

imaging workshop

Dodge and burn

Discover two of Photoshop's hidden tools as Darren Lock explains the secrets of dodging and burning



■ *Dodging and burning has enabled us to boost the shadows and highlights in this image to produce a much more vibrant shot.*



If you've been using Photoshop for some time, you may have already noticed the mysteriously named 'Dodge' and 'Burn' buttons on the toolbar. Traditional film photographers may be familiar with the terms, although the appearance of the functions in Photoshop can be baffling, to say the least.

Many users are overlooking an important creative springboard with these two little buttons. The dodge tool is used to lighten pixels when it is painted over an image – the Exposure percentage bar can be used to set the amount of contrast change. It's also possible to lighten either the highlights, midtones or shadows of the picture. The tool should be used like a paintbrush in Photoshop and you can use multiple, layered strokes to build up an effect.

The burn tool is similar, but this time it is used to darken pixels. Again, you can select the level of adjustment using the percentage bar and choose whether to darken the highlights, midtones or shadows. The tools can be used together to achieve interesting tonal effects, and it's also possible to correct or enhance areas that are too dark or light.

Details are often lost in an image because of too much shadow and this is where the dodge and burn tools are most effective. Once you've got the hang of using dodge and burn, you'll be surprised at how much difference it can make.



■ *A bog-standard beach scene has been improved by burning the darker areas of the picture for an unusual effect.*



○ *Image Workshop files:
Dodge&burn.tif,
Dodge&burn (changed).tif,
Large features.tif,
Large features (changed).tif*

Alternative adjustments

RGB colour images sometimes have a tendency to look a little washed out and dull compared with the original scene, especially if the pictures have been captured on film and digitised using a scanner.

Instead of using the colour contrast and brightness controls in Photoshop 7.0, try applying careful washes of the dodge and burn functions as described in our tutorial.

But it doesn't stop there. You can also use the Sponge tool to saturate or desaturate areas of an image.

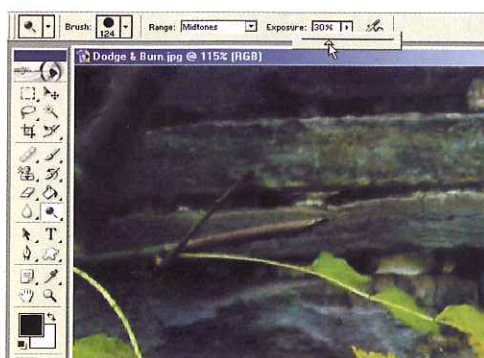
Like the dodge and burn functions, it's possible to adjust the intensity of the sponge effect and the size and style of the brush. With practice you can use these three tools to breathe life into even the dulllest, most lifeless pictures.



Dodging techniques can be surprisingly effective.

For your information...

If you're looking for help and advice on how to use Photoshop's dodging and burning tools to best effect, pay a visit to Icehouse Designs at www.icehousedesigns.com. The site is chock-full of tutorials and good advice for Photoshop beginners, and the online forums are a great place to ask fellow users for help on all sorts of editing-related queries.



1 Dodging the issue

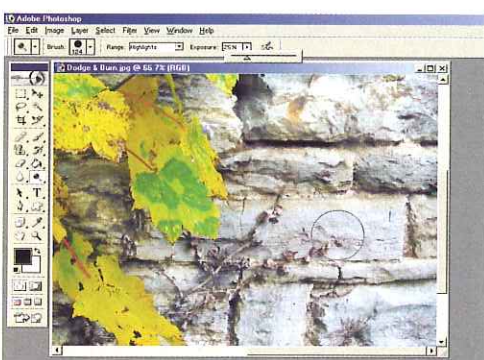
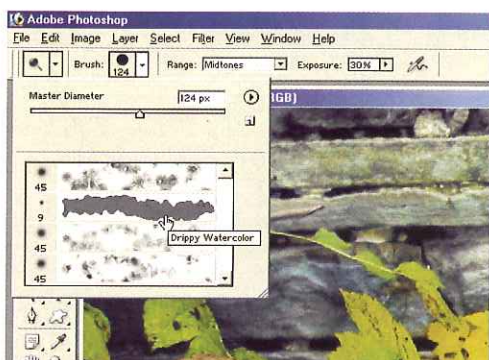
When dodging and burning, the first step is to decide how you want to adjust your shot. In our case, we're going to lighten the brickwork to shift emphasis away from the leaves. There's a lot of detail in the old stone wall – the dodge tool should help to bring it out.

2 Midtone adjustment

To pick out the hidden detail, we're going to use the dodge tool to adjust the midtones (select 'Midtones' from the menu at the top of the screen). You don't want areas of the picture to look bleached out, so adjust the exposure level as necessary before clicking on the Dodge and Burn icon.

3 Brush strokes

Using gentle strokes, start to click over areas of your shot, raising the midtones to an acceptable level until the detail shows through. You can use heavier strokes in darker areas to achieve an even adjustment and reduce any unwanted shadows. Build up the effect a little at a time for best results.



4 The brush for the job

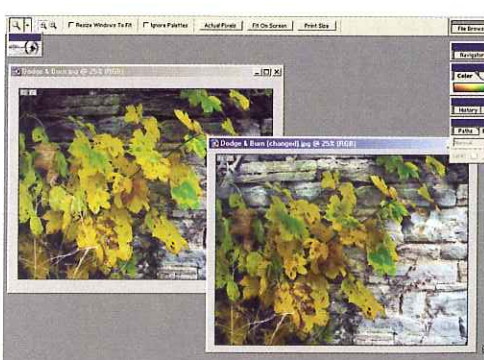
Use different brushes depending on the area you're working on. To cover a large area, use a larger brush to save time, while a small brush is ideal to get into difficult nooks and crannies. You can also experiment with different brush styles such as Drippy Watercolor for some interesting lighting effects.

5 Adding highlights

With the midtones successfully adjusted, select the highlights from the menu and set the exposure rate to around 30 per cent. Use a medium-sized brush to work across the picture, gently picking out the highlights of the image using short, staccato mouse clicks.

6 In the shadows

If there are any shadows or darkened areas that you want to adjust, change to the Shadows setting and work your way around darker areas of the picture with the brush. Quick, sharp clicks should dissolve the area, but take care – too much shadow action can make the area look bleached.



7 Going for the burn

With the brickwork dealt with, we're going to turn our attention to the foliage – the aim is to darken it. Click and hold on the Dodge and Burn tool and click the Burn option. The first step is to adjust the midtones using a medium-sized brush and the exposure set to 50 per cent.

8 Subtle tones

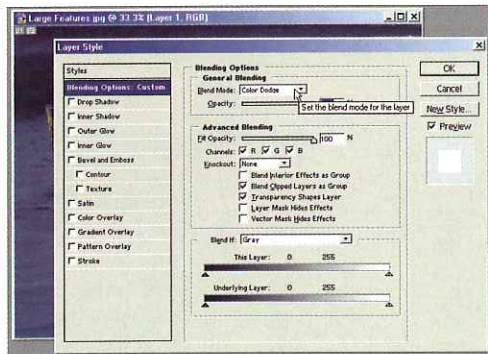
You can see that the autumnal tones from the foliage are really showing through. To give the leafy area of the picture a little more depth, we've also adjusted the highlights and shadows, toning down overly bright areas of the picture and adding shadow behind the leaves.

9 A different view

The dodge and burn tools have enabled us to completely change the look of the original picture. We've brought out the subtle tones of the foliage and revealed the dark, hidden detail in the stonework. With practice, the tools can be used to create all kinds of effects, as we explain over the page.

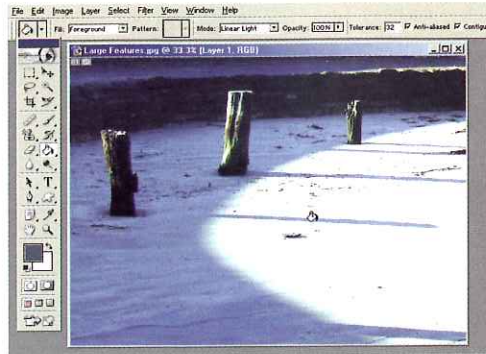
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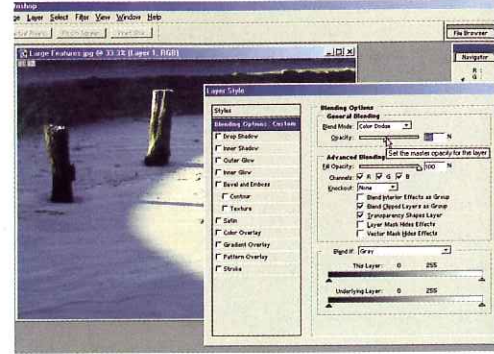
10 Burning options

Dodge and burn techniques can also be used to apply colour adjustments. Open an image and create a new layer via Layer > New Layer, then click on the Layers palette and make sure Color Dodge is selected as the blending mode. Alternatively, click on Layer > Layer Style > Blending Options.



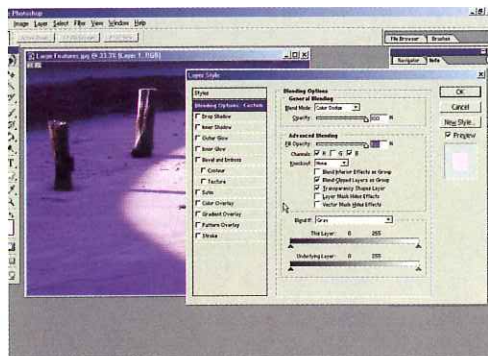
11 Colour dodging

With Color Dodge selected, click on the Paint Bucket tool in the toolbar and select a colour from the palette. Here we've used the eye dropper to capture the darkest pixel element in our photograph and have used this sample colour to create a colour dodge composite.



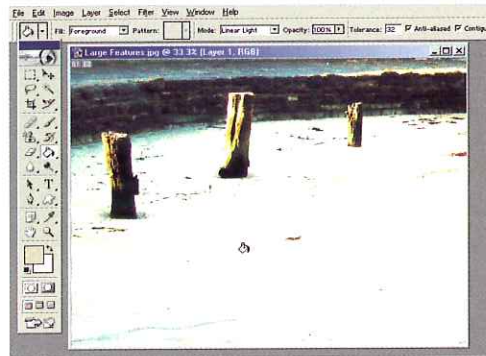
12 Making adjustments

This first attempt has turned our beach snap into something that resembles a lunar landscape. To adjust the overall tone and look of the image, use the blending opacity and fill sliders in the Layer Style window to alter the colour density of the layer and achieve a more subtle colour wash.



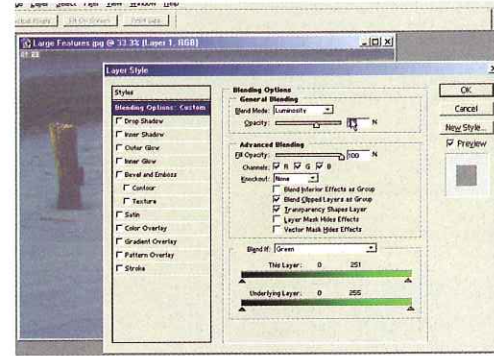
13 Advanced blending

With the Layer Style menu open, you can also adjust which colour channels are used to blend the two layers. By knocking out either the red, green or blue channel (or a combination of two) by clicking to untick the boxes, you can achieve some weird Andy Warhol-type effects.



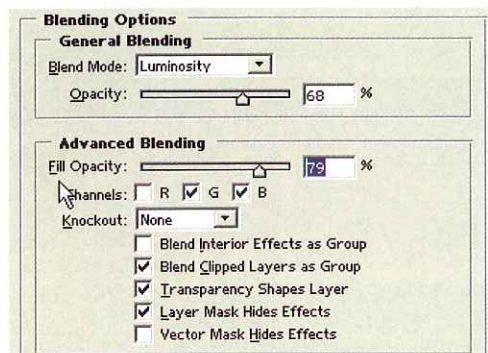
14 Changing colour

Colour dodge effects don't end there. You can also use the Paint Bucket and other colours to create interesting effects. We've used a sandy colour sampled from the beach in our picture to create an overexposed effect without resorting to the contrast and brightness controls.



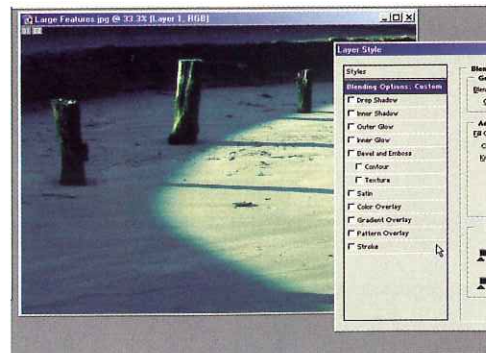
15 Experimenting with luminosity

Open the image you want to edit and create a new layer, then open the Layer Style menu and select Luminosity from the Blend Mode menu. Now close this menu and use the Paint Bucket to create a colour wash on the luminosity layer. Stick to using variations of primary colours for the best effects.



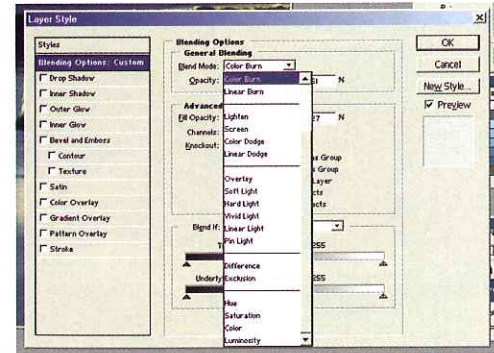
16 Colour tweaks

As with the colour dodge blending effect, you can alter the blend opacity, fill opacity or the colour channels. Again, knocking out one or two of the channels transforms the image drastically – it pays to experiment with different colour fills on the luminosity layer.



17 Time to burn

If you look at the blending mode menu, you'll notice that there are many other blending options to experiment with. The Color Burn layer blend is particularly effective – it adds a subtle wash of colour from the blending layer and can be used to create sub-sepia effects.



18 Many different results

The dodge and burn blending options can be used to achieve both extreme and subtle colour adjustments. Again, the key with Photoshop is to experiment with the tools that are available because there's more than one way of achieving the same effect in this application.