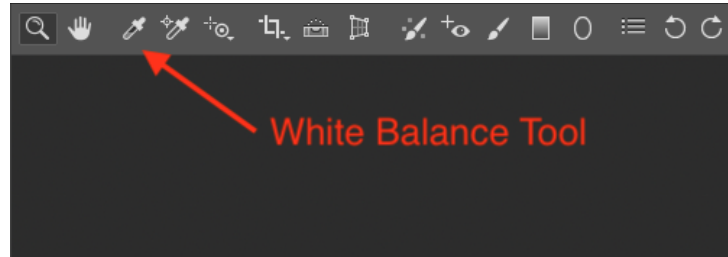


Portraits in ACR

Portraits are handled slightly differently to normal pictures at the start of the work flow.

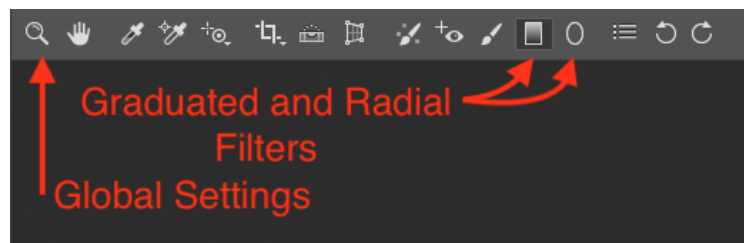
For a portrait it is important that the skin colour is correct or believable. An incorrect white balance can create an unbelievable skin tone.

ACR has a useful tool



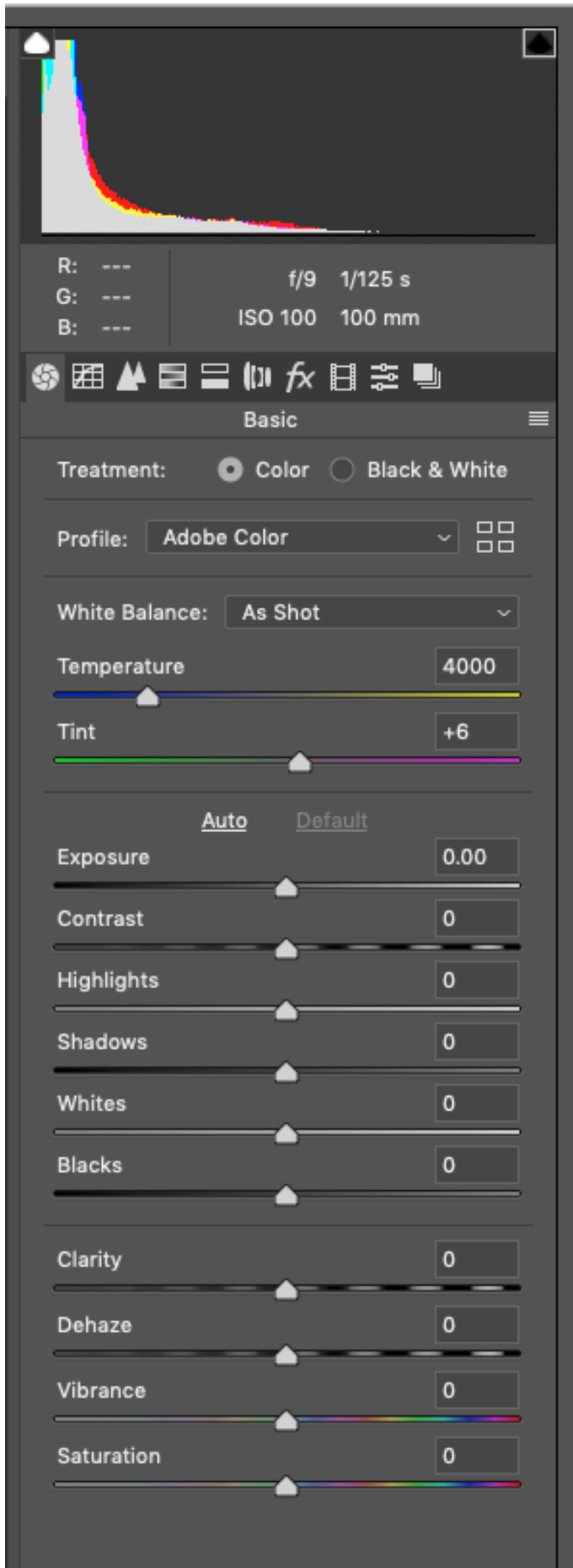
You can click round the image on things like white clothing, whites of eyes, and teeth. The decision as to what is a believable or correct is an artistic choice. Even better is to include a grey card or X-Rite colorchecker passport in a test image or in an area of the final image you know you will crop off. A white card can be used but it must not be at peak white as ACR will refuse to use it.

ACR allows you to make global changes to the image or to chose parts of the image to apply the filters.



The Global tools are in the order that ACR suggests you use them.

Below shows the Global Tools and a histogram for an underexposed image. By sliding the exposure control to the right, the exposure can be corrected. Care needs to be taken with this as in a portrait correcting exposure to peak whites is likely to produce unwanted "hot" spots on the skin, such as forehead, cheeks etc. depending upon lighting. The amount of exposure correction is therefore an artistic choice.



This is the histogram, black is to the left, white is to the right. This image is underexposed.

Sliding Exposure to the right can correct the exposure. The remaining controls can be used, for example if the exposure has been put to the right a bit too much Highlights can be used to recover them whilst the remainder of the image will be more exposed. Blacks and Whites are the equivalent of Levels in PSE & PS.

Clarity can be used globally but it might be better used in an Elliptical filter.

For ladies slide clarity to the left and for gritty men slide to the right.



Create a radial filter encompassing the face.

Use Clarity as described above. Artistic choice as to where the setting is. Sometimes the reduction in Clarity on the eyes is not a good effect, it can be reversed with small Radial filters on the eyes and Clarity right.

Sliding Shadows to the right can also soften shadows on a lady's face.

Global Clarity can be set to the right to enhance clothing and textures. Global Shadows can be used to reveal things or hide things in the shadows.

The other controls can be experimented with and may improve your image.

Filters can be used "Inside" or "Outside" so a quick vignette can be created with a radial filter nearly filling the frame and an "Outside" reduction in exposure. The feather can be altered to suit.

When you are content then the image can be opened in Photoshop for final tweaks.

Levels

Even though you may have adjusted peak blacks and white in ACR you may wish to readjust using an adjustment layer but this time “hold back” the parts of the image that do not require adjustment by using the mask and a black brush.

Cloning

In order to clone it is advisable to create a duplicate layer and clone on that layer. This can be used to remove blemishes, if your subject is happy you do that, highlights or things that you’d rather were not there!

An example where a highlight might be removed is where a lip has an over exposed area that could not be recovered in ACR. The trick I use in my clone layer is to pick up the colour close to the highlight with the dropper tool. Choose a soft small brush and set, mode darker, opacity and flow reduced to suit and brush over the highlight. If you have set flow to a low number you can build up the colour with repeated brush strokes until happy.

Dodge and Burn

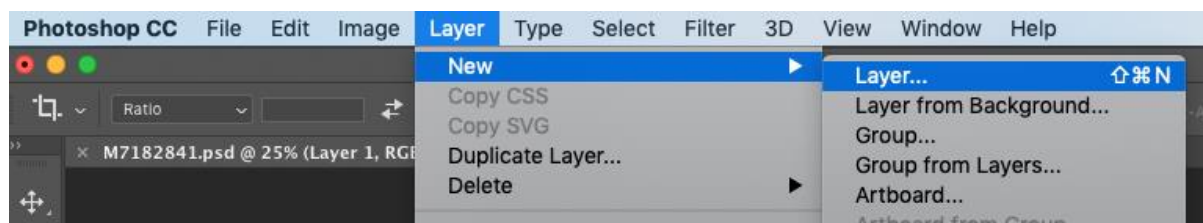
If clarity and shadows within filters in ACR has still left you dissatisfied then whites of eyes can be brightened and the shadows on faces lightened.

Here is the original

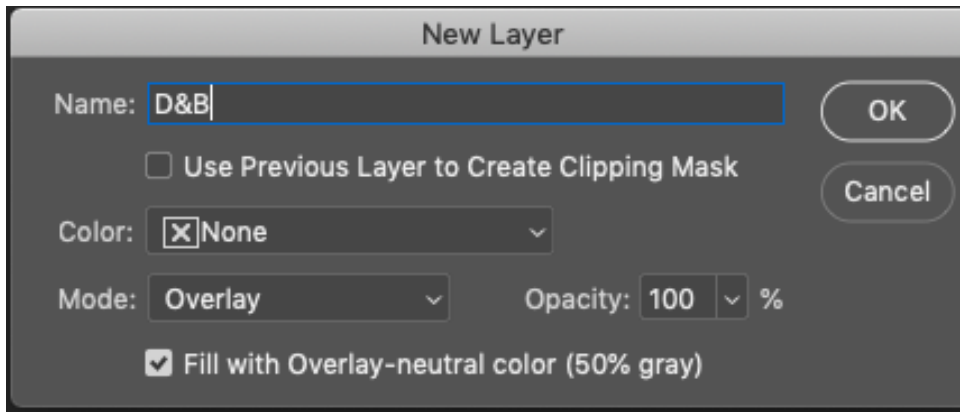


The subject’s whites of eyes are dark and there are dark shadows under her eyes.

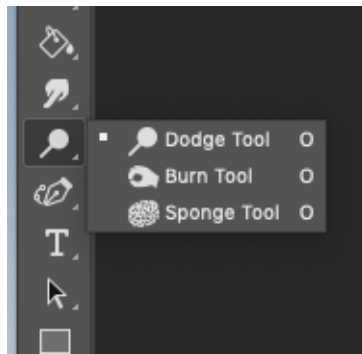
Create a Dodge & Burn Layer, this is a reversible process and better than using the D&B tools directly on the image.



Label the layer D&B, choose mode Overlay, and fill with 50% Grey.



Choose the Dodge tool (this lightens the image)



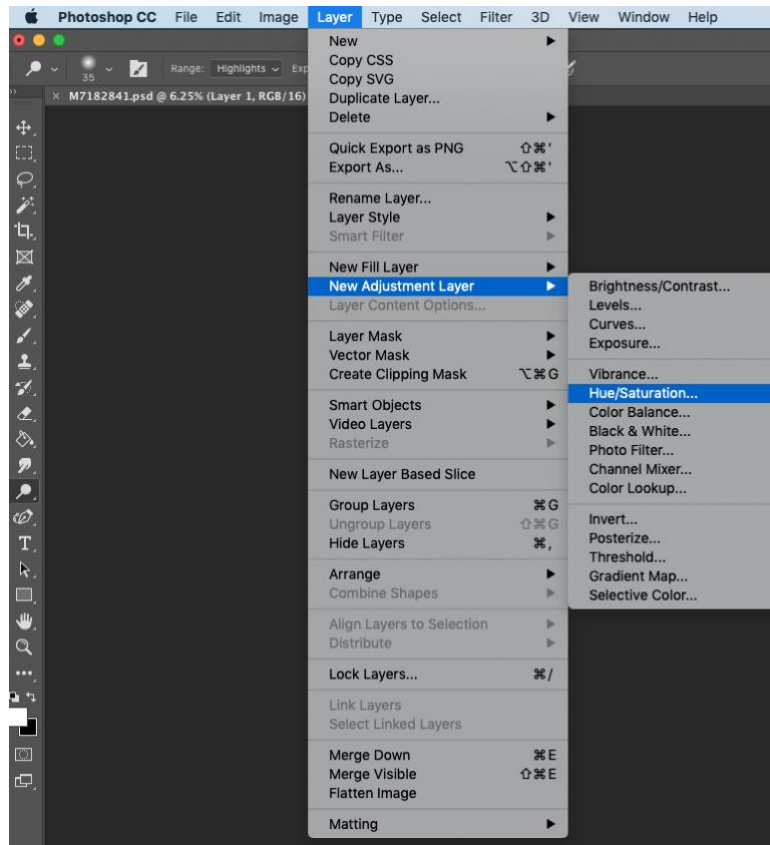
Then choose a size of tool to suit what you are doing, and you can get this result when you brush over the dark parts you wish to lighten.



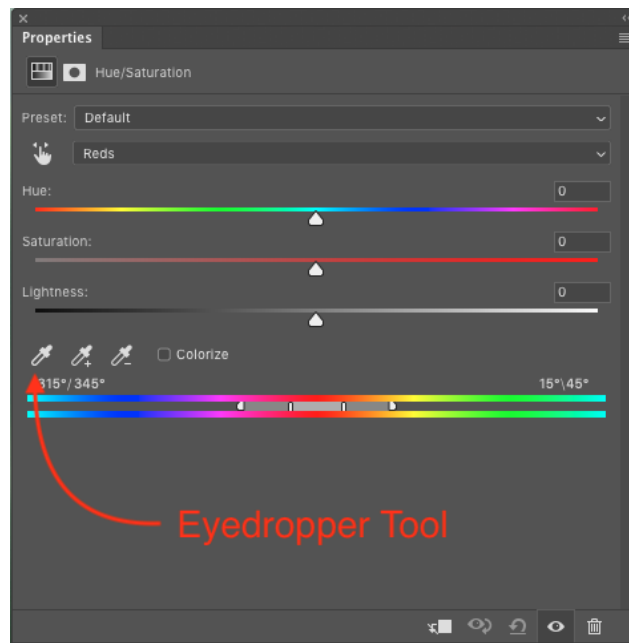
The burn tool can be used to darken areas.

If you change your mind, then you can select 50% grey as the foreground colour and use a brush on the layer to return the area to the original. Be cautious about over-whitening eyes as it is easy to make subjects look demonic!

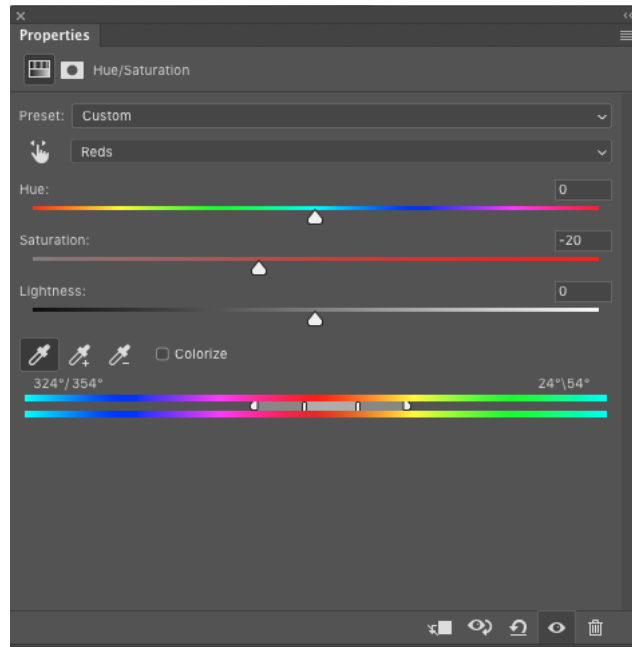
I've just noticed this lady had a red patch under her eye. This is one method of reducing it. Create a Hue & Saturation adjustment layer.



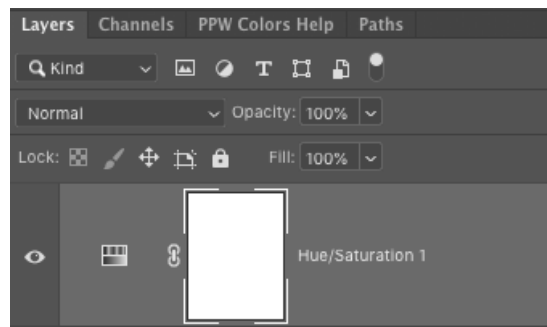
Then click OK when the layer box appears.
This is the Properties window



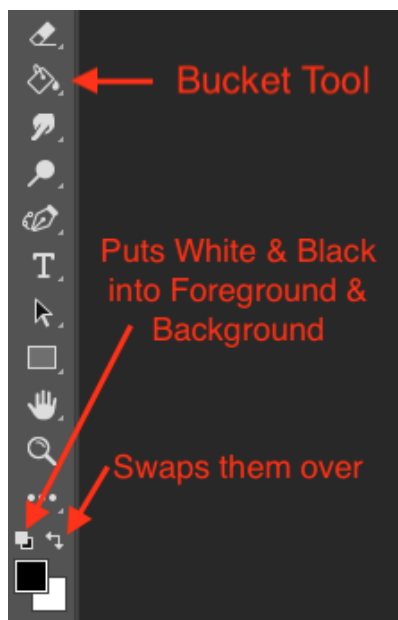
Use the Eyedropper tool to pick up the colour you want to desaturate. Then slide Saturation to the left, sometimes you might need to adjust Lightness, artists choice.



The picture will now look rubbish because you have applied this colour desaturation to the whole image. We will now undo that. This is the Layers pallet. Ensure the mask is outlined.

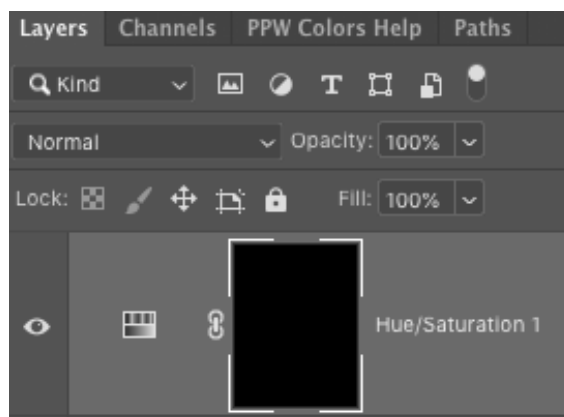


Ensure the foreground colour is Black a pick the Bucket tool



Now use the bucket tool and click on the image. If you have done it correctly the colour will return to all of the image.

The Mask will now look like this



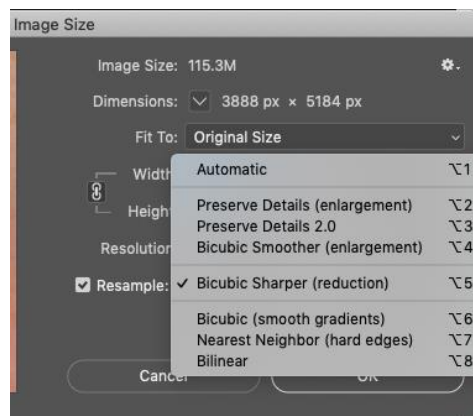
Now put foreground back to white (swap). Get a suitably small brush and set flow to something low (15%) then brush over the parts you want to desaturate. Repeated brushing will increase the amount of desaturation. You can also change the amount of Desaturation or the Opacity of the layer to achieve the result you want.

Sharpening

How you sharpen depends on what you intend to with the image. It isn't possible to give a definitive set of rules as it depends on the original image, the subject and the output. However, it should be remembered RAW images are intrinsically unsharp so sharpening needs to be done somewhere, if you want a sharp image!

I use a NIK software sharpener for most prints, this produces an extra layer and needs a pixel layer to work. Alt Merge Visible Layers produces a "Full Stop" layer which can allow sharpening either with NIK or one of the PS Filters like Unsharp Mask (USM).

If you are going to produce a PDI then you need to be careful as the algorithm shown for resizing sharpens and can over do it! I use either 5 or 6, if 6 then I sharpen using USM.



This has been a quick exploration of how to process a portrait. If I haven't used a tool then there is no rule to say that you are not allowed to play and see what it does. Experiments are free! Also remember there are many different ways of achieving the same or similar result, find the method you like.

Rex Waygood
Feb 2019