

Class 2 – Photoshop Elements Must-Know Tools

At the start of our *Photo RR&R* course we go into a whirlwind tour of the *Photoshop Elements* tools that you need to be already familiar with in order to engage in photo retouching, repair and restoration.

Before beginning, here is a very important time- and hair-saving technique: Always consider the choices available up in the **Option Bar** for the tool that you select. Also, know that many of the tool option selections don't revert back to their original state. I therefore suggest that you **RESET** the tool (or **RESET ALL TOOLS**) by clicking on the microscopic disclosure triangle at the left-most end of the tool option bar. A pop-up menu will appear where you can make your **RESET** selection. Furthermore, if you ever encounter odd or unexpected behavior with your Photoshop tools, do a tool reset as described above.

And now, the MUST-KNOW Photoshop Tools and Techniques:

CROP TOOL: Check that Option bar up top for important options. You can also crop with a selection tool by making a selection then go to **menu:IMAGE>CROP**

STRAIGHTEN TOOL: You get to tell *Photoshop* how to straighten an image. Drag the tool cursor along what should be a straight edge – like a horizon or a building. Look at the Straighten Tool **OPTION BAR** for important options when using this tool.

FREE TRANSFORM: To allow you to manually manipulate (distort, skew, rotate) a selected object

SELECTION TOOLS: For selecting square, rectangular or round areas. Remember to **ADD TO** a selection with the **SHIFT** key and to **SUBTRACT** from the selection with the **ALT(OPTION on Mac)** key. Also, the very special shortcut of pressing the **SPACEBAR** while making a selection to help you position your selection without starting over. The **POLYGONAL SELECTION TOOL** is used for the selection of object with straight edges. The **LASSO TOOL** is used to select irregularly shaped objects. The **MAGIC WAND** is a good way to select large areas of even color. The **SELECTION BRUSH** can be used to “brush” on a selection. By using a soft brush, you can automatically feather the selection. New in *Elements 6* is the **QUICK SELECTION TOOL** (replacing the Magic Selection Brush). This gives you a easy way to make a fast selection, and not having to use the **SHIFT-Select** technique to add selections to existing selections. Use the **ALT(OPTION on Mac)** key to **SUBTRACT** areas from an existing selection.

SAVING SELECTIONS: You have an important feature for saving selections, particularly when they were painstakingly done. This is located under the **SELECTION** menu. You save, and later reload, selections that are stored in the file itself.

FEATHERING SELECTIONS: Frequently necessary for the removal of that hard-edge effect to a selection. Under the **SELECTION** menu.

COLOR SAMPLER EYEDROPPER TOOL: Set the sampling to three pixels up in the Options bar. Learn to use the three eyedroppers (white, gray, black) found in the **LEVELS** dialog box to do COLOR CORRECTING in an image.

THRESHOLD ADJUSTMENTS in LEVELS: When adjusting the histogram sliders, you can press the ALT(OPTION on Mac) key to have *Photoshop* show you the darkest shadow and lightest highlight areas in the image.

ADJUST COLOR FOR SKIN TONE: this is located under **menu:ENHANCE>COLOR ADJUST**.

LAYERS: The heart of *Photoshop*! Learn to work with Layers, Adjustment Layers, Fill Layers. Learn also to Copy, Merge, and Flatten layers. **LAYER OPACITY** is frequently used in repair and restoration work.

LAYER MASKING TECHNIQUE: Used with **ADJUSTMENT LAYERS**. Black on an layer mask is like masking tape! It masks the effect of the adjustment you are making. You “paint” on the black masking, or erase it with white. Remember this: **WHITE REVEALS, BLACK CONCEALS**

SHADOW/HIGHLIGHT ADJUSTMENTS: A fairly new, very powerful tool found in **menu:ENHANCE>ADJUST LIGHTING**. Really helps fix a poorly exposed image. Helps bring out detail in shadows and tone down highlights.

GAUSSIAN BLUR: Forget all the other blurring filters. Use GAUSSIAN!! A perfect tool for adding a soft-focus effect. Under **menu:FILTER>BLUR**.

RED-EYE TOOL: *Photoshop Elements* makes fixing red-eye such a cinch!

LIQUIFY FILTER: Used frequently to fix smiles, reduce “love handles,” build muscle tone, and much more. Located in **menu:FILTER>DISTORT**

SPOT HEALING BRUSH: Used to fix blemishes, remove dust spots, hair and nose piercings! Adjust the size to just a bit larger than the blemish, then click. It uses the texture that surrounds the spot as a guide to how *Photoshop* should “paint-over” the spot. This way, color, texture and tone are matched up.

HEALING BRUSH: This brush is great for the removal of wrinkles and crows-feet by first sampling a clean area, then “painting” over the affected area. Like the Clone Tool, but more realistic. This tool works by merging background and source details as you paint. After doing the healing, tone it back a bit by reducing the **LAYER OPACITY**, otherwise the fix looks too unrealistic.

CLONE STAMP: This traditional tool still has a place in photo editing. For example, use it to remove distracting signs and modern light fixtures from an antique building wall.