

An Easy Technique To Make Your Photos "Pop"

This is a quick and easy technique for giving photographs some extra "pop." You can use this with Photoshop or Photoshop Elements. It will also work with other photo editors, like GIMP, that support layers and an Overlay-type blending mode.

This technique adds "pop" by increasing contrast. It's more pronounced than using something like the Clarity slider in Adobe Camera Raw or the TLR Clarity Enhancement effect. It's a "softer" contrast adjustment than just whacking contrast around with something like a Curves "S" curve.

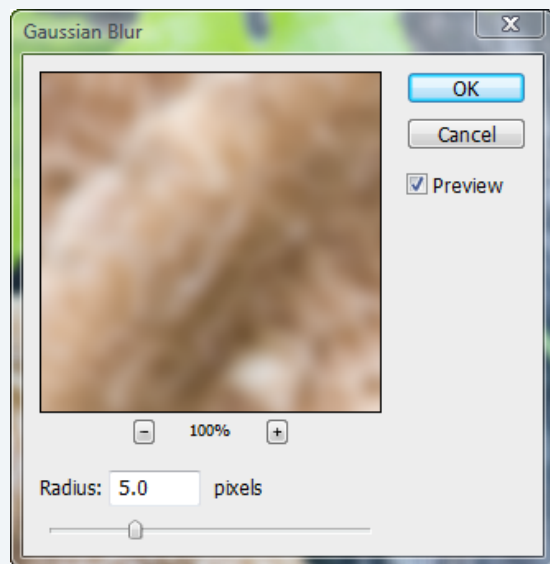
This technique is useful for lots of photographs: architectural, botanicals, landscapes, nature, still life, etc. The sample we'll be using for this tip is a macro shot of a fungus.



Start by making a new layer and stamping what's visible underneath into the new layer. With Photoshop, that's easy to do in one step with a keyboard short-cut. Alt+Ctrl+Shift+n+e on the PC, Option+Cmd+Shift+n+e on the Mac.

A Gaussian Blur is applied to the layer. With Photoshop CS3/CS4, I suggest you use Apply Smart Filters. Then you can easily adjust the effect later by altering the Gaussian Blur setting.

There is only one setting with Gaussian Blur: the Radius setting. You want to add enough blur so that details disappear but objects still retain their basic shapes. I chose a Radius of 5 pixels for this photo.

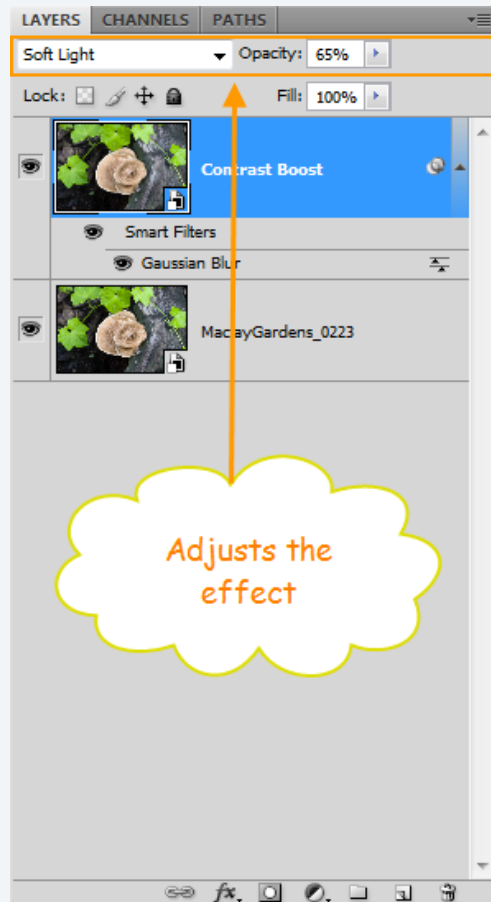


The rest of the effect comes from the choice of layer blending mode. You want to select one of the

Overlay-type blends. You'll probably have the best luck with Soft Light or Overlay. Soft Light will be less pronounced than Overlay. If you want a really strong effect, you might try Hard Light for the layer blending mode.

I chose Soft Light for the blend and I knocked it down further by adjusting the Opacity for the layer to 65%.

Just a couple of very basic maneuvers give you a lot of control with this technique.



You can also make localized adjustments with a layer mask. I added a Reveal All layer mask. That's a layer mask filled with White. That meant the total effect was visible until I painted it out. I grabbed the Brush tool with a soft brush, set the foreground to Black, and set the opacity to 20%. That way, I could build up the effect over successive strokes.

What I wanted to do was knock down the effect for the dark soil in the lower left corner of the photograph. The contrast boost was "stopping up" too much detail.

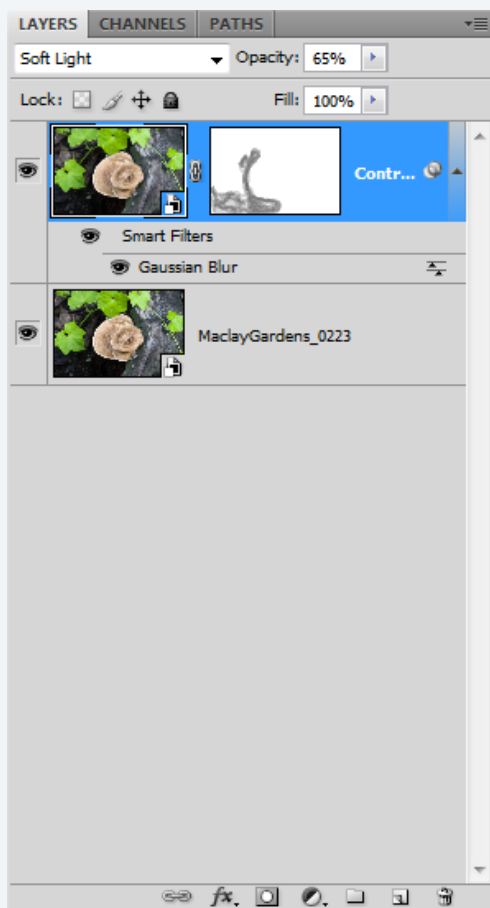


I made just a few quick strokes with the Brush tool. Many digital photographers are afraid of the Phtoshop Brush tool. For edits like this, you don't have to be all that precise. Use a soft brush; keep the opacity low. If you make a mistake, switch to White and paint out your changes and try again.

Take a look at my layer mask. It gets the job done, and it took just a few moments.



That's all there is to this effect! A single layer. Blur and change the layer blending mode. Then refine.



The final result is a photo with extra "pop." You can lower the opacity for a more subtle effect or you can go with something like the Hard Light blend mode for even more "pop."



Author information

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Glenn Mitchell is an avid digital photographer, technical writer, and university administrator. He is an author with a long list of publications in trade magazines, peer-reviewed academic journals, and co-authored books. He is creative force behind The Light's Right. His photography can be seen at his gallery site: www.thelightsrightstudio.com.

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