DARKROOM : PHOTO EDITING

Turn Back Time

**Retouching can make subtle, yet dramatic improvements to photos of friends and family**

SPOTS, MOLES AND WRINKLES
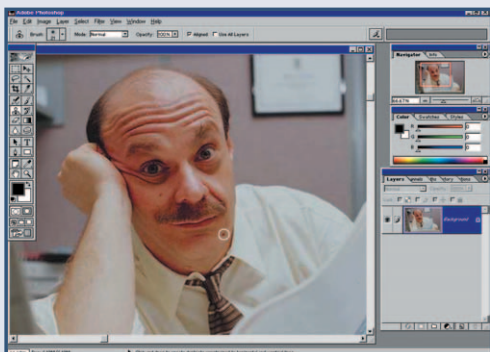
1 Most ordinary mortals suffer spots and blemishes, and it's a given that any skin condition will be at it's worst – or emphasised – when a photo is taken. Conventionally spots and moles are removed by using the Clone tool, overprinting the offending mark with a nearby portion of the skin. It's important to use a soft-edged brush when cloning so the copied skin tones merge seamlessly with the existing texture.
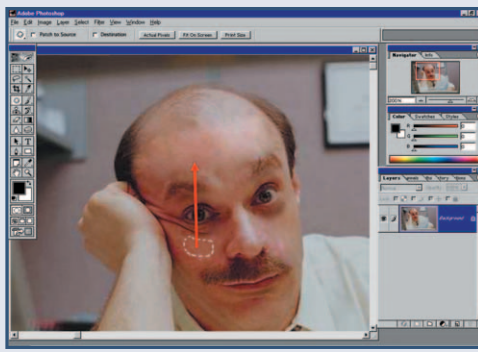
2 Wrinkles can be more problematic to remove: the furrowed brow here, more so. It is often difficult to find areas of skin tone that provide a perfect match. Usually the Clone tool could be used, at a low opacity to correct these faults, but the Heal and Patch tools in the latest version of Photoshop can take the skin texture from one area and paste it over another another – in this case over the wrinkles. The benefit of using these tools is that the colours of the original area is preserved, but only the texture (the wrinkles) is changed.
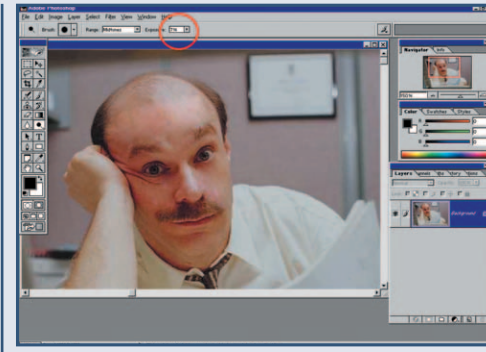
3 That the Heal and Patch tools preserve the tones of the original pixels can sometimes be a drawback. Where the skin needs to be lightened – for example to de-emphasise cheek bones or to remove bags from under the eyes – it doesn't really help. In these instances, the Dodge tool has to be used to lighten areas. Activate and set the tool to a very low exposure (between 5-10 per cent) and build up the effect gradually. The saturation of colours in the dodged area may need to be increased the saturation as dodging tends to drain colour.

THE WINNING SMILE
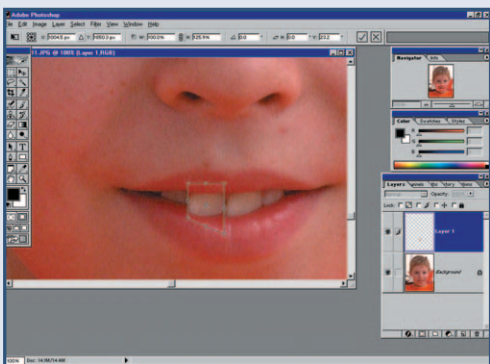
1 The ravages of time don't just affect skin – teeth and eyes can look the worse for wear, and not just with older folk. Whether the subject is old or young a sparkle can be added to smiles and eyes with a little digital corrective surgery. A missing or damaged tooth can be replaced by selecting an adjacent or suitable nearby example and copying it. The Transform tool will have to be used to adjust the size and shape slightly to fit the corresponding gap.
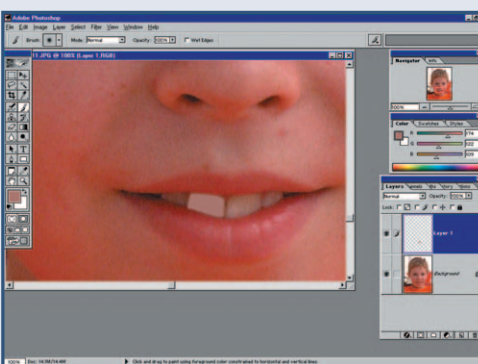
2 If there isn't a convenient tooth to copy, create one. Make a new layer and drawing an tooth shape with the Brush tool. Use the Eyedropper tool to sample colours from another teeth or select a convincing cream colour from the colour picker (don't use pure white). Don't worry that the new tooth looks fake at this stage.

3 Use the Burn tool to add some shading to the tooth to make it appear more 3-D. Slowly (again using a very low exposure setting), using a very fine brush, add shading around all sides. It helps if you've other teeth to duplicate the effect for, but there is no need for absolute precision. Use the Eraser to trim the edges of the painted tooth to make it match the space and alignment of the others.
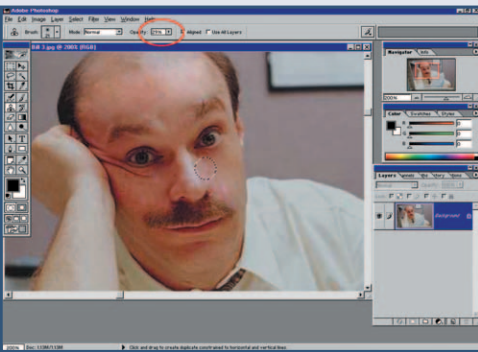
4 Pay attention to other aspects of the face that also vary according to age. Lip and chin shading also tends to become more pronounced with age. Use the same dodging technique to lighten the area below the lower lip and chin. Look too for any other areas that need smoothing. Use the Clone tool with an opacity of around 30 per cent to reduce streaking and marks on the skin. This is a good way to eliminate fine blood vessel marks around the nose.
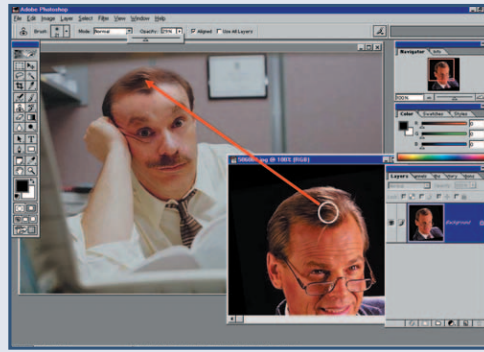
5 Hair is the most difficult element in the image to replace convincingly. Not only does it need to be photographically convincing, but it also has to be faithful to the subject. That means restoring the hairline and texture of the hair that the subject would have had in the past – anything else will look obviously false. When there is little hair to work with, consider using hair texture from other photos of the subject to start adding new hair.

6 Build the hair up gradually and don't aim to give the subject a particularly luxuriant growth. Knowing where to stop is important here. Stand back periodically and examine the overall effect. It's useful to have some old photos around to establish what the subject looked like when they were younger. Darkening the hair is also possible. Create a new layer and paint over the hair using an appropriate colour. Then switch the blend mode of that layer from Normal to Colour.

THE EYES HAVE IT
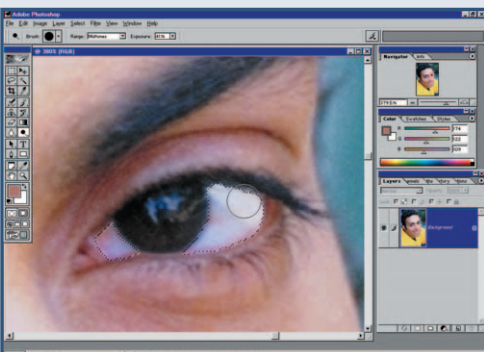
1 Subtle manipulation of a subject's eyes can achieve more than dramatic digital surgery elsewhere on the face. Brightening the eyes can take years off a subject and make for a warmer expression. Begin by selecting the whites of the eyes with the Magic Wand before brightening them. Use the Dodge tool set to an exposure of 10 per cent for this. Don't overdo it. Too much brightening can give your subject a very strange appearance.
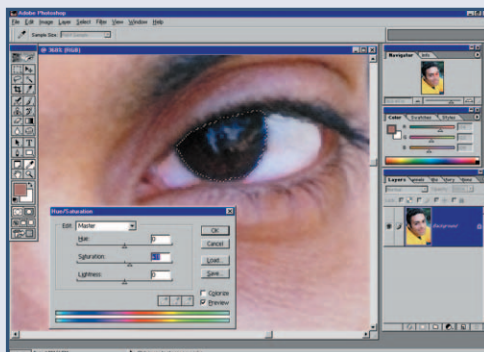
2 Dark brown irises can often become near black and featureless in photographs. Again, the Dodge tool (set exposure to 5 per cent) can be used to lighten them and restore some of the detailing. Next increase the saturation. The Sponge tool (set to Saturate, exposure: 5 per cent) or the Hue/Saturation control can be used, after selecting the irises. Again, do not oversaturate or overbrighten the irises – it helps to zoom out periodically to check the look of the whole face.

3 As a final flourish, add a catchlight to the eyes. Professional portrait photographers often use special flash lights to give a catchlight – a small bright highlight that gives the eye sparkle. The Brush tool can be used to do this – select a fine, soft edged brush and apply some white paint at 70 per cent opacity. Build up the density with repeated applications for a stronger effect.