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JOHN ROSS

www.TheArtOfRetouching.com

While Photoshop might have five different ways of doing anything, knowing which one will do it the best will lead to your success. Understanding the light sources, and how they affect the various objects within the image, is critical to making your composites believable. Learn to play with shadows and highlights, and help them interact with each other to create depth within the image.

■ Learn how to apply more of John Ross's expert photo-editing techniques in his tutorial on architectural retouching on p50



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Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill,
Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200

Web: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
www.advancedphotoshop.co.uk
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Magazine team

Editor April Madden

april.madden@imagine-publishing.co.uk

☎ 01202 586218

Editor in Chief Dan Hutchinson

Production Editor Alicea Francis

Senior Designer Curtis Fermoer-Dunman

Photographer James Sheppard

Senior Art Editor Duncan Crook

Publishing Director Aaron Asadi

Head of Design Ross Andrews

Contributors

Julie Bassett, Tjard du Plessis, Larissa Mori, Kirk Nelson,
Autun Purser, John Ross, Anna-Lisa Saywell, Simon Seaton
and Pat Watson

Advertising

Digital or printed media packs are available on request.

Head of Sales Hang Denitz

☎ 01202 586442

hang.denitz@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Advertising Manager Alex Carnegie

☎ 01202 586430

alex.carnegie@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Sales executive Tim Hawkins

☎ 01202 586437

tim.hawkins@imagine-publishing.co.uk

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Assets and resource files for this magazine can be found
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International

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partnership opportunities.

Head of International Licensing Cathy Blackman

☎ +44 (0) 1202 586401

licensing@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Subscriptions

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adphotoshop@servicehelpline.co.uk

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Circulation

Head of Circulation Darren Pearce

☎ 01202 586200

Production

Production Director Jane Hawkins

☎ 01202 586200

Founders

Group Managing Director Damian Butt

Group Finance & Commercial Director Steven Boyd

Printing & Distribution

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MASTER ARCHITECTURAL RETOUCHING

PLANNING, CREATIVITY AND COLOUR BALANCE CAN GIVE A FLAT IMAGE VISUAL DEPTH AND AN EVOCATIVE LOOK

The job of architectural retouching is to make a shot of a building more than merely a photograph. It should represent the idealised physical reality of the building, removing the extraneous clutter of city life (cars, traffic signs, litter) and enhancing the scene with better lighting, an improved sky, and a sense of calm focus that makes the building the star. To do this, you'll need to master retouching and compositing techniques.

Retouching and compositing is just like assembling a 1000-piece puzzle. For every tiny

piece that you connect, you will be one step closer to completion. To avoid becoming overwhelmed, focus on the part, not the whole.

No matter what type of image you need to work on, it will come with many different challenges. Before you start retouching, pretend you have already finished. What does the image look like? What steps did you take to create it? Start every project by planning backwards. Imagine the steps you are going to need to take to get the project where you want it. Look at the various elements that you are going to use, and try working out all

the problems in your head first. Figuring out how you would solve the issues up front will make it easier once you get into the complex part of the retouching later. Fifteen minutes now could save you hours later.

During the planning phase, you may want to create a quick and loose mock-up for yourself. You might even scribble some notes across the image to help guide you in the right direction. Give yourself a bird's-eye view of the project before you get in deep with the details. Ready? Let's get started.



OUR EXPERT

JOHN ROSS
www.TheArtOfRetouching.com
John educates photographers and retouchers by helping them expand their creativity through Photoshop from his website, and the classes he teaches from New Haven, Connecticut.

SOURCE FILES

The image used for this tutorial can be found at [dreamstime.com/stock-images-building-modern-architecture-image7184644](https://www.dreamstime.com/stock-images-building-modern-architecture-image7184644).

WORK IN PROGRESS

FROM STOCK PHOTO TO FINISHED ART



Progress 1: Planning



Progress 2: Correcting, cloning and compositing



Progress 3: Final effects



01 PLANNING AHEAD

When starting a new project, everything seems to be uphill battles with very complex solutions. Try and pace yourself. Don't tackle everything at once. Plan it out, and take it one step at a time. Create a to-do list with notes for yourself. Maybe even put together a quick composite to see where you are going.

“Don't tackle everything at once. Plan it out, and take it one step at a time”



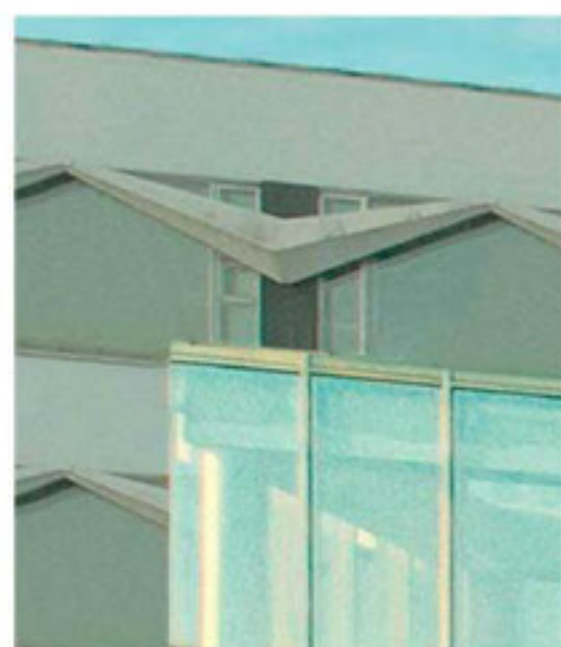
02 TECHNICAL ISSUES

Before detailed retouching, start by getting the technical details out of the way. This image is supplied in an Untagged Color Profile. Use Edit>Convert to Profile and make it AdobeRGB, which is a safe profile to use as it is a common industry standard. Resize the artwork to match the final printed size, if it will be larger than the existing file. If it will print smaller, keep the larger size. For magazine work, keep in mind the gutter (gap between the pages), and the outside bleed that will be trimmed.



03 TOUGH CLONING

Start by clicking the 'Create New Layer' button in the Layers palette. Clone the background building from the right side, to left. There is just enough information to add the entire left side of the building. Once you get the first row completed, then clone down two more times, making a duplicate pattern. Right now, it's three rows of an exact match, but you can fix it later. Bit by bit, it starts to come together. Before you know it, the task will be done, and no-one will know.



04 PACE YOURSELF

Before getting into the creative part, start by correcting the severe flaws first. When you find yourself stressing over the details, zoom out. How bad is it? Stop 'pixel peeping' and getting too close. If it's not noticeable, then don't worry about it. No one will ever look as closely as you are. In this case, we have just started fixing things. There is still plenty of time to work out any remaining problems once you get to the later stages, and can see the image coming together.

QUICK TIP

While lens flares create drama and add unity to your images, try to use them sparingly. Photoshop comes with a few limited flares. If you enjoy using them, you should look into the Knoll Light Factory plug-in, which comes with several dozen completely different and customisable flare types.



05 LOWER BUILDING

The back building on the left has the same roofline, with the building in front of it. Drop the background building to offset it. This will help create some added depth, and make it clear they are two different buildings. Also, by dropping the building down and cloning from the ground up, you will find that you can easily cover over the car so it's gone. This is why working on separate layers for all the parts is so important.



08 DOOR REFLECTIONS

The doors that you cloned in will appear to have a repeating pattern. By adding a random reflection, it will be less obvious. Select the Combined layer, Ctrl/right-click, and select 'Convert to Smart Object'. Select the glass on the doors however you would like, and add several filters to add the illusion of depth and transparency. Play with different filters to see what you can get. Try Filter>Distort>Ripple, Filter>Pixelate>Facet, Filter>Render>Clouds, and Filter>Render>Fibers. The first one will apply the selection as a Smart Filter Mask.



06 SCALE THE GROUND

After cloning over the car, you can select all the layers and use Cmd/Ctrl+Opt/Alt+Shift+E to merge all selected layers into a new flattened layer. Usually, you should avoid doing this as it is a permanent change, leaving old layers behind. But in this case, the option we need to use will only work on flattened layers. Use the Lasso to select the left side of the ground. Use Edit>Content-Aware Scale to stretch out the ground so that it stretches the brick pattern in a believable way.



09 DOOR DETAILS

At this point, you should start focusing in on some of the details for the doors. While the previous reflections help quite a lot, taking the time to add highlights and shadows around the frame of the doors will really help. Also be sure to include some final touches on the door windows by adding some shading to the top and bottoms. Maybe even add some door handles. This will once again break up the impression of having a repeating pattern across the various doors.



07 SCALE THE SKY

Once again, use Edit>Content-Aware Scale, only this time you will be grabbing the left of the sky. There is a huge difference between using Edit>Free Transform, and Edit>Content-Aware Scale. Basically, this tool will try to keep solid objects from stretching, and prefers to distort big, open areas. For this sky, you will find that it pushes the clouds apart by adding more blue between them. The goal here is to fill in extra white space on the left, but not distort any of the clouds themselves.

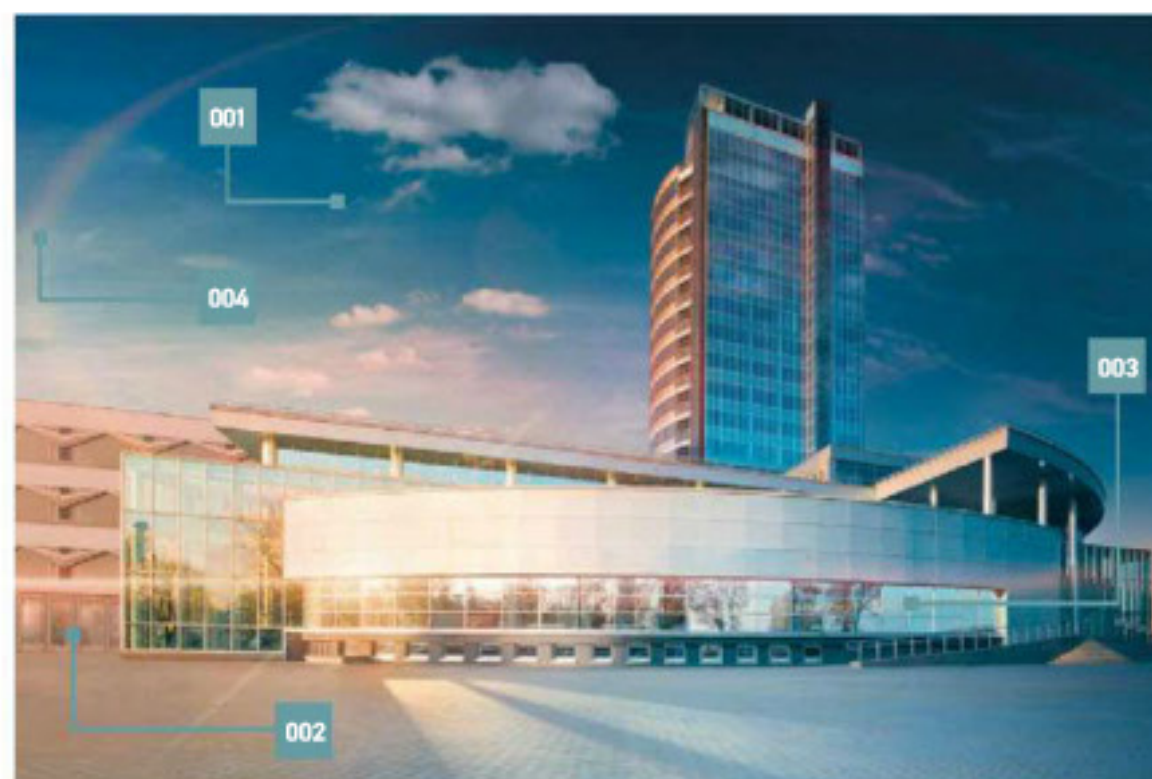


10 SMART OBJECTS

Select all of your layers, and use the slide-out menu to select 'Convert to Smart Object'. Select the new Smart Object layer, and drag it onto the 'Create New Layer' icon. One layer will be used for the background sky; the other layer will be for the foreground building. By separating them, we can colour-correct more easily. We now have a complete full-sized image, with the basic elements laid out where we want them. Time to start creative retouching!

12 LAYER ORDER MATTERS

Before the heavy retouching, consider your imaginary layering order. How will the parts stack together? Which elements will be created by hand and which ones can be filters? Which parts need adjustment layers, and which can be done in the Camera Raw filter? What is in the foreground, what goes in the background? How do things group together? Keep your pixel layers on the bottom, and adjustment layers on top. If you can keep them separate, it will allow for more flexibility later on.



001 | PREPARE FOR SUCCESS

Create a list of things you need to get done before starting. Planning up front will help you avoid problems later.

002 | FIXING CORE PROBLEMS

When working with stock images, who knows where the images came from? Be prepared to spend some time fixing basic issues.

003 | FOCUS ON DETAILS

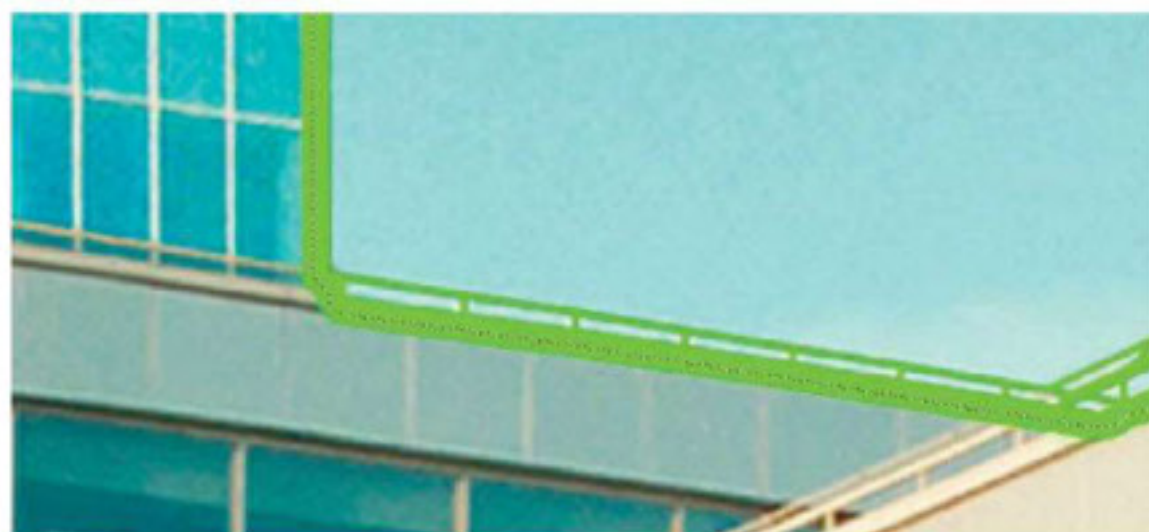
Take the time to create subtle highlights and allow objects to pass through each other. The results are worth the effort.

004 | ENJOY THE CREATIVITY

Even on the most technical images, there is still a world of play and experimentation to explore. Who knows what will happen?

■ QUICK TIP

Camera Raw Filter comes with the same power as Adobe Camera Raw. Only now, you can use it on any layer from within Photoshop. If used on a Smart Object, it will become a Smart Filter. This will give you the ability to jump in and out as you develop your images.



11 MASKING THE BUILDING

While some retouchers prefer to silhouette with the Pen tool, learning how to use the Quick Mask (Q) and a small brush will give the most realistic results. Once the building is outlined, fill the mask in. Using the Magic Wand and Select>Modify>Expand 5-8 pixels, then filling with black, will overlap any soft edges. Push the Q key again to come out of Quick Mask. Select the top layer, and click the 'Add Layer Mask' button at the bottom of the Layers palette to apply the mask.



13 CUT IN MASKING

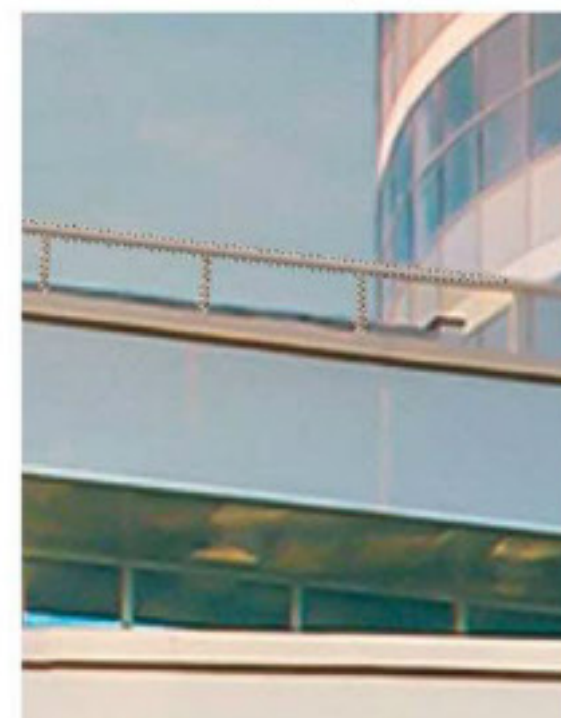
During the silhouetting stage, pay close attention to details. You need to come close to the edge, but be sure not to drift over the side. Leave a few pixels behind that will be cut off from the mask. No one will miss a few pixels when you cut in. If you cut wide, everyone will see it as a mistake. Generally, when zooming in 200-400%, leave 3-4 pixels behind. This will give the clean result you are looking for.



14 COLOUR CORRECTIONS

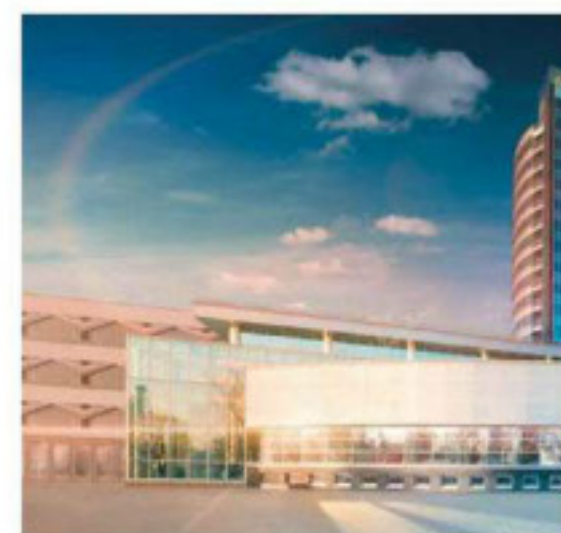
Now that the foreground and background elements are separated, you can use Filter>Camera Raw Filter to make your colour and tonal changes on the building layer. Be sure to enhance the warm tones, and really pull out the sunset colours. On the bottom sky layer, you can give the blue a much darker and deeper tone. Use the Graduated Filter to really bring out the deep blue and warm oranges from the various directions. Because this has nothing to do with the building, you can play with it more easily.

“Smart Objects and adjustment layers provide the flexibility necessary to give you a truly non-destructive workflow”



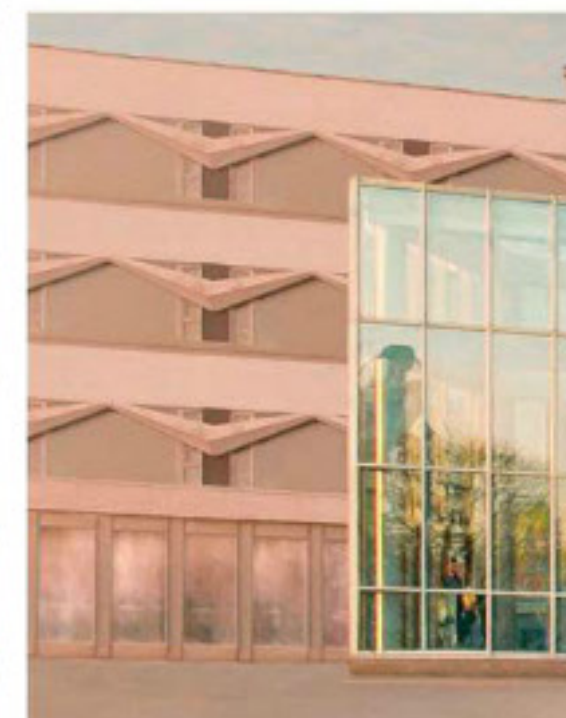
15 MISSING RAILING

Notice how there is a railing that runs from the right to the left at the base of the tower, but then stops? This is poor cloning on the image as it's been supplied. The simple solution is to push the 'Create New Layer' button at the bottom of the Layers palette. Use the Eye Dropper to grab the same colour from the existing railing. Use the Brush tool to begin painting with a small brush. Add some reflections to the railing as well.



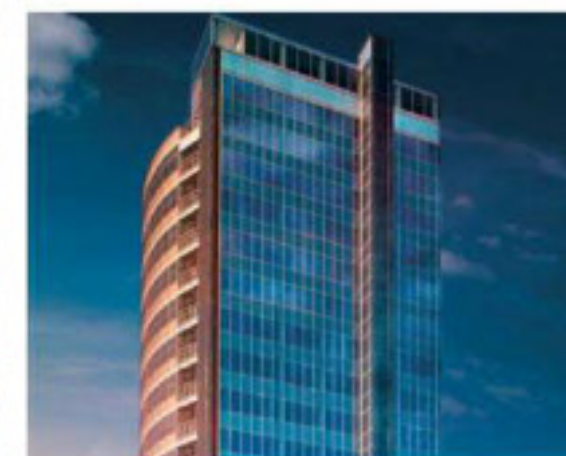
18 LENS FLARE

Make the image more dynamic by adding a lens flare. You could either use one built into Photoshop from Filter>Render>Lens Flare, or use one from the Knoll Light Factory plug-in, which has dozens to choose from. This image was created with Knoll's Flash Gordon settings. To do this, create a black layer on top. Ctrl/right-click and select 'Convert to Smart Object'. Change the blend mode to Screen, and then select a lens flare of your choice. This will add it to the layer as an adjustable Smart Filter.



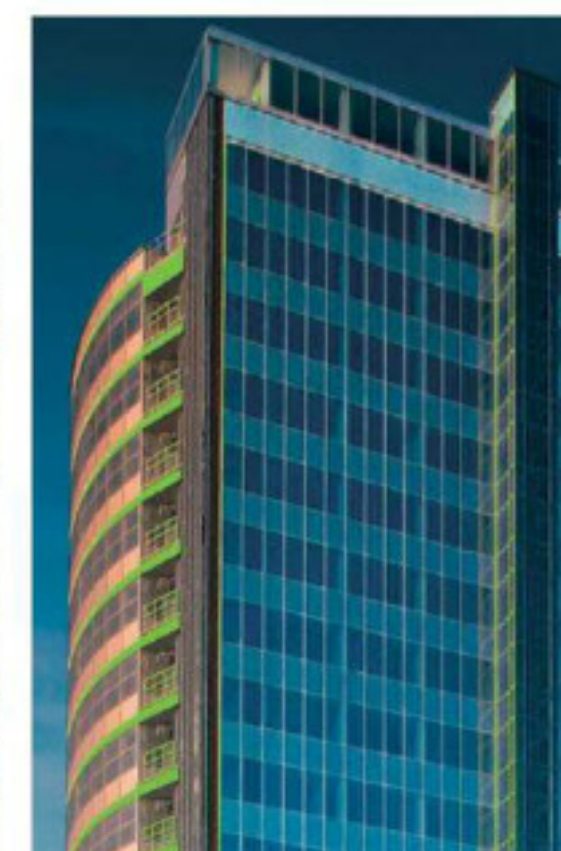
16 SIDE BUILDING

Some more depth can be added to the left side building. Push it further into the distance by lightening the shadows with Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Curves and bring the left side of the curve up. As objects go into the distance, they become lighter with fewer details. You can also add some more sunset warmth as well, by using Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Photo Filter at 41%. You can also adjust the tones by highlighting certain elements to give it more depth with Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Exposure set to +17.



19 TOWER REFLECTIONS

To add cloud reflections on the tower, start by creating a new blank layer and filling with Filter>Render>Clouds. Select the layer, Ctrl/right-click, and select 'Convert to Smart Object'. Next, you need to grab the dark blues by using Select>Color Range. When you think you have it, push the OK button. You can refine the selection by pushing the Q key for the Quick Mask mode. When done, hit the Q key again. Try various filters to see what you get, like Filter>Distort>Ripple and Filter>Distort>ZigZag.



17 TOWER HIGHLIGHTS

Sometimes, you really need to pay attention to the small things, like adding some extra highlight details onto the sunny side of the tower. Using a Quick Mask (Q) and a very small brush, paint along the brightest parts of the tower, shown here in green. When you have all the little parts selected, hit the Q key again to come out of the Quick Mask. Then select Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Curves to lighten up the highlighted areas. This will give added depth to the focal point of the image.



20 FINAL CORRECTIONS

Now you can finally see your vision come to life. Finish by going into the various Smart Objects and adjustment layers and tweak any of the colours, exposures, or filters. You may not have completed all the changes you laid out back in step one, but at least you had a guide. By following along with these steps, you will find amazing flexibility in your file structures. Smart Objects and adjustment layers provide the flexibility necessary to give you a truly non-destructive workflow.