
Photoshop Technique

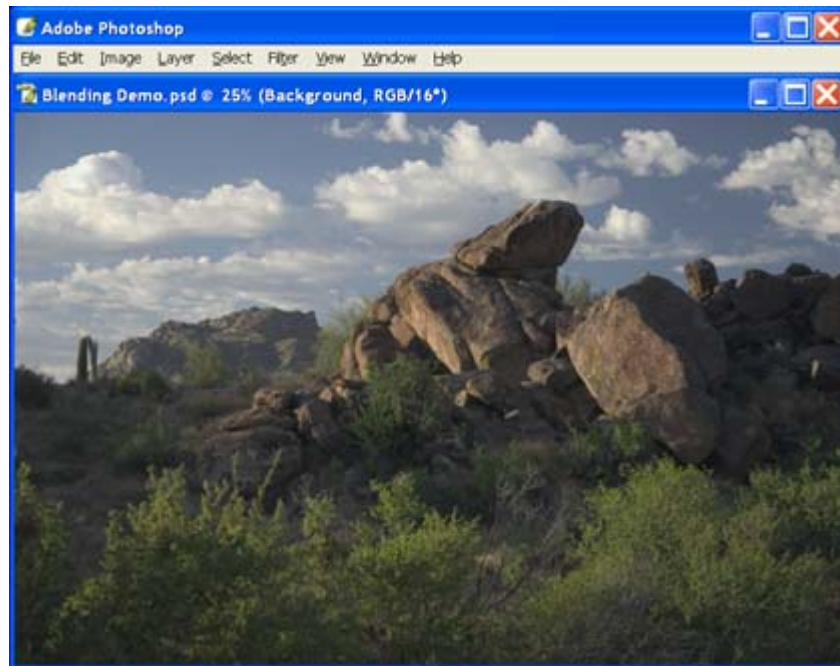
Jack Davis – Adding Density with Advanced Blending

1. Background

A common approach to enhancing a landscape image is to “punch it up” by altering the tonal values. There are many useful techniques for accomplishing the effect with various Photoshop tools. This one makes use of the Layer Palette and takes advantage of blending modes. It does not involve complex selections.

Jack Davis illustrated this technique in his recent seminar and included it as a lesson in his Software Cinema DVD titled “Photo Enhancing and Creative Effects”. He uses Photoshop blending modes in a straightforward way, but adds a refinement called Advanced Blending that often creates a more pleasing result. He also introduces the trick of building the blending layer from an “empty adjustment layer” to avoid bloating the file size.

This tutorial uses a landscape image captured near the McDowell Mountains in Scottsdale with a Canon Digital Rebel camera shooting in RAW mode. This is the camera image capture after RAW conversion and cropping.

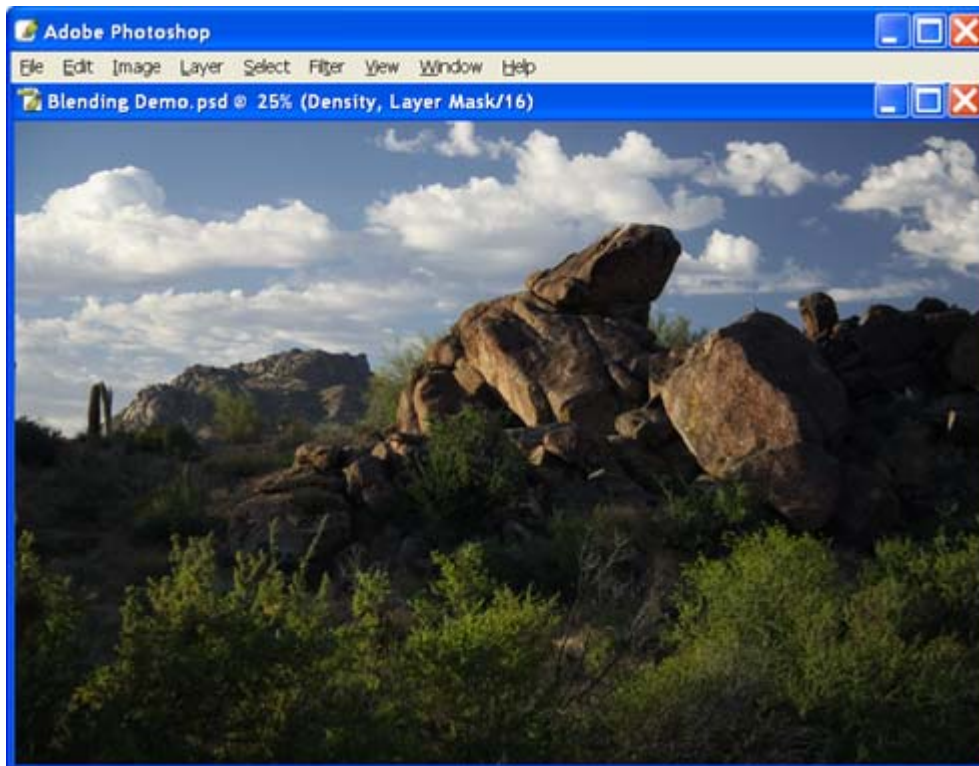


2. Image Enhancement Procedure

- Open the photo image and create a blending layer: Rather than duplicating the background layer, which doubles the file size, create an “empty adjustment layer” by clicking the New Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layer Palette and selecting the Curves option. Then click OK to close the Curves dialog box without making any changes to the “curve”. Name this layer “Density”.
- Although the Density adjustment layer is not being used for the usual Curves effects, it can still play the role of blending layer. Change the blending mode of the Density layer to Soft Light, using the drop down list at the top of the Layer Palette.

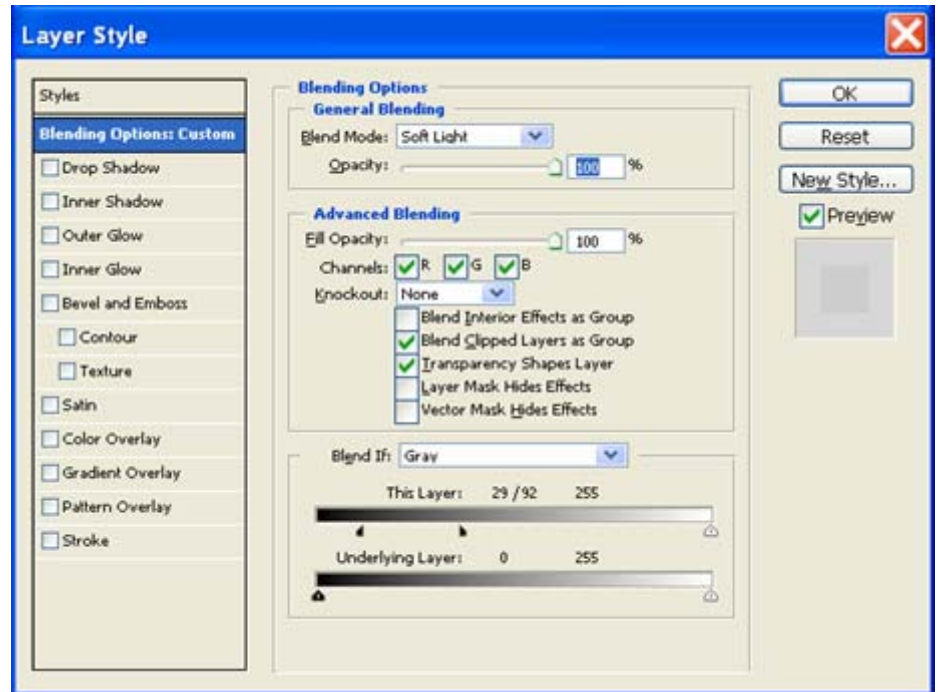


- As shown below, Soft Light blending punched up the image by darkening the dark tones and lightening the light tones. But note that it has also blocked up the shadow areas, losing some interesting shadow detail.



Now as if by magic, we will recover some of that shadow detail.

- With the Density layer active, press the leftmost (Layer Style) icon at the bottom of the Layer Palette and select the first option in the drop down list, “Blending Options”.
- When the large and complicated dialog box appears, concentrate on the segment at the bottom called “Blend If”. Make sure the drop down list is set to the default “Gray” and check the Preview on.

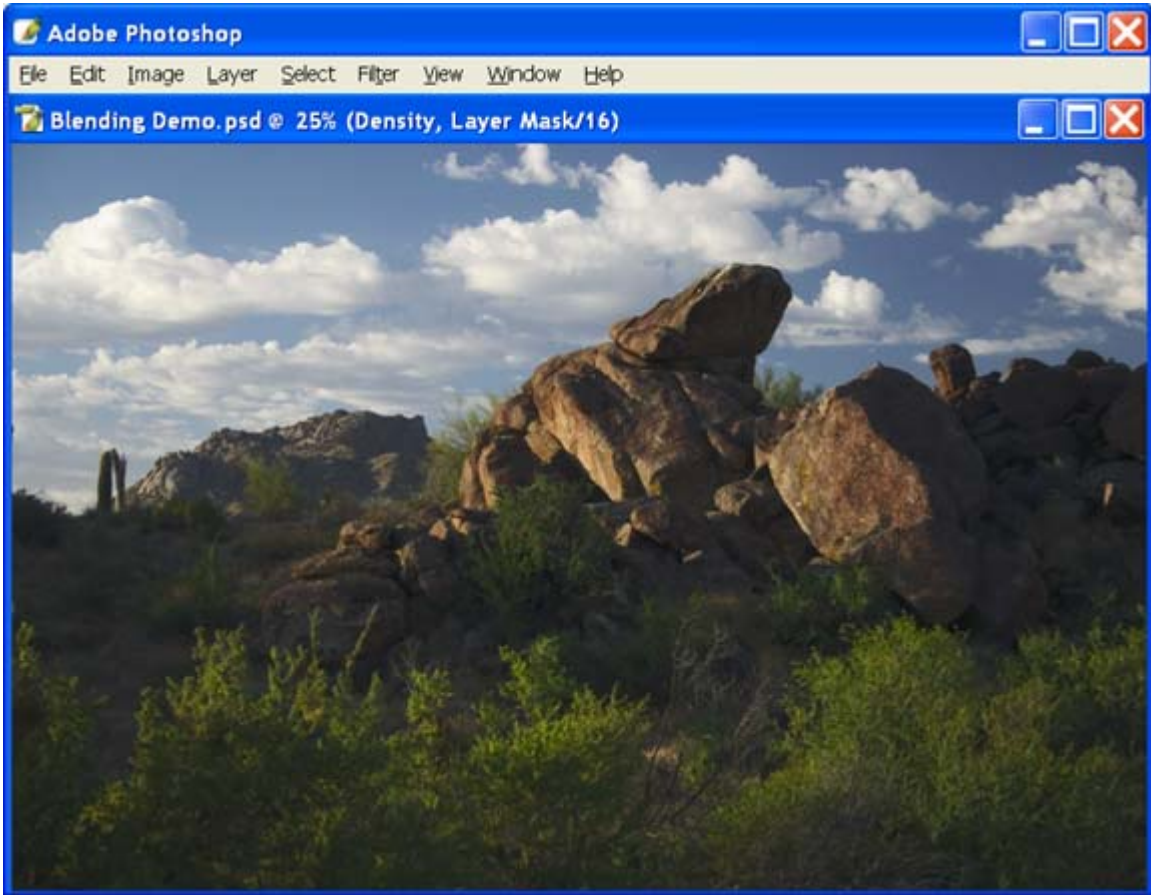


- Now watch the image as you drag the leftmost slider slowly to the right. At about position 25 or so you will notice that the original detail is re-appearing in the shadow areas. What you are doing in effect is asking Photoshop to selectively ignore the blending, based on the luminosity of the base image. For tones to the left of the slider, blending is ignored, while tones to the right of the slider are blended.

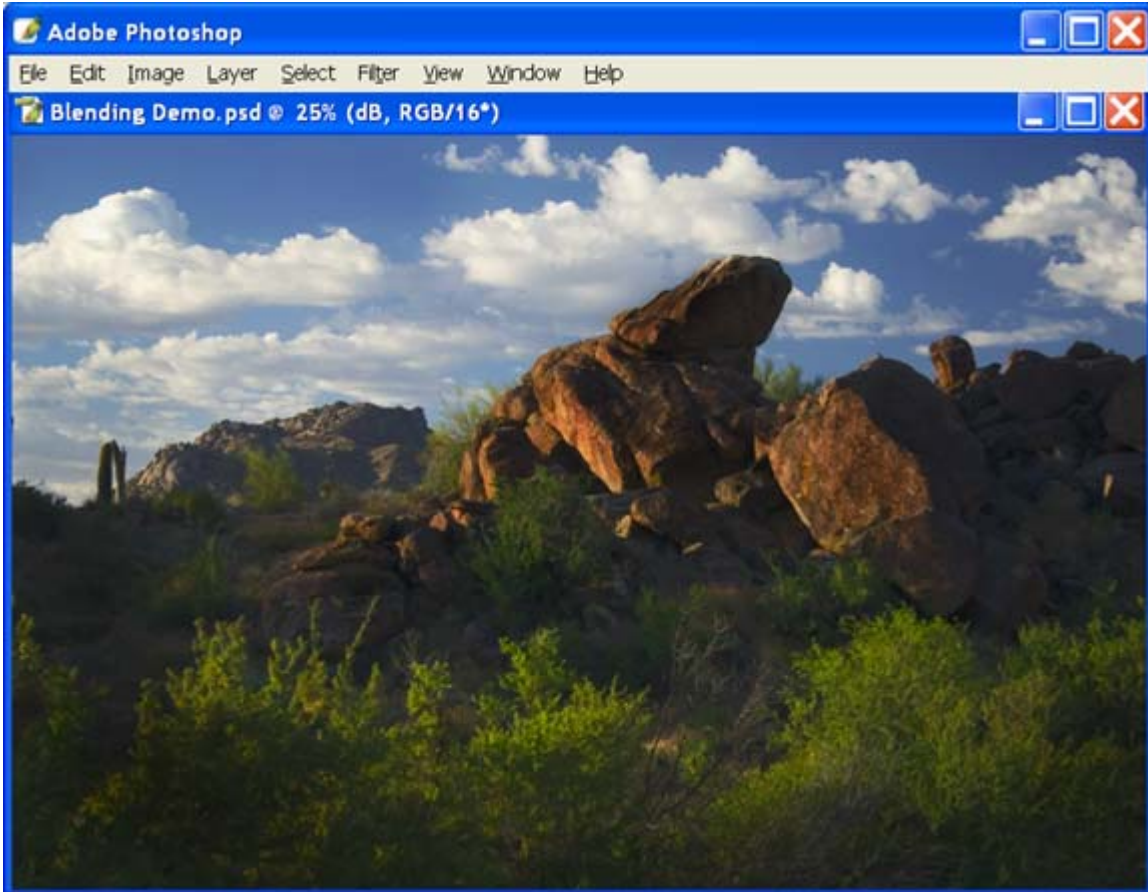
This is an interesting phenomenon, but the effect is not usable as is because of the objectionable hard boundaries between the blended and non-blended areas. To soften those edges and make a smooth transition, we will “split the slider”.

- Hold down the Alt key, use the mouse to carefully grab the right side of the slider, and move it to the right to about the 90 position. This will restore some of the shadow detail in a more graceful way.
- The proper positioning of the slider segments is purely a judgment call – it depends entirely on the particular image you are working with and your own “artistic eye”. Experiment until you get an effect that you like, and then click OK in the Blending Option dialog box.

This looked better to me.



I finished the enhancement process by adding a Hue/Saturation Adjustment layer to spice up the colors, then a Dodge and Burn layer to highlight the prominent rock, and another Dodge and Burn layer to darken the lower edges of the frame



This is the final image with its layer stack.

