



Wish I Knew: Retouch

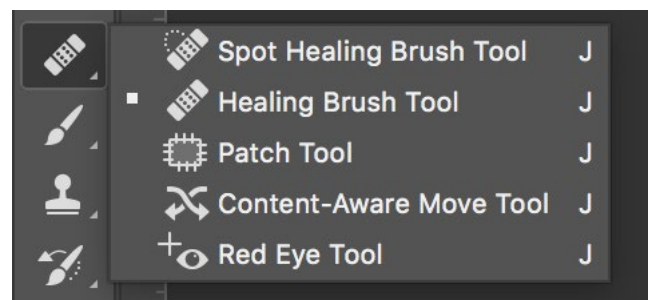
Wish I Knew: Retouch

In this lesson, we're going to cover the essential concepts I wish I had known when I first started retouching images in Photoshop.

The retouching tools

A lot of people get used to using one or two retouching tools and then rely solely on them. There are many great tools, however, and it's a good idea to get acquainted with all of them, as each one has its own particular strengths.

The Spot Healing Brush When using the Spot Healing Brush, it's important to always use a hard-edged brush. If you use a soft-edged brush, it won't have control over what's happening toward the edges of the brush. This can result in an unappealing fade-out. I usually use a brush that is set to 80-100% for the hardness setting, but most of the time it's maxed out at 100%. Make sure that the size of your brush is just large enough to cover the spot or object you want to remove. Also make sure that the circle itself is touching an area that has the proper color and brightness that should be used to replace the area inside.



The Spot Healing Brush can be accessed from within the Toolbar.



When using the Spot Healing Brush, make sure the tool is just large enough to cover the spot you're trying to remove.

The Spot Healing Brush works best when the area you're trying to retouch does not have to be filled with something specific in order for it to look good. It will work well when the tool can choose from a large amount of surrounding area to determine what to place in the retouch location. It will NOT work as well when the retouch area needs to be filled with something specific. An example would be a wall with a specific pattern on it. In order for the retouch area to look correct, the

pattern must be perfectly matched, and this is not something the Spot Healing Brush is good at. In an instance like this, the Healing Brush will do a better job.

The Healing Brush The Healing Brush is better at retouching areas that have a pattern or are more detailed. That's because, when using the Healing Brush, you can tell Photoshop where to copy from. Hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) and click on the area you'd like to copy from. Then, release the Option key and paint over the area you need to retouch. The cursor will display a preview of what you are copying from so that you can accurately line up any patterns or objects.



When retouching with the Healing Brush, the round tool tip will display a preview of what you'll be painting in.

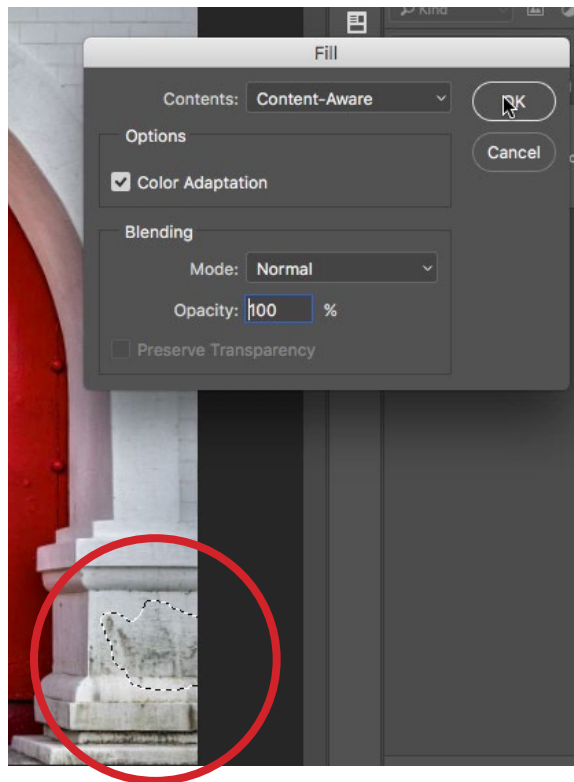


The Healing Brush matched the color of the retouch area but used the texture from the sample area.

Whenever you use a tool with the word “healing” attached to it, the tool will look at the content that is directly touching the edges of the circular tool tip and attempt to match the color and brightness of that area. Because of this, it doesn't matter what color is in the area you're copying from. It is essentially using that source area to copy the texture, or the variation in brightness. In the video example, we used the Healing Brush to sample an area from the white brick wall and then paint over an area in the red, wood door. As a result, the color was correct (red), but we painted in the brick texture onto the wood wall. The Healing Brush matched the surrounding color of the retouch area but inserted the texture from the sample area.

Content-Aware Fill This command works in the same way as the Spot Healing Brush. The difference is that, with the Content-Aware Fill command, you start by creating a selection around the area you want to retouch. There is no painting tool like there is with the Spot Healing Brush. With the selection active, go to the

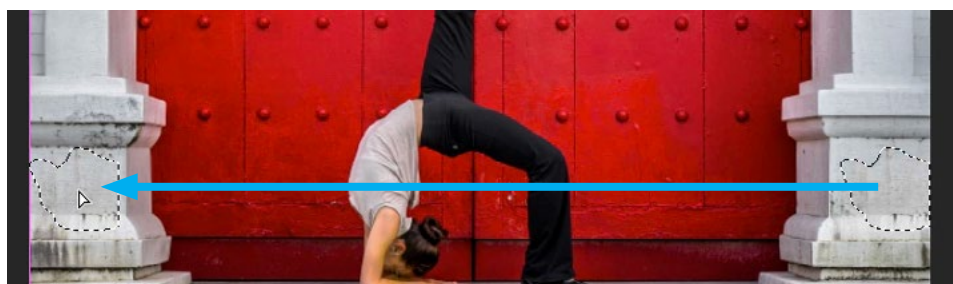
Edit menu and choose Fill. In the dialog that appears, make sure that the Contents menu is set to “Content-Aware” and that the Opacity setting is at 100%. Then click OK. Photoshop will attempt to fill in the selected area based on what it sees in the surrounding areas. Sometimes this works perfectly on the first try. Other times, you may need run the Fill command again or fine-tune the area with another tool.



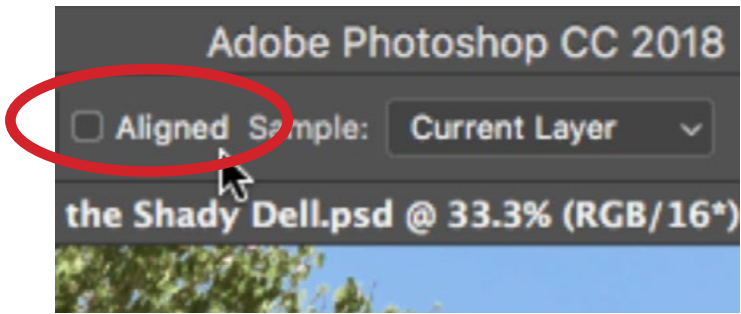
The Content-Aware Fill command is being used to fill the area inside the selection based on the content in the surrounding area.

The Patch Tool The Patch Tool is hidden behind the Spot Healing Brush and the Healing Brush in the Toolbar. It works in a similar way to the Healing Brush. With the Patch Tool, you start with a selection around the area you want to retouch. You can create the selection with any selection tool you’d like, and if there is not a selection already active, you can use the Patch Tool itself to draw out a selection. Then, click somewhere inside the active selection and drag your cursor to the area you want to copy from. As you drag with your mouse, you’ll see a preview of what the selection will be filled with if you were to release the mouse button. When you release the mouse button, the selected area will be filled with the content from the area you specified.

A selection was created using the Patch Tool and then the contents of the selection is being dragged to the location we want the tool to sample from.



Aligned setting for Clone Stamp Tool and Healing Brush When working with the Clone Stamp Tool or the Healing Brush, there is a setting I wish I had known about much earlier, and that is the Aligned setting. After clicking to apply some healing or cloning to an area, the preview inside the round tool tip may no longer remain lined up after you move your mouse away from the area. I like the preview to remain aligned and to maintain the relationship between the area I sampled



The Aligned setting can be found within the Options Bar when the Clone Stamp Tool or the Healing Brush is active.

from and the area I am retouching. To ensure this relationship is maintained, I'll turn on the Aligned setting, which can be found in the Options Bar above the main image window. The Aligned setting determines what happens if you click once with the tool and then release the mouse button. If the setting is on, it will remain aligned when you move your mouse around.

The Clone Stamp Tool Any of the tools with the words “heal” or “content-aware” in the name is going to try and blend the target area in with the surroundings. Sometimes, however, you don't want that. In these cases, you would use the Clone Stamp Tool. This tool is used to blatantly copy the content from one area and place it in another area (without trying to do anything fancy). It can be very useful when the area you need to retouch needs to contain very specific content. For example, let's say the retouch area contains some kind of seam that needs to follow a specific path. The other retouching tools could mess things up when attempting to fill the area. With the Clone Stamp Tool, you can carefully copy from a specific area of the image that contains the same type of seam and paste the content into the area you need to retouch. In other words, it's a much more manual way of retouching.

Rotate the source area With the Clone Stamp Tool and the Healing Brush, you can copy from one source area and then rotate the content in order to correctly paste it into your target area. In the video example, we wanted to copy a horizontal border on the sign and paste the content in a vertical fashion.

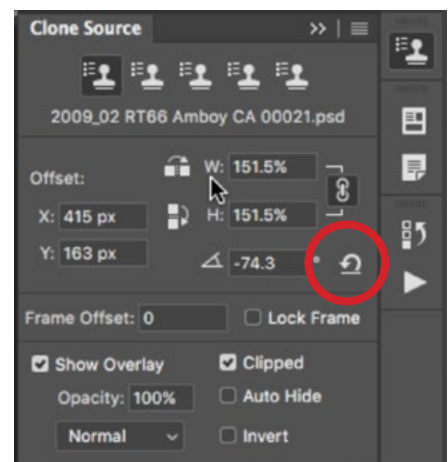
To do this, use the Clone Stamp Tool or the Healing Brush (we're using the Healing Brush in the video), hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) and click on the area you'd like to copy from. Then, position your mouse over the area you'd like to retouch. The preview inside the circular tool tip will show you the angle of the content you're going to paste.

Hold down Shift+Option (Shift+Alt on Win) and then use the greater-than and less-than keys (> <) to rotate that content you're going to apply. You can also scale the content you're going to clone or heal by holding down Shift+Option (Shift+Alt on Win) and then using the bracket keys ([]) to make the content larger or smaller.



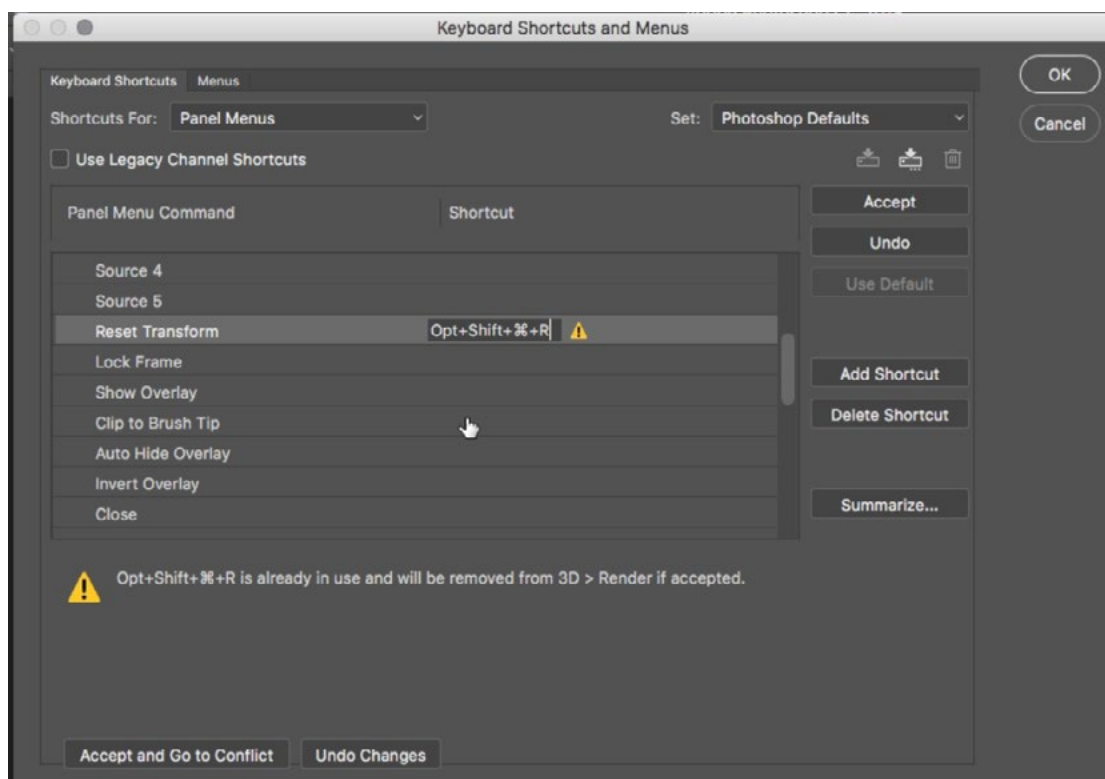
Left: The Clone Stamp Tool is being used to copy from a line on the sign. Center: We want to paste the copied content to a different part of the sign, but it doesn't line up. Right: The copied content was rotated so that it lines up with the area we want to retouch.

Note that after rotating or scaling the sampled content, there is no keyboard shortcut to reset the tool back to its default settings. You can, however, reset the tool from within the Clone Source panel. The Clone Source panel contains all of the settings for the keyboard shortcuts we just mentioned and you can access it by going to the main menu at the top of the screen and choosing Window > Clone Source. Reset all of the transform settings by clicking the Reset button on the right side of the panel. It looks like a rounded u-turn arrow.



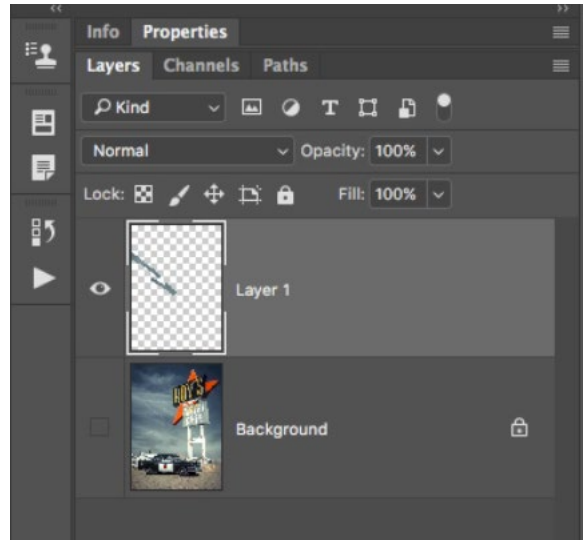
The Reset button within the Clone Source panel.

Create keyboard shortcut to reset Clone Source settings Personally, I rarely need the Clone Source panel open and I didn't want to have to open it just so I could hit that Reset button. To get around this, I created a custom keyboard shortcut for the Clone Source Reset button. Let's look at how to do that. Go to the Edit menu and choose Keyboard Shortcuts. In the dialog box that pops up, set the "Shortcuts For" menu to Panel Menus. This will present you with a list of all the different Photoshop panels available. Click on the little disclosure triangle to the left of the Clone Source option and it will expand to show you all of the options within the little side menu for the Clone Source panel. Click on the "Reset Transform" option and a text field will become available for you to type in a custom keyboard shortcut. I used the following shortcut: Shift+Option+Command+R. When I entered this shortcut, a warning appeared, letting me know that the chosen shortcut was already in use for the 3D Render command and, if I continued, the shortcut would be removed from that command and applied to the Reset Transform command. I, personally, don't use the 3D features so I was fine with "stealing" that shortcut. Click OK when you're done entering your custom shortcut.

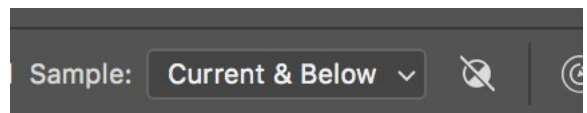


Here, we're creating a custom keyboard shortcut for the Clone Source Reset button.

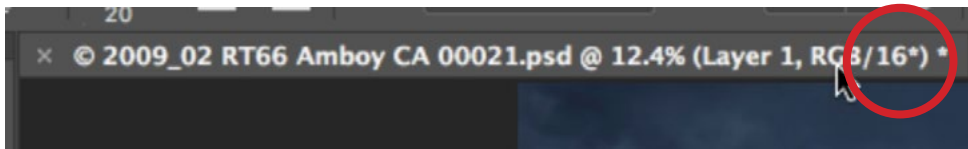
Working with layers When retouching your images, there are two ways that you can use layers. With the first method, you would duplicate the background/image layer and then do your retouching on the duplicate. The problem with this method is that you double your file size by duplicating the layer. With the second method, you would create a new, empty layer and then do your retouching on this layer. This second method is much more versatile and doesn't force you to double your file size. When you do your retouching on an empty layer, there are some settings that you need to be aware of. When using the Clone Stamp Tool or the Healing Brush, there is a Sample menu in the Options Bar at the top of the image window. In order for the tool to work on an empty layer, this menu should be set to sample Current & Below. If you keep it set to sample the Current layer only, the tool will have nothing to sample from since the layer is empty. When using the Spot Healing Brush, the setting will instead appear as a "Sample All Layers" check box or button within the Options Bar. Note that the Content-Aware Fill command will NOT work on an empty layer. It needs actual content to work with and will present you with an error message if you try to use the command on an empty layer. Therefore, if you want to use the command without affecting the original background layer, you will need to duplicate that image layer and then run the Content-Aware Fill command on the layer duplicate.



The retouch work is being done on an empty layer.

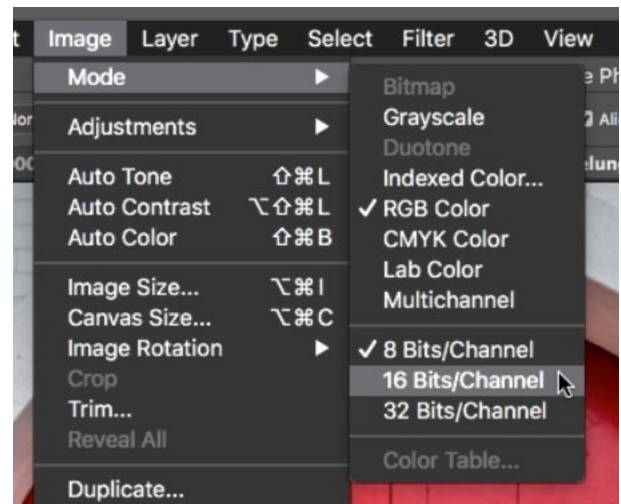


When a retouching tool is active, the Sample setting can be found within the Options Bar above the image window.



Looking at the Photoshop document tab, we can tell this image is in 16-bit mode.

16-bit mode for retouching smooth skies If you're ever doing any retouching on a sky, especially if it's a blue sky that doesn't have any clouds, it's best to work in 16-bit mode. When working in 8-bit mode, Photoshop has access to 256 brightness levels in the image. In 16-bit mode, Photoshop has access to thousands of brightness levels. Because of this, the results you'll get when retouching skies will be much smoother. You can tell what mode your picture is in by looking at the document tab directly above the image window. At the end of the line of text, it will include the color space and whether it's in 8-bit, 16-bit or 32-bit mode. To change the mode of your image, go to the Image menu and choose Mode. There, you can choose between 8-, 16- or 32-bit mode.



To change the mode of your document, go to the Image menu and choose Mode.

Cloning between documents Photoshop's retouching tools also allow you to clone between documents. Start in the document you'd like to copy from and Option+Click to specify a sample area. Then switch to the document you'd like to paste that content into. Within the circular tool tip, you'll see a preview of the content you'll be pasting. You can then paint in the sampled content from the other document.

Soft-edged vs. hard-edged brushes Any time you're using a healing tool (Spot Healing Brush, Healing Brush), be sure to use a hard-edged brush. If you use a soft-edged brush, the tool won't have control over what's happening toward the edges of the brush. Any time you're using a cloning tool (Clone Stamp Tool), you need to be careful of how hard the brush edge is because you'll need it to be soft enough so that it blends in with the surroundings.