobe Certified Expert and Instructor in Photoshop CS4. He has over 17 years of classroom teaching experience and teaches courses in beginning photography and a variety of computer applications. In addition to his writing and video tutorials, he also sells stock photography through iStockphoto.com.
By Matt Kloskowski | We've been getting requests for portrait-retouching tutorials, so this time around, I'll show you one of my favorites: the nose reduction. We all know someone with a nose that's a little larger than normal (including myself), and this technique works great to just bring the size down a bit.

Retouching is more about making people look as they are when we're face-to-face with them. Typically, when we're engaged in conversation with someone, we don't pay attention to the color of their teeth, the size of their nose or the blemishes on their face. However, when we look at a photo of that person, we have no other choice but to see those things. That's why we take minor—please note the emphasis on the word “minor”—steps to help reduce the impact of some of those features.
Start out with a photo of some one who has a slightly larger-than-normal nose. Our goal here is not to make him look like he’s got the nose of a 10 year-old; we want to reduce the size of his nose just a little—and tastefully.

Select the Lasso tool (L) from the Toolbox. Drag a rough selection around his nose. It’s okay to include part of the cheeks and even some area above his nose too.

Go to the Selection menu and choose Feather. Enter a small amount, just to soften the edges of the selection—10 pixels works for me most times—and click OK. You won’t see anything change on-screen, but you’ll see how this benefits us in a couple of steps.

Let’s duplicate the selection onto its own layer. Press Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J), which will take whatever you had selected and copy it on to a new layer above the original. You should now see two layers in the Layers palette.

With the topmost layer (the nose) selected in the Layers palette, choose Image>Transform>Free Transform. You’ll see a bounding box appear around the nose.

You can follow along by downloading this image from the Subscriber Extras area at PhotoshopElementsUser.com

EXTRAS: GET THIS IMAGE
**THE NOSE REDUCTION**

6 First, hold down the Ctrl key (Mac: Command) and drag the top right corner of the bounding box inward. Then hold down Ctrl again and drag the top left corner in by about the same amount.

7 Our touch-up is making the nose look better, but if you look at the bottom of the nose you might see remnants of a “double” nose (from the layer beneath). To help fix this, drag the top middle point of the bounding box downward. It will start pushing the nose back down into place and cover that area up. Press Enter when you’re done to OK the change and leave Free Transform mode.

8 The last step is clean-up. There is still a little funky area to the bottom right of the nose. I wish I could give you a magic formula for this one but it’s always going to be different, depending upon the skin color and the size and shape of the nose and the face. So I’ll give you my little secret that works most of the time.

Grab the Clone Stamp tool (S) and, in the Options Bar at the top of the window, set the Blend mode to Lighten (this helps match the skin tones better). Then Alt-click (Mac: Option-click) in an area next to the nose. Now paint with a small soft-edged brush to clean that part up.

Remember, the goal here is not for huge changes. Every step of tasteful retouching is about being subtle. It is five or six tiny changes that make a big difference, not taking someone’s huge honker and making it half its size.

Until next time, have fun!

By Barbara Brundage

For scrapbookers, the Elements’ Content palette is like Grand Central Station, a conduit for adding all sorts of creative touches to pages. If you’re primarily a photographer, however, you may be overlooking this useful feature.

With the Content palette, you can create an elaborate framed effect, make a beautiful title page, or add fancy caption text and graphics to your images to make them more artistic—or even silly.

The Content palette is primarily the core of Elements’ Create tab, used to make photo books, cards and collages. But the palette and all of its goodies are also available when you’re using the Editor. Just choose Window>Content and you can use it with any image.

Once the palette is on-screen, you’ll find six types of objects available: backgrounds, frames, graphics, shapes, text and themes. Each type has its own uses (and little quirks), so let’s take a look at what’s there and what you need to know about each one.

Content palette objects come into your image as a smart object layer, which means that you can make them any size you want without worrying about pixelation—at least until you “simplify” the layer, which converts the object directly into pixels.
The first category is backgrounds. The Content palette has dozens of different background designs that you add to your magnum opus. Why would you want a background if you’re just showcasing a single photo? Aside from artistic effect, backgrounds can be handy when you need to print on standard-size photo paper but your image isn’t the same aspect ratio. Instead of wrecking your photo’s composition by chopping it to size or printing it with lots of empty white space around it, adding a background says, “I meant to do that.”

Backgrounds are smart objects: no matter where you are in the layer stack, when you apply a background, Elements replaces the existing Background layer, if there is one (see “Backgrounds and Background Layers,” below). If not, it makes a new, locked, Background layer for you. If you’re working in Create mode, you probably chose a theme for your project when you started. If you choose a new background, it will automatically replace the existing background design.

In the Editor, you need to proceed with some caution. If your photo is the current Background layer, adding a new background from the Content palette will replace your photo entirely. To avoid this, just double-click the lock on the Background layer in the Layers palette to turn it to a regular layer before you start, or create a new file and add the Content background and your photo to that document. If you make a mistake, the Undo button at the top of the screen will fix things.

The other tricky thing about backgrounds is that they’re not so smart about resizing to get all the graphics on your page. If you apply a landscape-orientated background to a portrait-oriented page, you only get part of the whole design. This primarily matters for the designs based on images, not patterns, but it can be a nuisance. If you want to fit a landscape-oriented background to a page with a portrait orientation, create a landscape page and then use the Crop tool to trim the background to fit your desired page size.

Backgrounds and Background Layers

All this talk about Content Backgrounds and the Background layer can be confusing, especially if you don’t work a lot with layers. Here’s a quick explanation:

If you open a standard photo or create a new Elements document, it opens with a single layer in the Layers palette. This layer is called Background, and it is locked by default (top right). Whether you have this locked Background layer or not can create different results when your add a Content background or a frame.

If you double-click on the Background layer, Elements will unlock it and give it a new name; usually Layer 0, although you can call it anything you would like.

For more on layers, see our Layers 101 PDF, which you can download from the Subscriber Extras section at PhotoshopElementsUser.com.
The Content palette's Frames section includes a huge array of different frames and borders. Some are simple: just a plain border with a slight drop shadow to make it stand out. If you want more glitz, there are gold frames, animal prints, flower power designs, frames that crop your photos into shapes, and frames that make your photo look like a partially completed puzzle. There are frames that automatically age or tint your photo and ones that give you that "scratched film" look.

When applying frames, if your photo is the locked Background layer, the frame will automatically target it and you'll wind up with a framed photo.

But if your photo is a non-Background layer—meaning that you've renamed the layer or added the photo to a new document—the frame gets placed on top of the currently active layer. Then, just drag your photo into the frame from the Project Bin, or drag the photo layer from the Layers palette to put it inside the frame. If you want to use a photo that's not open, click inside the frame and choose an image.

Once your photo is in the frame, you'll see a little control strip (see below) for adjusting how it fits into the frame. The options include:

- The Size slider will enlarge or shrink the photo inside the frame.
- The Rotate button will rotate your photo in 90° increments.
- Clicking the Folder icon will let you choose a different photo in the frame. (You can also just drag it into the frame from the Project Bin.)
- The green check mark is like the OK button; it commits your changes; the red circle cancels any changes you've made to the frame.
Frames get placed differently depending upon whether your image is the Background layer (top) or not (bottom).

It only took a double-click in the frame palette—on the “Brown-paper Sepia” frame—to turn this color photo of modern-day Bruges into an aged antique.

When the control strip is visible, Elements also selects the Move tool in the toolbox. You’ll see the bounding box around the boundaries of your photo, and you can move it inside the frame, and you can also scale the photo relative to the frame by dragging a corner handle of the dotted outline.

You can always bring back these options later by double-clicking the framed photo, although, if you’re in the Editor, click on the Move tool first.

You can remove a frame by right-clicking anywhere on it and choosing Clear Frame from the pop-up menu; choosing Replace Photo from the same pop-up will give you a dialog box that lets you choose a different image from the photos on your computer. And, if you resize your photo inside the frame, right-click and select Fit Frame to Photo to resize the frame.
**Graphics**

The Content palette is loaded with all kinds of graphics you can add to your images. Some are photographic images, while others are clip-art-style drawings. All of them are vector objects, so you can resize them as much as you want without worrying about seeing jagged images in your final version.

The preview usually looks pretty bad if you scale it larger quite a bit (see the butterfly graphics, below right), but once you click the green check mark or press Enter (Mac: Return) they’ll sharpen right up.

With graphics, you can add a realistic flower to the corner of a photo, or combine elements from a photo with some of the hand-drawn graphics for an artistic effect. There are also costumes and clothing articles you can use to silly up your photos, just for fun. Think your friend the diva really should have a crown? Just add it to your photo, move it into place and resize it.

You can create whole images just using the graphics and backgrounds from the palette. Forgot to get a birthday card and it’s time you were out the door? No problem. A background, a graphic from the palette and a little text, and voilà: instant card.

Here’s the same graphic before (left) and after (right) you click the green check mark. Once you’ve clicked OK, the graphic gets redrawn to its final resolution.

**Get Big Thumbnails**

If you find the tiny thumbnails in the Content palette are too hard to see, just click the (hard to read) More button in the upper right corner of the palette and choose Large Thumbnail View to see them slightly bigger. Also, if you have “Show Tool Tips” checked in Elements’ Preferences (General), you’ll see the name of each item in the palette as you hover over it, which can be helpful.
**SHAPES**

The Content palette includes the same shapes that you can draw with the Custom Shape tool (see Mike Rodriguez’s “The Shape Tools,” Photoshop Elements Techniques, November/December 2009, Page 14, for more). This is primarily to make custom shapes available when you’re working in Create mode and don’t have access to the Editor’s tools. You don’t get the Options Bar choices you would have with the Custom Shape tool, but it can be convenient to draw the shapes from the palette, especially if they’ve come up in a custom search.

In this section, you also get frame shapes, some of which give more of a mid-century modern effect than the frames in the Frames section of the palette. There are also talk bubbles to combine with text for a comic book effect in your photos, and old-style mustaches that you can stick on the faces in your photos.

You can use shapes from the Content palette as text ornaments for the opening slide of a presentation, like this first page of a wedding photo portfolio.

**TEXT**

If you’ve recently upgraded from an early edition of Photoshop Elements and are wondering where all the text effects went, they now live in the Content palette. There, you can make text look like fur, plastic, or metal.

The text effects are actions which apply several different layer styles, and once you’ve applied one, you can further customize the look by going into the Layers palette and double clicking the Layer Style icon (the little “fx”) to bring up the Layer Styles Editor to adjust things.

This title text had the “Gradient Blue Medium” text effect applied, but the bevel made it look like a plastic button. By changing the bevel direction in the Layer Styles dialog box and reducing the opacity of the text layer, the effect becomes more like rubber stamping.
When you start one of the projects in the Create tab, like the Photo Collage, Elements offers you a choice of themes to use. These are backgrounds paired with appropriate frames. In Create mode, your theme automatically includes the correct number of frames for the layout style you chose.

In the Editor you can apply a theme to any file by using this section of the palette. This can be quite helpful if you want page dimensions that are different than the limited ones offered in Create mode. The downside is that themes have the same portrait vs. landscape limitation found with backgrounds (as discussed on Page 15), and one major difference: if you apply a theme to an image with only the default Background layer, Elements will properly place the photo in the theme.

Once you’ve added a theme and your photo is in the frame, you can rotate it to any angle, and you can add additional frames by dragging them into the image from the palette.

**Themes**

Getting More Content

If you’re using the Windows version of Elements 7 or 8 and you have a Photoshop.com account, you’ll notice little banners across the upper-right corner of some of the thumbnails. These banners indicate extra content that you can download from Photoshop.com. If it is blue, it’s a free download; if it is gold, it means the item is only available if you have a paid Plus account. Adding any of those pieces of content will automatically download them to your PC.
Using the Content Palette

As you’ve no doubt realized by now, the Content palette is crammed with stuff, but what makes it more powerful are the additional layers of organization Adobe has created. Here’s a look at the many different ways to find the content you want.

1. Start by choosing your main search criterion. Use the pull-down menu at the upper left of the Content palette to tell Elements how you want to search. When you first open the palette, this menu reads “By Type.” With that item selected, the pop-up menu in the middle lets you choose the different kinds of objects the palette contains: backgrounds, frames, graphics, shapes, text or themes. But that’s not the most interesting choice. That first pop-up lets you select other ways to search, by Activity, Color, Event, Mood, Object, Seasons, Style, and Word (a text box appears where you can type a keyword for your search). You can also choose Show All to see every single item in the palette.

2. For each category in the left menu, you can refine your search by choosing from the list in the right-hand menu. Elements will then show only those items that fit the criteria you’ve selected. You might choose By Event>Sports, for instance, to see everything in the palette that’s sports-related, or By Color>Green to see all the green-toned items. Sometimes, though, you’ll see a few odd suggestions, like the airplane shape that turns up with the hammers, ladders and saws in the By Activity>Home Improvement category (left).
Finally, you can narrow your choices further by using the buttons under the menu to restrict what content that the palette displays.

From left to right, the buttons are for Backgrounds, Frames, Graphics, Shapes, Text Effects, and Themes. You just click a button to show or hide the results for that category. When you start, all the buttons are turned on, and clicking a button hides that type of content. In the view of the palette on the right, the buttons for Shapes and Text Effects are turned off, so you don’t see the darker square around them.

So if you’re searching By Event>School, for example, and you only want to see what graphics Elements has, click so that only the Graphics button is highlighted, and you won’t see backgrounds or custom shapes.

Once you find what you want, you can apply it to your image in any of three ways:

- Drag its thumbnail over the image window and let go.
- Double-click the thumbnail.
- Click the thumbnail once to select it and then click Apply.

Each item that you add comes in on its own layer, so you can endlessly adjust and rearrange things until you find the exact look that best shows off your photos.

Watch out for the trash can icon in the Content palette! If you click it you delete the selected item from the palette rather than from your image. Delete items directly from your image if you don’t want them there, and don’t click the trash icon unless you’re tired of having so many items to choose from.

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Create a Quick Collage Using Blend Modes

By Lesa Snider

Perched in the upper-left corner of the Layers palette are the Blend Modes, which control how pixels on different layers interact with each other. When layers overlap, the top layer can either block the one underneath it completely, or the two layers can blend together in some way. Blend modes let you control this exactly, and it is a handy tool for creating collages, adding color to grayscale images, changing the color of an object, and much more. In this tutorial we’ll focus on how to make a trendy collage using the power of blend modes.

Collages are a great opportunity to use stock images or free online textures. The two texture-rich beauties used in this tutorials came from a quick search for the words “winter background” and “sunbeam” on iStockphoto.com. However, it’s easy for you to create your own textures by capturing a patch of snowy ground, some icy tree branches, a weathered sidewalk and so on. (For more on using and creating textures, see Diana Day’s article, “Add Excitement to Your Photos With Textures,” Photoshop Elements Techniques, March/April 2009, Page 30.)

EXTRAS: GET THESE IMAGES

You can follow along by downloading the images and backgrounds from the Subscriber Extras area at PhotoshopElementsUser.com
1. Open your image and backgrounds in Elements. If the Project Bin isn’t visible, choose Window>Project Bin.

Double-click on the skier thumbnail in the Bin, which will make it the active document. Then, click and drag the sunbeam thumbnail into the main window (your cursor will turn into a tiny hand as you drag). Once you release your mouse button, you’ll see two layers in your Layers panel: the skier girl and the sunbeams.

Click and drag the snowflake thumbnail into the same window.

2. In the Layers palette; you should see three layers, with the skier as the bottom layer and the snowflake at the top. If that’s not the case, click and drag the appropriate layers up or down in the palette to get them in the proper order.

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**How Blend Modes Work**

When experimenting with blend modes, it’s helpful to think of the colors on your layers as being made up of three parts:

- **Base color.** This is the color you start out with; the one that already lives in your image on a particular layer.

- **Blend color.** This is the color you’re adding to the base color, whether it’s in an image on another layer or a color you’re adding onto a new layer with the Brush tool, a fill, or some other method.

- **Result color.** This is the color you get after mixing the base with the blend color using one of the blend modes.

The Blend Mode menu is divided into categories based on their neutral color—the color that causes no change in that particular mode. Today you’ll focus on the Darken category, wherein Elements looks at the base and blend colors and keeps only the darkest ones (and the winning color values are assimilated into the base to create the result). Using the blend modes in this category will always result in a darker image than you started out with (great for our collage). The neutral color in this category is white, meaning it has no effect on the blend at all and any white areas in your image will disappear.

The Darken modes are incredibly useful when you want to swap a light-colored background for something darker, or combine images together.

For a complete look at each of the blend modes and what they do, download Mike Rodriguez’s “Blend Right In” PDF from the Subscriber Extras area at PhotoshopElementsUser.com.
Click the sunbeam layer in the Layers palette, and change its blend mode to **Color Burn**. This mode intensifies color and increases overall contrast, though the result color isn’t quite as dark as Linear Burn. Since the sunbeams are darker than the snowflake background, this mode keeps the collage from becoming too dark. (Feel free to experiment with other modes in the Darken category to see what looks good to you.)

Click the snowflake layer in the Layers palette to make it the active layer. In the pop-up menu at the top left side of the palette, change the blend mode to **Linear Burn**. This mode produces the darkest result color of any mode in the Darken category, and gives your image an extra dose of contrast. Since the snowflake layer is fairly light in color, Linear Burn darkens it rather nicely.

To change the blend mode to Linear Burn with a keyboard shortcut, press Alt-Shift-A (Mac: Option-Shift-A).

Click the sunbeam layer in the Layers palette, and change its blend mode to **Color Burn**. This mode intensifies color and increases overall contrast, though the result color isn’t quite as dark as Linear Burn.

Since the sunbeams are darker than the snowflake background, this mode keeps the collage from becoming too dark. (Feel free to experiment with other modes in the Darken category to see what looks good to you.)

In order to hide part of the texture so it doesn’t cover your subject, we will use a layer mask. Click the half black/half white circle in the Layers palette and choose **Levels**. If you’re using Elements 8, ignore the Adjustments panel that pops open; if you’re using an earlier version, press OK to dismiss the Levels dialog box. You’ll see an adjustment layer named Levels appear in your Layers palette.

The Color Burn mode’s keyboard shortcut is Alt-Shift-M (Mac: Option-Shift-M).
When working with layer masks, always remember that “black conceals and white reveals.” Since your goal is to hide part of the texture, you need to paint in the layer mask with black. Press D to set your foreground and background colors to their default of black and white, and then press X until black is the top (the foreground) color.

Making sure that the Levels adjustment layer is active, press B to grab the Brush tool. In the photo, brush across areas you want to hide (in this case, it’s the girl’s face and snowy ground). If you hide too much, you can press X to swap the foreground and background colors (so that you’re painting with white) and brush back over that area.

If one or more of the texture layers looks too dark, you can lighten it with layer opacity. Click to activate the sunbeam layer and lower the Opacity setting at the top right of the Layers palette to 70%.

Now choose File>Save As, give your masterpiece a name and press OK. Congratulations, you’re finished! As you can see from the final image, a quick change in blend modes can make a really neat collage in a jiffy.

Until next time, may the creative force be with you all!

Lesa Snider, chief evangelist of iStockphoto.com, is the author of Photoshop CS4: The Missing Manual (Pogue Press/O’Reilly), and the video training titles “Photoshop Elements 8 for Digital Photographers” and “Practical Photoshop Elements” (KelbyTraining.com). She is also founder of the free creative tutorial site, GraphicReporter.com.
Removing Unwanted Objects from Your Photos

By Diana Day | A question asked quite frequently in the Elements Village forums, and in the Photoshop Elements Users Group I host in my community, is how to remove an unwanted object from a photo. My first inclination is to recommend using the Clone Stamp tool, but with some photos, there are better solutions, and in many instances, you'll need to use multiple techniques to clean your photos properly.

In this tutorial, I'll primarily show you an approach that works well on photos having an area that can be used to copy and paste over an object you wish to remove. We'll remove a stop sign and traffic signal that cover parts of the building and sky. I'll also use a second method (starting with Step 4) that involves erasing an object and replacing the pixels another way.

1 When editing a photo, I always leave the background layer untouched, so I can toggle before and after views as I complete the project. To create a duplicate layer to work on, select Layer>Duplicate Layer, or use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J). Select the Zoom tool (Z) and drag out a rectangle around the front windows and awnings, including the stop sign we want to remove.
2 Grab the Polygonal Lasso tool (L) and click around the awning, window and panel to the right of the stop sign, avoiding the parts covered by the bench and planter at the bottom. It’s a good idea to select more area than you may need; you can always erase what you don’t need after positioning it. After making the selection, copy it to a new layer with the keyboard command Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J).

3 In the Layers palette, reduce the opacity of the selection layer to 60%; this will help you line up the details as you move the new selection into place. Then, from the Image menu, click Transform>Free Transform, or use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl-T (Mac: Command-T) to get the bounding box, then move the copied window, positioning it over the window covered by the stop sign.

Because of the photo’s perspective, the new window is somewhat smaller than the one we’re replacing. It will be necessary to use the Free Transform controls to enlarge the window, reposition it, rotate and even distort the angle a bit, in order to line it up with the window beneath. (See “How to Transform a Layer,” on the opposite page for more.)

You can undo a transformation that doesn’t look right by clicking the red circle to cancel it; if you don’t like the look after you have clicked OK, use the Undo arrow at the right of the menu.

After resizing and repositioning the replacement window, see how the windows line up by returning the layer’s opacity to 100% and clicking on the eye beside that layer to turn its visibility off and on. Keep in mind you may not get the windows to line up perfectly; just do your best to make the reconstruction look as natural as possible. To touch up the copied section, you can use the Eraser tool (E) with a small soft-edged brush to erase any visible edges, and the Clone Stamp tool (S) to cover any flaws. When finished, merge the top layer down with Layer>Merge Down, or use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl-E (Mac: Command-E).

EXTRAS: GET THIS IMAGE
To follow along with this tutorial, download Diana’s photo from the Subscriber Extras area at PhotoshopElementsUser.com.
How to Transform a Layer

The Transform command enables you to apply transformations to a layer, such as move, rotate, resize (or scale), skew, distort, or alter perspective. You can apply the Transform command to anything on a layer, such as a selection copied to its own layer, a shape, or an image added in a layer. Target the layer you wish to transform by clicking on that layer.

From the menu, choose **Image>Transform>Free Transform**, or press the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl-T (Mac: Command-T)**. You can also initiate free transform by selecting the Move tool and clicking on one of the bounding box handles.

When you choose free transform, a "bounding box" is formed around the edges of the layer with square markers, commonly called handles, on all four corners and sides, for a total of eight. Near a corner of the bounding box, are two icons: a green check mark to accept the transformation, and a red circle with a slash (to cancel).

To **Move** the layer, place the cursor inside the bounding box, which will change the cursor to a black arrowhead, then click and drag. To drag, depress and hold the left mouse button and move the mouse.

To **Resize**—or scale—the layer by placing the cursor over one of the handles. When you see a small line with an arrow on each end, drag inward to reduce or outward to enlarge. To constrain proportions when resizing, drag from one of the corner handles.

To **Rotate** the layer by positioning your cursor just outside the bounding box and when you see a curved double-headed arrow, click and drag.

To skew, distort, or change the perspective of a layer, use the appropriate command in the **Image>Transform** menu (above). You can also use keyboard shortcuts to initiate these effects, as indicated below.

**Skew** slants an image vertically or horizontally; you can only drag a handle up or down, or side to side. To use the keyboard shortcut, first press **Ctrl-T (Mac: Command-T)** to get the bounding box, then depress and hold **Ctrl-Shift (Mac: Command-Shift)** while moving a handle. To shift an entire side, drag a handle in the middle of a side of the bounding box. To shift a corner only, drag a corner handle. You can move more than one handle, if needed.

With **Distort**, you can drag a handle in any direction. To use the keyboard shortcut, first press **Ctrl-T (Mac: Command-T)** to get the bounding box, then depress and hold **Ctrl (Mac: Command)** while moving a handle.

**Perspective** is generally used to correct convergence of lines in a photo, but can also be used to manipulate a layer. When dragging on a corner vertically, both the top and bottom corners move equally; when dragging horizontally, both the left and right corners move equally. To use the keyboard shortcut, first press **Ctrl-T (Mac: Command-T)** to get the bounding box, then depress and hold **Ctrl-Alt-Shift (Mac: Command-Option-Shift)** while moving a handle.

Once you select Free Transform to get the bounding box, you can easily switch back and forth between any of these types of transformations in a continuous operation by changing the keys you hold down while dragging on the handles.

Too accept (or commit) a transformation, press **Enter** or click the green check mark; to cancel, press **Esc**, or click the red circle icon with the slash.
To finish removing the bottom part of the stop sign post, I’ll use an object-removal technique I learned from Janice (cats4jan) in the Elements Village forum—a method I call “erasing and replacing.” Start by duplicating the top layer with Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J).

Select the Eraser tool with a hard-edged brush, which we’ll then soften slightly. The default soft-edged brushes in the brush picker are a little too soft for this technique and tend to leave a light “halo” on the edges of the replacement area. So we’ll make our own slightly softened brush version: Hold down the Shift key and tap the left bracket key (‘[’) twice. You’ll notice the graphic representing the brush in the options bar will get softer edges. Then resize the brush just a little wider than the post using the left or right bracket keys, as needed.

Making sure the duplicate layer at the top is active, click once with the Eraser at the top of the post, then position the cursor at the bottom of the post, hold down the Shift key, and click once again. This will erase a straight line between your first click and the Shift-click. It appears as though nothing happens, but if you turn off the visibility of the two bottom layers, the hole you erased becomes visible.

An easy way to view just one layer in a stack of layers is to hold down the Alt (Mac: Option) key and click on the eye beside that layer. Alt-click again in the same spot to turn the visibility of all layers back on.

Now here’s the secret trick: how to fill the gap. Click on the layer beneath the erased layer, press Ctrl-T (Mac: Command-T) for free transform, then drag that layer in the direction needed to find matching pixels to fill the gap – in this case drag horizontally to the right a bit. An alternate method for moving the targeted layer, in order to easily keep the layers matched horizontally, is to press the right arrow key several times. Click the green check mark to commit the move. Now merge the top two layers by clicking on the top layer, then pressing Ctrl-E (Mac: Command-E). Use the Clone Stamp tool to touch up any imperfections around the replacement area.
Removing the traffic signal from the top of the building involves the same basic steps (Steps 1 through 4) we used with the lower window and awning. Rather than repeat specific details, I’ll give more of a suggested workflow here.

Zoom in and select (with the Polygonal Lasso) the left corner of the far right dormer, roof, and red shingles, including the right corner of the middle window, then copy the selection with Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J).

Move the copy over to reconstruct the middle dormer and roof where it’s covered by the traffic signal. Resize, reposition, and line up the layers to match. You’ll need to manipulate the layer with Image>Transform>Distort to get the edges of the new piece lined up. Don’t worry about trying to get all the details of the piece perfectly lined up with the dormer beneath: just get it covered and lined up on the edges. If you find it too difficult getting the one large copied piece lined up using Distort, try copying smaller segments and reconstructing the dormer and roof in several steps, rather than in one big chunk. When finished, merge all layers except the background layer.

Once the middle dormer has been reconstructed, we can select and copy it and the surrounding area to restore the left dormer. Notice how much space the remaining traffic signal takes up on the dormer and roof and how far down it extends over the window. This determines how big of a piece you need to select and copy to cover the signal and reconstruct the underlying area. Again, you may wish to select and copy smaller sections to rebuild this area in several steps, rather than copying one large selection and manipulating and distorting it to fit, like I did. Merge layers when finished, always leaving the background layer free.
To remove the traffic signal from the sky, we’ll start by cloning out the power lines. Create a new blank layer by clicking the New Layer icon in the Layers palette. We’ll do the cloning on this blank layer. Choose the Clone Stamp tool (S) and select a hard-edged brush; soften it slightly by holding down the Shift key and tapping the left bracket key twice. Adjust the brush size so that it is slightly larger than the power line. (Make sure the All Layers box is checked in the Options Bar.)

With the Clone Stamp, Alt-click (Mac: Option-click) to sample the blue sky slightly above the power line at the far left of the image. Centering the cursor over the far left of the power line, click once. Position (do not drag) the cursor to the right a few inches, then while depressing the Shift key, click once again. Notice that the Clone tool has “painted” a straight line between the two clicks, covering the power line. Move the cursor ahead a bit more, then Shift-click again. Continue Shift-clicking horizontally across the power line until it is all cloned out. For now, don’t worry about the lines around the traffic signal. Merge the cloned layer down with Ctrl-E (Mac: Command-E).

Due to the gradient variations in the blues of the sky, the area cloned over the power line is slightly darker than the surrounding sky. We can touch that up further with the Clone stamp. In the Options Bar, select a default soft-edged brush, resize it to about 75 pixels, and lower the opacity to around 40%. Creating another blank layer for the touch-up, sample at the far left slightly above the dark streak, then “paint” around over the dark streak. Frequently take new samples as you paint horizontally across. This should blend in the edges of the dark streak quite nicely, but if it is a little too dark, lower the opacity of the cloned layer. Merge that layer down when you are satisfied with it.

If you need basic instructions for using the Clone Stamp tool, check out the following videos from PhotoshopElementsUser.com:

Clone Stamp (Aug. 19, 2005)
Cloning 101 (Sept. 2, 2008).

Tutorials for using the Clone tool can also be found in past issues of Photoshop Elements Techniques:

“Cloning & Healing,” Vol. 3, No. 6, page 11
To cover the rest of the traffic signal, select and copy a section of sky. Zoom in on the signal and the sky above it. Use the **Polygonal Lasso tool** to select a rectangular area of the sky at the same angle as the top of the roof and a size that will cover the signal with room to spare. Press **Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J)** to copy the selection to its own layer. Press **Ctrl-T (Mac: Command-T)**, then move and position the piece of sky to cover the traffic signal. Lower the opacity of the sky layer slightly so you can see where the signal is. With a medium size soft-edged Eraser, erase away the sky not needed to cover the signal, which will help blend the edges in with the rest of the sky. Return the opacity to 100% and merge the copied sky layer down when finished.

The methods we’ve used here to cover up objects may have left a few edges out of alignment, as well as some noticeable duplications. The two side-by-side windows with curtains in the same exact position and with the same objects seen behind the glass is a good example. Notice, too, where we removed the bottom of the stop sign post, there are some spots on the panel that were duplicated when we replaced the post. Zoom in at 100% and carefully examine your edited image for such areas. Then touch them up using the **Clone Stamp tool**, sampling nearby pixels to cover the duplications, and making your editing less obvious.

Once your photo is finished, view the before and after by clicking to toggle the eye icon beside the Background layer off and on: you’ll see what an improvement you made in the image.

**tip**

When cloning in a narrow area, such as the windowpanes in this project, you can use a selection to limit the area affected. Use the Polygonal Lasso tool to select one of the panes where you wish to eliminate the appearance of duplication. You can then sample either inside or outside the selected area, but only areas inside the selection will be cloned over when painting with the Clone brush. All areas outside of the selection are protected, even if you stamp with the brush half inside and half outside the selected area.

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*Diana Day, retired H.R. Manager and self-taught Elements user, hosts a PSE Users Group where she teaches Elements to members of her community. Diana also puts her skills to practical use administering her church’s Web page and public relations projects.*
Dora 1942

Vicki Meyer
CARROLLTON, TEXAS

This photo was taken in California in 1942. I have many vintage photos of my mother-in-law and I wanted to do something interesting with this particular one. My goal for this project was to use the one photo, highlight different parts, adding color and creating a background. I cropped out portions of the picture and resized them for the small photos down the right side of the layout, then flipped the image of the car for the left side of the page, and layered the scan of the original photo to peek out from under the colorized version.

Out of the Blue

Jens Langhans
CLOVIS, CALIFORNIA

The image was created using two photos, a sky taken in Oregon, and a dock on the Ceago Winery grounds in Lake County, California. I used Matt Kloskowski’s video tutorial, “Mother’s Day: Framing images to add interest” (May 8, 2008) to frame part of the dock image, keeping the color in this area and changing the rest to black and white. The Pattern Stamp tool was used to bring the dock to the foreground and to selectively introduce the clouds.

Cousins

Robin Bennett
COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

We were at a soccer game and the girls were eating candy. When they stuck out their tongues, I was able to get this shot. I created the frames using Corey Barker’s “Using Simple Shapes to Create Interesting Designs” video (Elements Killer Tips, December 3, 2007).

Here is a selection of some of the best recent work by subscribers, showcasing original photos and completed projects from magazine tutorials and videos on the Web site.

See the note on the opposite page for more information on how to submit your work for future issues.
Above the Midway
James Evanson
SOUTHAMPTON, PENNSYLVANIA
The image was shot at Hershey Park, on the midway during our annual family reunion. It was a lucky find: I came around a building, looked up and immediately realized that this scene would make an awesome black-and-white photograph.

The original was shot in Raw format and processed with Camera Raw 5.3. Inside Photoshop Elements 7, I converted it to black and white using the Infrared setting and sharpened the image slightly using the Unsharp Mask filter.

Thundering Thoroughbreds
Timothy Neddy
TAMPA, FLORIDA
To turn my colorful photo into a black-and-white sketch, I desaturated the photo and adjusted the exposure using the Levels and Shadows and Highlights commands, and then used the Unsharp Mask filter. The final effect was done with the Stamp filter.

EXTRAS: SUBMIT YOUR WORK
Go to the Magazine Subscriber Gallery section in the Elements Village forums and read the message, “How to Submit Images to the P.E.T. Subscriber Showcase,” which has the info you’ll need to upload your photos. The next deadline is February 8.
www.ElementsVillage.com