

A large, stylized blue graphic on a blue background. The top part is a spiral that starts from a central circle and winds outwards. Below the spiral is a stylized figure, possibly a dancer, with a long, thin body and a head that is a circle with a spiral inside, similar to the one above. The figure is positioned as if it is holding the spiral.

Tips and Tricks

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Reach Out & Retouch Someone

DIGITAL IMAGING's technical consultant shares her expertise in the retouching realm.

BY HELENE DELILLO

There is an art to retouching portraits. I have worked with many photographers on portraits ranging from celebrities and executives to pets. Every image must be appropriate to the client's needs and desires. Remember, the idea is to make the client look good (then they're happy—and then they pay you!).

Fashion models and Hollywood notables want their images to be perfect. I call this the 25-year-old crowd—you know, no wrinkles, no stress, hair in place, etc. On the other hand, musicians generally want their images to be closer to reality. They are more interested in looking cool, and a little weathering of the skin shows character and personality.

Then there are corporate executives. They are a breed unto themselves, a combination of Hollywood star and musician. They like looking mature with personality and intelligence, but they also want to look good. They want you to look at the image and say, That's why we hired her. See how intelligent she is—and pretty, too! So, when airbrushing executives, I don't remove all of the wrinkles like I would on a fashion model. This might have the executive lose credibility—cute people don't run companies. The point I'm trying to make: It's important to know a little about your subject and



In the before shot (left), the eye needs to be sharpened, eyelashes darkened, and the under-eye area lightened; the desired results (right) are achieved using tools in Photoshop.

get a feel for the image, which leads me to our next step.

LOOKING AT THE BIG PICTURE

Your first instinct is usually the best. What is your overall feeling of the original image and how does it represent the person in the photograph? What is the image for? How sensitive is the subject about his or her appearance? Some additional questions might be:

- What are the first things that stand out?
- Is there a zit in the middle of the subject's forehead?
- Is the makeup applied evenly?
- Does the lipstick match the lip-liner color?
- Is the chair the subject is sitting on in the frame and distracting?
- Is the lighting contrasty and

showing all the pores in the subject's face?

- Is one of the eyes out of focus? Does it need cleaning up?
- Is the skin tone and texture pleasing?

Once you have determined what it is that needs to be done without discussing it with the client, then ask the client what they would like to do to the image. I have a retouching form that my clients fill out with specific instructions. The retouching process is a creative one, and sometimes after you've retouched part of an image you may decide you liked it better the way it was initially. Make sure you always save the original file so the client can see the before and the after. It's also a good idea for you to keep a copy of the original.

OPENING THE EYE

1. Duplicate the "background" image layer. Name it "Retouched."

2. Create an adjustment layer in Levels—making sure highlight midtone and shadow are set correctly.

3. Use the Rubber Stamp/Clone tool to remove black spots/dust in the image. Set Opacity to 100% and Normal Setting.

4. Zoom into the center of the eye; take a look at the white of the eye.

5. Clone using Lighten from the sub menu (see Screen #1, right).

6. Go to the Edit menu and select Preferences; select Menu display and cursers and check the box brush size (see Screen #2, right).

7. Make sure Clone tool is selected. Hold the Option key down on the Mac, Alt key on Windows. Select the area to the left of the center of the eye, which is the whiter part. Set Opacity to 10%. Select a soft-edge brush. Brush over the area that's dark. Notice it only retouches dark areas and replaces it with the lighter color.

This technique I use for strong shadows under the eyes, wrinkles, and veins in the skin. It is one of my favorite retouching tools. However, I must caution you in using the Clone tool. If you take this tool too far, you will get a repeating pattern and the image will look flat. You can avoid this by unselecting Align in your Rubber Stamp Options window. Another way to avoid repeating patterns is to use the Airbrush Set with Lighten at 6% as you brush in the whiteness until it looks good.

CORRECTING THE EYELASHES AND SHARPENING THE EYE

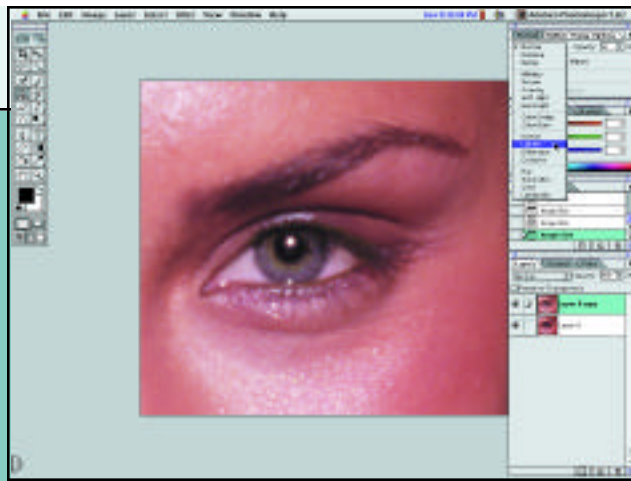
1. Use the Burn tool; set Opacity to 6% and select a very small soft-edge brush. This is the only time I suggest the Burn tool!

2. Zoom into the bottom line of the eyelashes so they fit into the window.

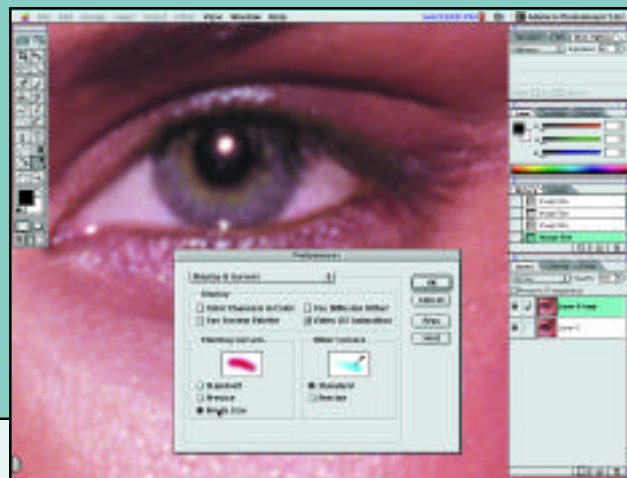
3. Follow the lines of the eyelashes and extend them. This darkens them, making the eye appear sharper. Also zoom into the iris and trace the edge with the Burn tool. Don't go over the same area twice; the Burn tool will turn your image undesirable colors if you do.

4. Caution: Some images won't work if this is the case. Use the Airbrush tool with a color sampled from the edge that is dark, set the brush to 6%, and trace the eye and eyelashes again like this. It also works wonders in adding depth to the eye.

5. Now examine the before and after shots.



Screen #1



Screen #2

Some portrait photographers will have me retouch an image before the client has a chance to see it. Sometimes I'll even go on the set during the photo shoot. It's one of the advantages of digital cameras. As the image is shot, we can immediately go in and crop or clean up the image using Photoshop. Then we can work with the client right there. This is only done in rare cases, since there's the risk that the client will want to become the art director!

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

Now for the fun part (see box with steps): We are going to focus on a few of my favorite tools in Adobe Photoshop. If you are using another digital-imaging software package,

you can use the same technique—the tools will just be slightly different.

Let's start with the eyes. This is what speaks to us in a picture. Take a look at the eye on the previous page (on the left): The eye needs to open up; under the eye needs to be lightened; the inside red lines need to be lightened; the eyelashes need to be blacker to brighten the eyes; and the eye needs sharpening (it's out of focus).

Just follow the steps on the left to get started!

Helene DeLillo (helene@dancingicon.com) will be presenting sessions on digital retouching at the Thunder Lizard Photoshop Conference (www.thunderlizard.com) in Orlando, Florida, and at Adobe's booth at PhotoPlus East.

