



## Blending Sliders

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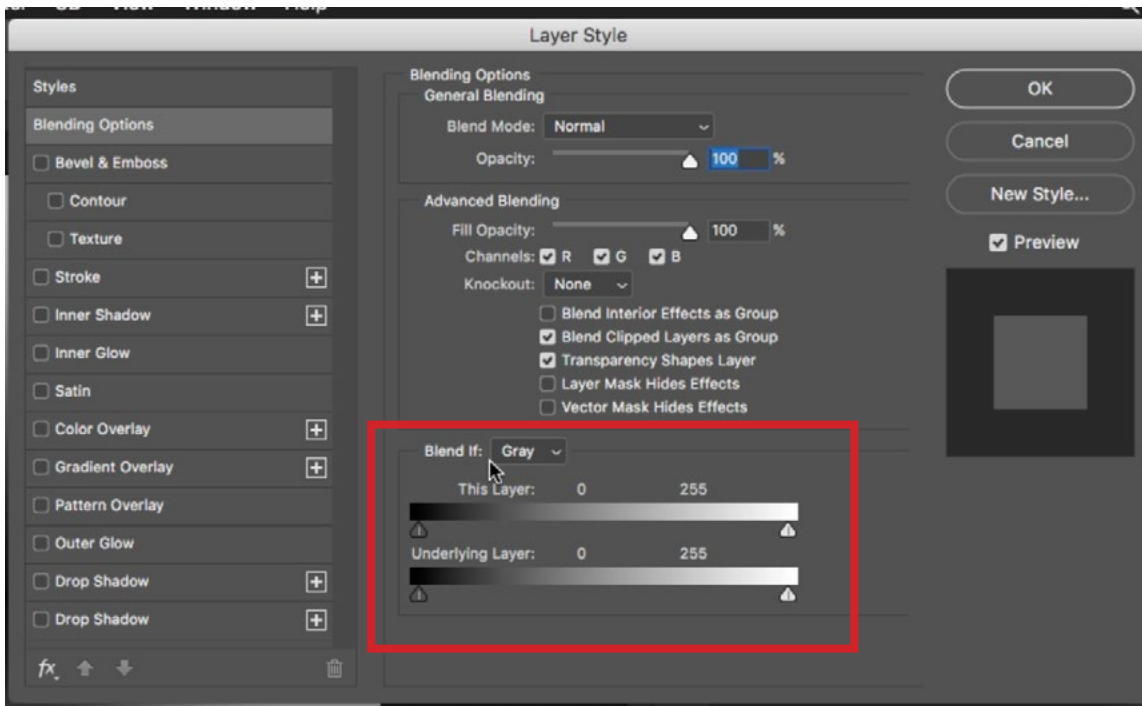
The Blending sliders are a feature that have been in Photoshop for a long time. Not many people use them, but they can be incredible useful once you understand how they work, and that is what we'll cover in this lesson.

## Blending sliders: Where they are and what they do

The blending sliders can be found within the Blending Options section in the Layer Style dialog box. You can access this dialog by double-clicking to the right of a layer's name in the Layers panel or by clicking on the FX icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choosing Blending Options from the pop-up menu. In the Blending Options section of this Layer Style dialog, the blending sliders can be found at the bottom.



Click in this empty area to the right of the layer's name to access the Blending Options.



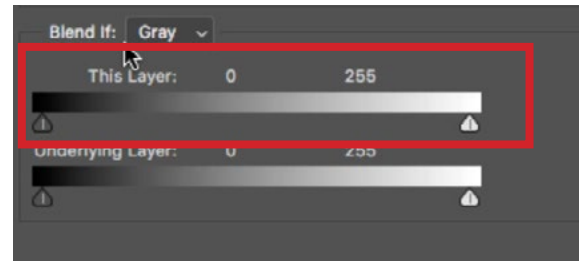
In the Layer Style dialog, the blending sliders can be found at the bottom of the Blending Options category.

Note: If you're working on the Background layer, you will not be able to access the Blending Options dialog unless you first unlock the layer. Unlock the layer simply by double-clicking on it in the Layers panel. A dialog will appear, asking you to name the layer and then click OK.

There is a set of sliders labeled "This Layer," which will control the visibility of the active layer, and there are a set of sliders labeled "Underlying Layer." These sliders should actually be labeled "Underlying Image" because it's looking at what the document looks like as a combination of all the layers stacked beneath the active layer.

## This Layer Sliders

Looking at the settings for "This Layer," there are two sliders set on a gradient bar, which represents the brightness range in the layer. The slider on the left controls the dark areas in the layer and the slider on the right controls the bright areas of the layer. If we take that white slider and drag it to the left, all the white areas in the layer will disappear. If we continue to drag it to the left, the brighter and brighter shades within the image will start to disappear as well. So what is happening here? Any areas of the layer that can be found in the brightness range to the right of the slider will become hidden. Any areas that can be found within the brightness range to the left of the slider will be visible.

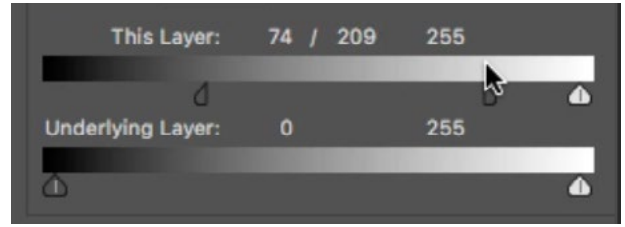


**The This Layer sliders control the visibility of the active layer.**

The black slider, located on the left side of the gradient bar, works in the same way. When we drag the black slider to the right, anything that's pure black in the image will become hidden. The more we drag the slider to the right, the more dark areas will become invisible.

**Splitting the sliders** When we drag the sliders to hide/reveal different brightness ranges, the transition between what remains visible and what is hidden will be an abrupt, hard edge. There is also a way to create a soft, gradual transition. If you

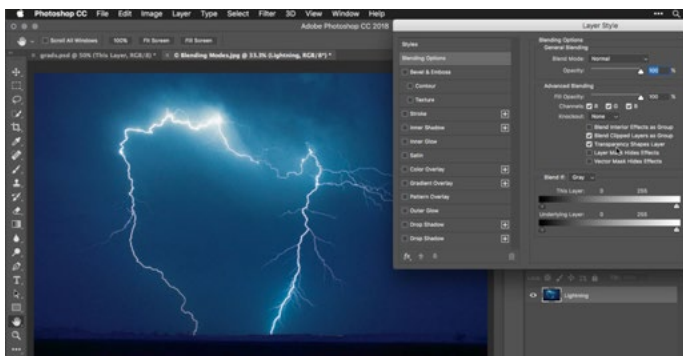
look closely at each of the sliders, you'll notice a vertical line in the middle of each one. This means that each slider is actually split into two parts, and those two halves can be separated by holding down the Option key (Alt on Win) and dragging one half away from the other. When you separate the slider, you will be creating a gradual transition between what is visible and what is hidden. When we're working with the white slider, anything to the right of the right half of the slider will be hidden. Anything to the left of the left half of the slider will be visible. The area in between is where the transition will occur, so these areas will be partially visible. The farther apart the two sliders halves are, the softer the transition will be.



**The black slider was split in half in order to create a soft transition. Everything to the left of the slider halves will be completely hidden. Anything to the right will be completely visible. Everything in between will be partially visible.**

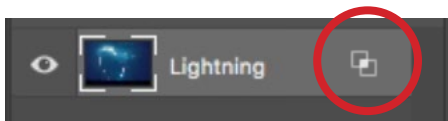
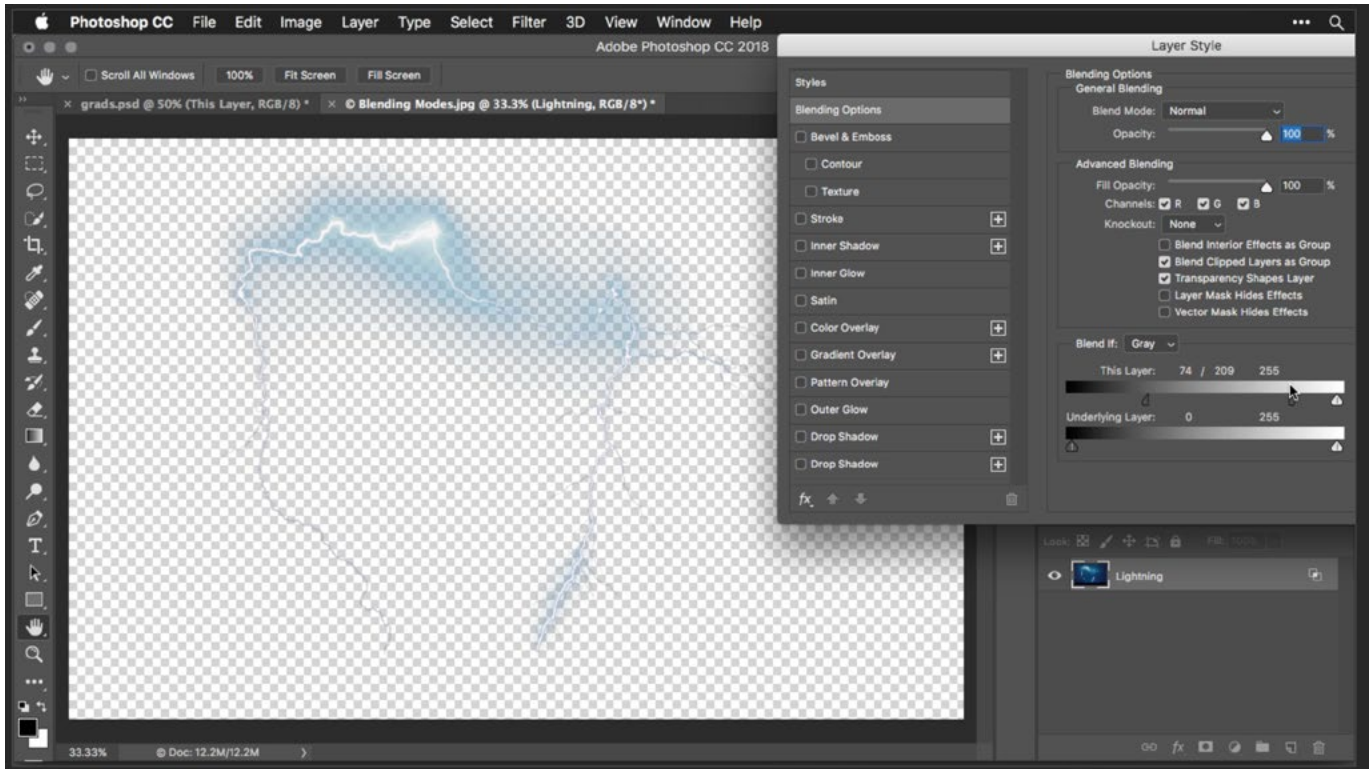
## When to use the This Layer sliders

**Isolate part of an image** In the video example, we have an image of a sky with lightning in it. We're going to use the blending sliders to hide everything but the lightning. This way, we can place the lightning into a different document and make it look as if it's appearing on another sky. We'll double-click on the lightning layer in order to bring up the Blending Options section of the Layer Style dialog box.



**The blending sliders will be used to isolate the lightning.**

We'll then drag the black slider to the right, making more and more of the dark areas invisible. We'll also split the slider in half in order to create a gradual transition between the sky and the glowy part of the lightning. Remember, to split the slider in half, we'll hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) and drag one half of the slider.



**Above: The black slider was moved to the right, hiding the dark areas in the image (the sky). The slider was also split to create a soft transition. Left: This icon means that the blending options have been changed.**

After the blending sliders have been applied to a layer, a little icon will appear to the right of the layer's thumbnail in the Layers panel. It looks like two overlapping squares and is an indicator that the blending settings were changed. Note that the effect of the blending sliders is simply a setting that is attached to the layer. It doesn't permanently change the contents of the layer. You can always go back and change the settings or undo them later by double-clicking on the icon to the right of the layer thumbnail to access the sliders again.

Now we can drag this lightning layer into a different document that contains an image with a different sky. We can always go back and fine-tune the blending sliders once we've positioned the layer so that the lightning blends best with its new environment.



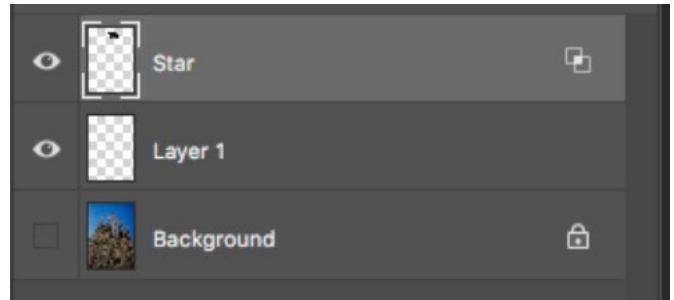
The lightning layer was placed into a different image and the blending sliders are being fine-tuned to make it suit the new environment.

When using the blending sliders on the background/bottom layer, it is not always easy to see what's going on because you're looking at the transparent, checkerboard pattern behind the layer. To get a better view of how the sliders are affecting the image, we'll click on the Adjustment layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choose to create a Solid Color layer from the menu that pops up. When the Color Picker appears, we'll choose a color that's similar to the background we intend to place the layer on top of and then click OK. Then, we'll drag the solid color layer below the image layer in the Layers panel.

After using the blending sliders to hide parts of the image, you may find that it didn't do a perfect job and that you have some residual content in areas you'd like to be invisible. If this is the case, you can either create a layer mask and paint with black on the mask in order to hide those areas, or you can use the Eraser Tool to remove the areas (if you know you're not going to need to bring them back later).

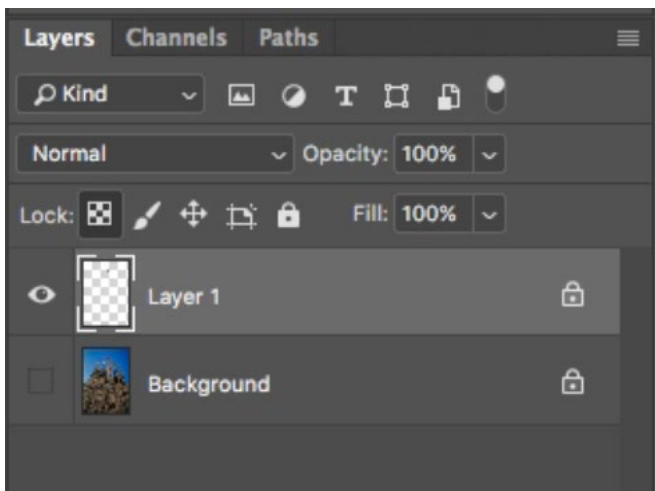
**Make the effect of the blending sliders permanent** We mentioned earlier that blending sliders are a setting that is attached to a layer. This setting does not actually remove any parts of the layer. There are, however, some instances where we might want to remove those hidden parts of the layer. If we'd like to apply the settings permanently, therefore removing the hidden areas, there is a trick for doing that. We'll create a new, empty layer and drag it directly below the layer with the

blending sliders applied. With the blending sliders layer active, we'll go to the Layer menu and choose Merge Down. The Merge Down command will take the contents of the layer we're currently working on and deposit it onto the layer that is directly below. When it does this, it can't take any special features along with it. Any affects will be permanently applied.



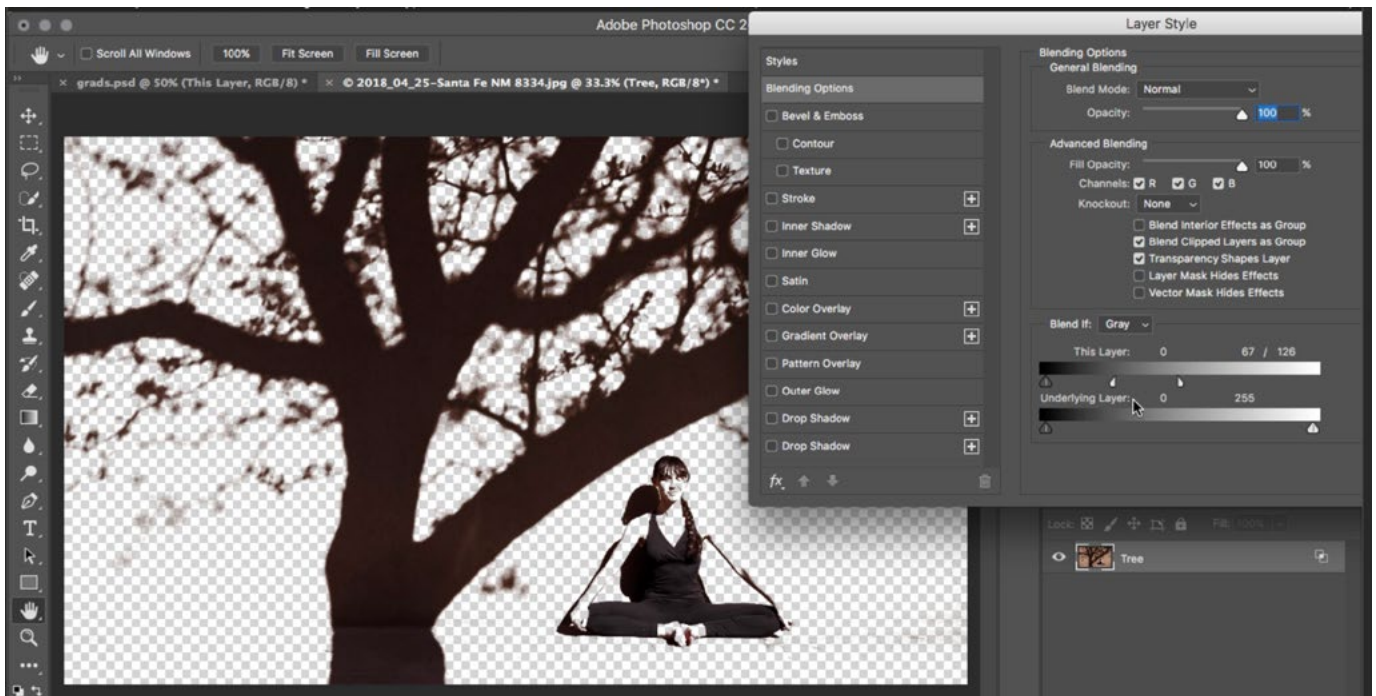
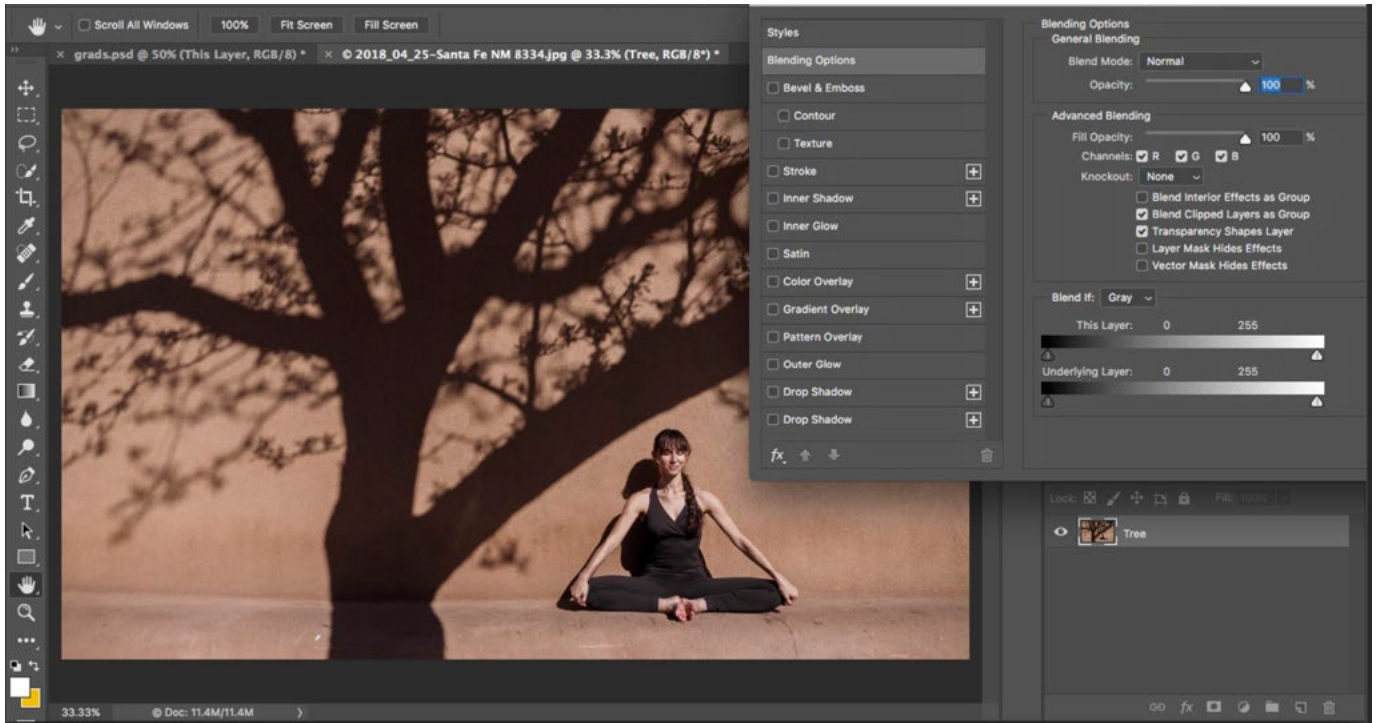
**The blending sliders were used on the Star layer. To make those settings permanent, we placed a new, empty layer under the Star layer and used the Merge Down command.**

In the video example, we used this technique to remove the background on a starburst. When placed into a new document, however, the starburst didn't blend well into the new background because there was a dark halo that was residual from its original background. To fix this, we'll click on the foreground color swatch at



**Clicking the Lock Transparency icon will make it so we can't add any paint/pixels to areas that are already transparent. We can only affect areas of the layer that already contain some kind of content.**

the bottom of the Toolbar and choose a yellow hue from the Color Picker that appears. We'll turn off the visibility of the other layers and, with the star layer active, we'll click on the transparency lock icon at the top of the Layers panel. This will protect the transparent areas, making it impossible for us to paint any pixels there. Then, we'll use the Brush Tool to paint over the starburst. This will paint the yellow color onto the starburst without getting any overspill into the surrounding areas.



In this example, we wanted to isolate the interesting shadow of a tree. To do this, we used the “This Layer” blending sliders and dragged the white slider to the left, hiding more and more of the light areas of the image. It’s only the shadow we want to be visible. We split the slider to create a soft transition between what’s visible and what’s hidden.

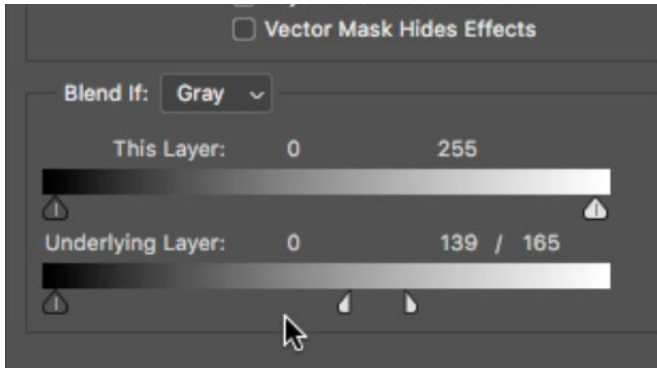


After isolating an object using the blending sliders, we can fill that area with a specific color. In the example image, we isolated the shadow of a tree, but we want the shadow to be perfectly black. We'll first need to take the effect created by the blending sliders and make it permanent, so we'll follow the same steps that we used above. We'll create a new, empty layer and place it below the shadow layer. Then, we'll use the Merge Down command (Layer > Merge Down).

Next, we're going to use the Fill command to fill the isolated area with black so we will make sure that our foreground color is set to black. To fill a layer with the foreground color, we would use the keyboard shortcut Option+Delete (Alt+Backspace on Win). This, however, would fill the entire layer. We just want to fill in the areas that already contain pixels, which is the tree shadow area. To do this, we'll use the keyboard shortcut Shift+Option+Delete (Shift+Alt+Backspace on Win). Holding down the Shift key will temporarily turn on the transparency lock setting, so the command can only affect areas that are not transparent (the areas that contain pixels). This will fill the tree shadow with our black foreground color.

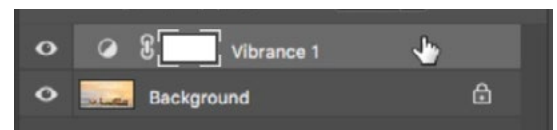
## Underlying Layer sliders

In the Layer Style dialog, there are two sets of blending sliders. The ones we have been working with up until now are the "This Layer" sliders. These sliders control the visibility of the active layer based on the brightness level within that active layer. The second set is called the "Underlying Layer" sliders. These sliders are still going to make parts of the active layer disappear but they're going to do it based on how bright the underlying image is. For example, if we drag the black slider to the right, the darkest areas of the underlying image will start to become revealed. If we drag the white slider to the left, the brightest areas of the underlying image will start to become revealed. Again, the transition will be abrupt unless we split the sliders in half and drag them apart from each other in order to define what brightness range is completely visible, which brightness range is hidden and how soft/big of a transition there is between them.

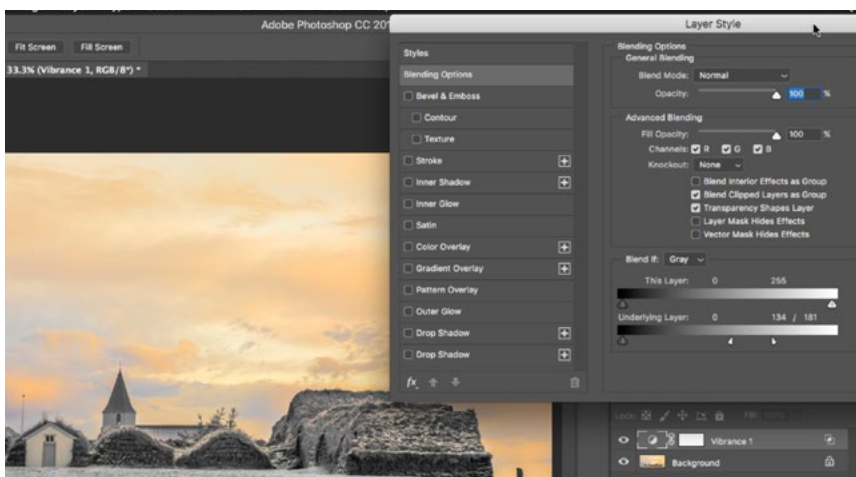


The Underlying Layer sliders determine what parts of the underlying image will be visible. When working with the white slider (the one on the right), the area to the right of the slider halves represents the brightness range that will be visible. The area to the left of the slider halves represents the brightness range that will be hidden. The area between the slider halves represents the parts of the image that will be partially transparent.

**Make parts of an image less colorful** Let's say that we want to make the dark parts of an image less colorful. We would do that by using either a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer or a Vibrance adjustment layer. In the video example, we'll create a Vibrance adjustment layer and we'll drag the Saturation slider to the left, making the image much less colorful. At this point, the adjustment is affecting the entire image. We'll double-click to the right of the adjustment layer's name in the Layers panel and this will bring up the Layer Style dialog with the blending sliders. We want the bright areas of the image to be in full color, so we'll want to allow those



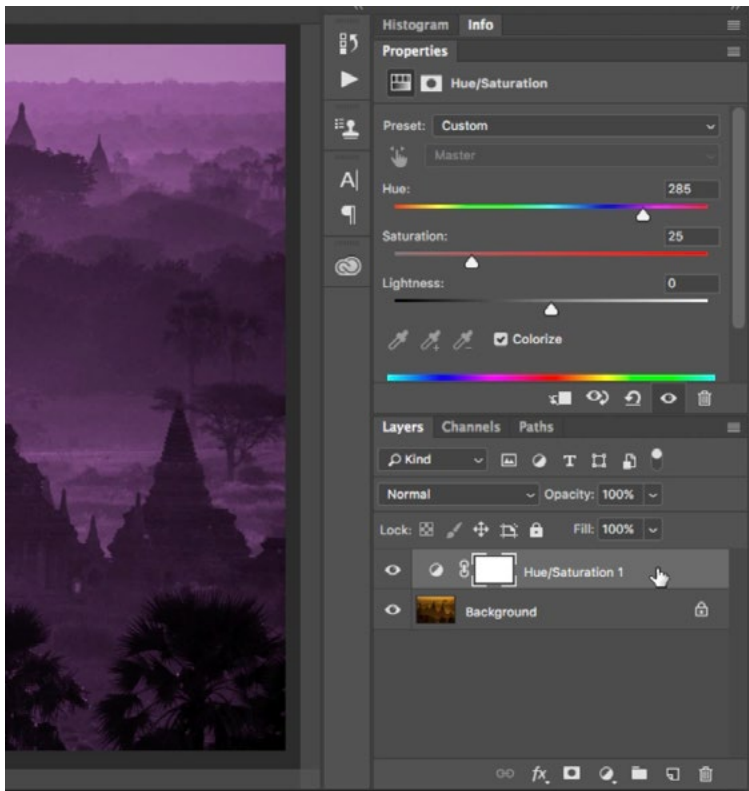
**A Vibrance adjustment layer was used to make the image less colorful. We want to limit the effect to the dark areas.**



**The white blending slider is being used to reveal the bright areas from the underlying image.**

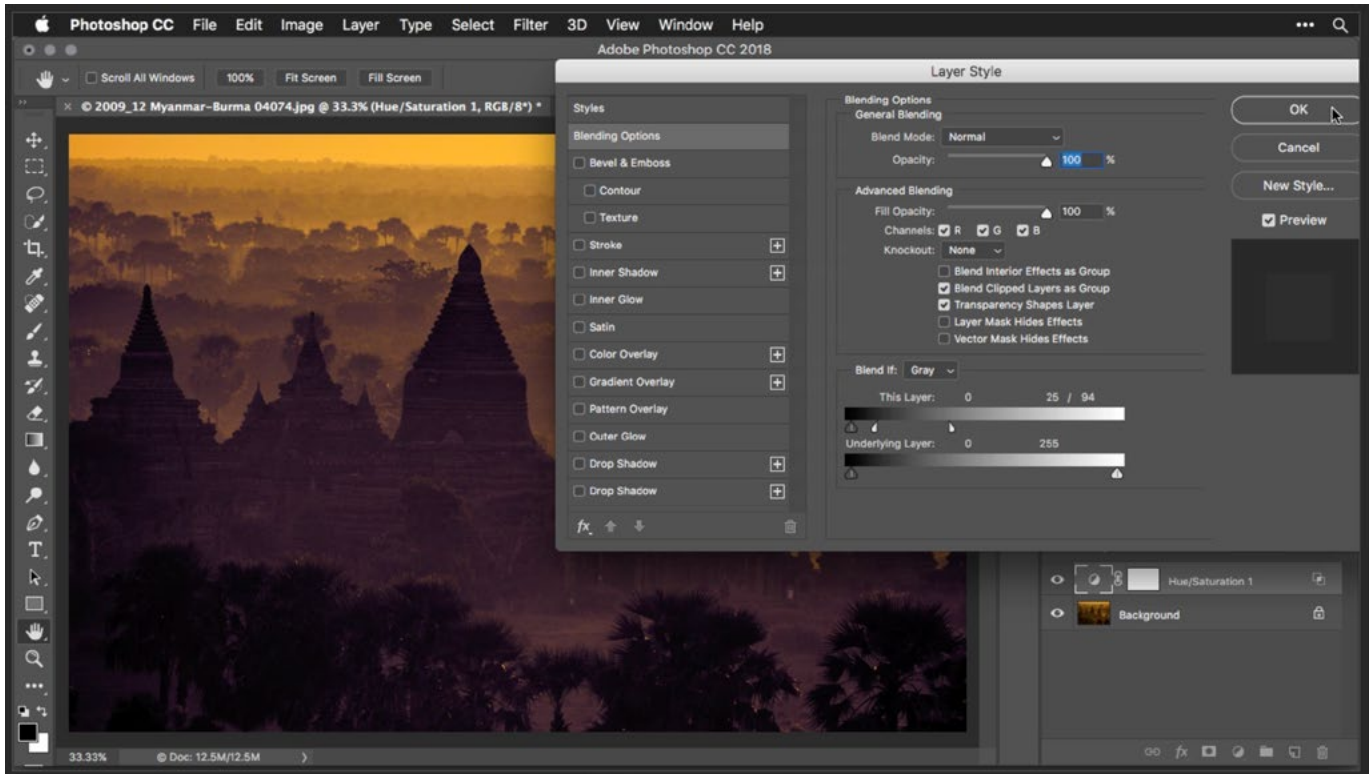
areas to break through the adjustment layer and we can do this by using the white Underlying Layer slider. When we drag this slider to the left, the bright areas from the underlying image will start to be revealed. We'll hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) to break the slider in half, creating a smooth transition.

**Create a two-tone feel to a mostly monotone image** In the next video example image, we have an image that is very orange, in both the highlights and the shadows. We want to create more of a two-tone feel to the image and we'll do this by using the blending sliders to introduce a different color into the shadow areas. First, we'll create a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer by clicking on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choosing Hue/Saturation from the menu that appears. In the Properties panel, we'll turn on the Colorize check box and then use the Hue and Saturation sliders to create the color we want to insert into the shadows. We adjusted the sliders to create a purple color. Then, we'll double-click in the area to the right of the adjustment layer name in the layers panel to access the blending sliders. Because we're working on an adjustment layer,



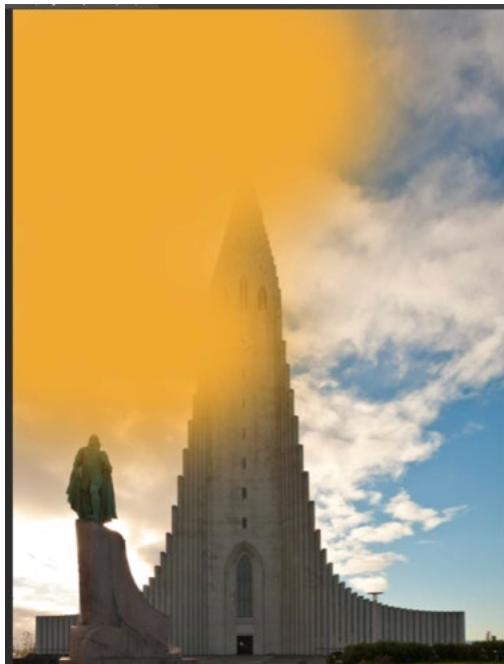
**A Hue/Saturation adjustment layer was created and we're using the settings in the Properties panel to create a purple hue. (The Colorize check box is turned on and we adjusted the Hue and Saturation sliders.)**

it doesn't actually matter which of the blending slider sets we use. The effect will be the same. We'll go to the "This Layer" sliders and drag the white slider to the left until the orange highlights from the underlying image start to appear. We'll hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) and split the slider into two halves, dragging the halves away from each other to create a smooth transition. Now, we have the orange highlights from the original image along with the purple shadows we created by using the Hue/Saturation adjustment layer. We can always go back to the Hue/Saturation adjustment layer sliders to fine-tune the color being applied to the shadows.



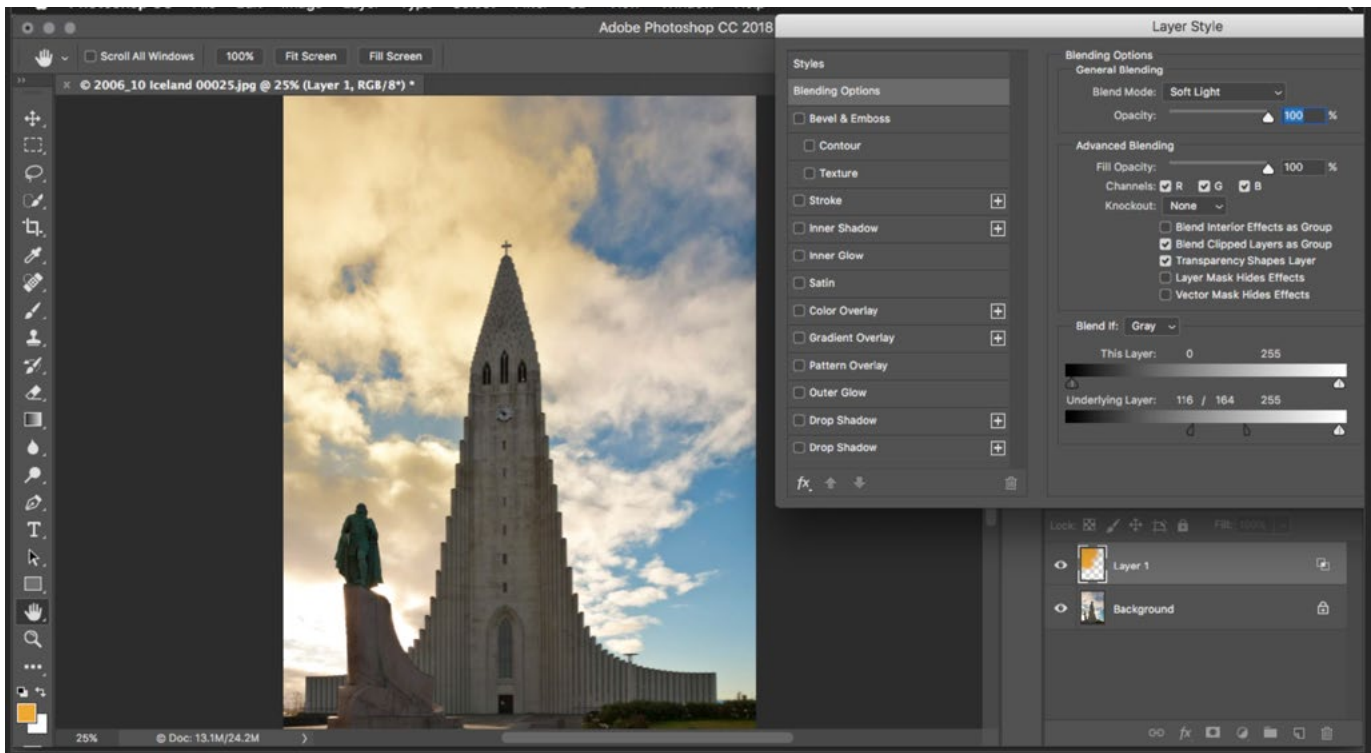
The white slider is being used to hide the purple Hue/Saturation layer in the bright areas.

**Iceland church example** We can use the Brush Tool in conjunction with the blending sliders to introduce colors into the bright or dark areas of an image. In the video example image of the Icelandic church, I would like to add more color into the clouds. Because the clouds are the brightest part of the image, I know that we can use the blending sliders to do this. We'll create a new, empty layer and use the Brush Tool to paint an orange/yellow color over the sky area. It



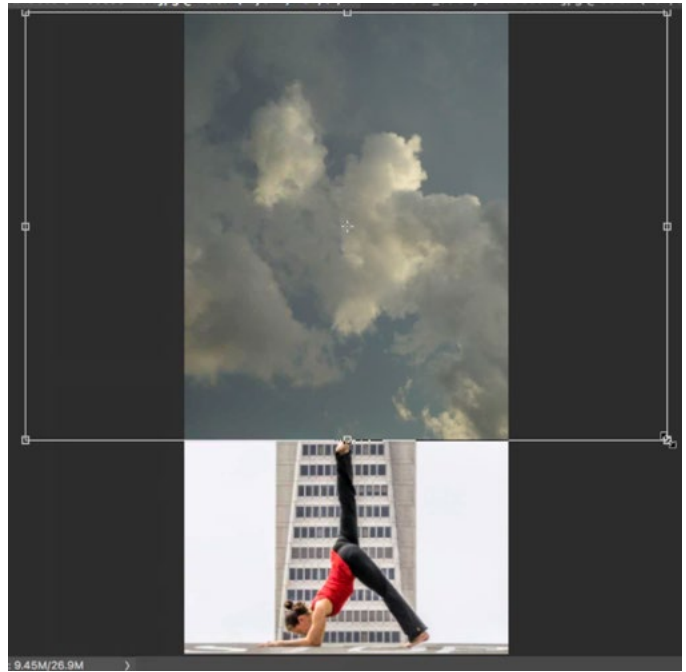
We want to introduce an orange color to the sky, so we're starting by painting the color onto an empty layer.

will simply be blatant paint that covers everything in the image, so to make it look more natural, we'll experiment with different blending modes. We'll set this paint layer to the soft light blending mode because it looks subtle and natural. Now, we're going to make the dark parts of what's underneath (everything except the clouds) show through. We'll access the blending sliders and use the Underlying Layer sliders because we want to hide what's on the paint layer based on what's in the image underneath. We'll drag the black slider to the right until the building starts to break through the yellow paint layer and then we'll split the slider to create a softer, more natural transition. We can always go back and add more paint on the layer in order to add variations in color.



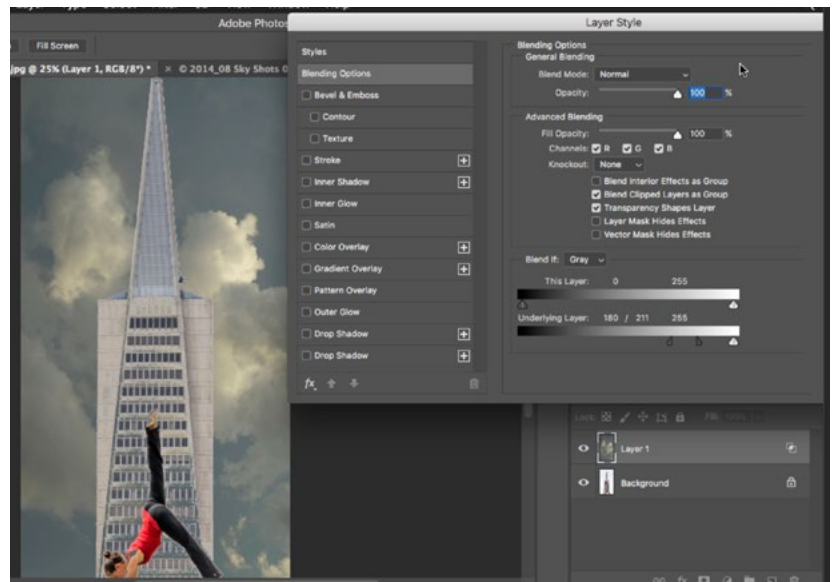
The Underlying Layer sliders are being used to allow the dark areas (the building) from the image layer to break through the orange color layer.

**Replacing a sky** The blending sliders can be used to replace a dull-looking sky with a more interesting one from another image. We'll first have to place the image of the interesting sky above the image with the sky we want to replace. In the example image, we also had to scale the sky up so that it filled the area needed. The sky we want to replace is the brightest part of the image so we will access the blending sliders and use the Underlying Layer sliders to make the dark parts of what's underneath (everything that is NOT the sky) break through. As usual, we'll break the



The sky layer we want to use is being positioned over the sky we want to replace.

slider in half (by holding the Option key while dragging one half of the slider) in order to create a smoother transition. In many cases, we won't be able to create a perfect result. There may still be remnants of the active layer showing up in areas we don't want it, and that is the case in the video example. We can still see bits of sky appearing over the building. When that is the case, we'll add a layer mask to the top layer and paint on the mask to hide the areas we don't want to show up.



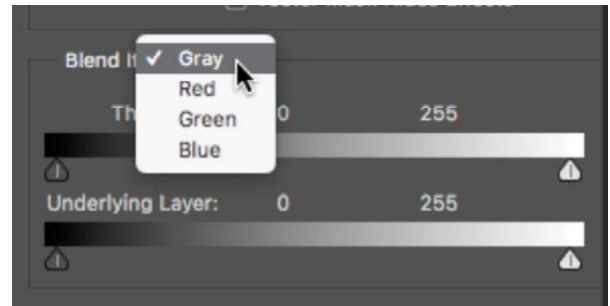
The black Underlying Layer slider is being used to make the dark building from the underlying image visible.

Note: While it's possible to replace a sky using the blending sliders, I actually prefer to use other methods because there are other techniques that will do a much better job. These include the Color Range Command and the Background Eraser.

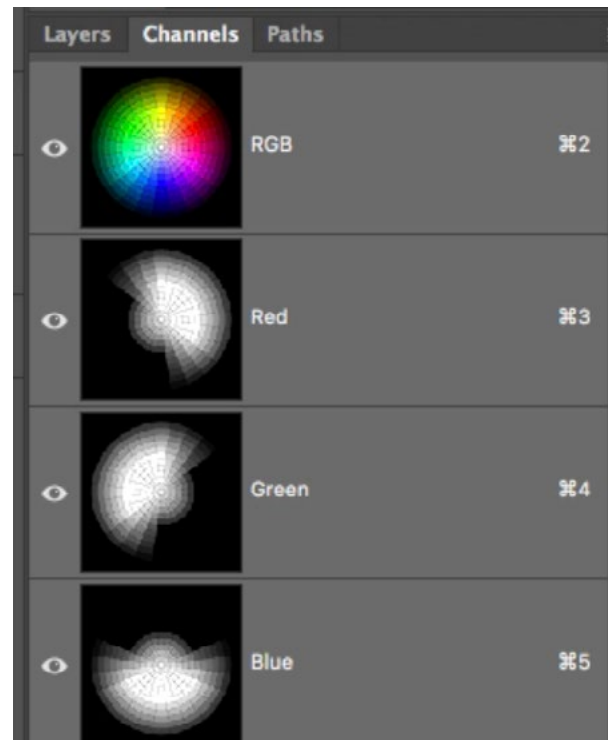
## The Blend If menu

When looking at the blending sliders, there is a Blend If menu right above them and this menu includes the options of Gray, Red, Green and Blue (When working in RGB mode). By default, the menu is set to Gray and this is the setting we've been working with up until now. When set to Gray, it thinks about your picture as if it's a black and white photograph. It is generally ignoring the colors and thinking only about brightness. When we change that menu to one of the color choices, it will think about which parts of the image contain the most of that color. For example, if we set the menu to Red, and then drag the red slider to the left, the first parts of the image that are affected will be the areas containing the most red.

The Blend If menu is essentially working with the different color channels. You can see a view of the different channels that make up your image by opening the Channels panel. If it's not already visible on your screen, you can access it by going to the main menu and choosing Window > Channels. If your image is in RGB mode, there will be red, green and



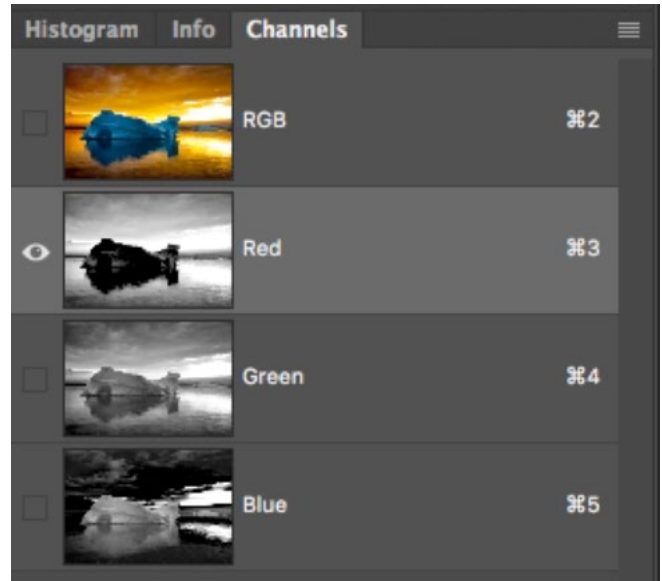
The Blend if menu determines whether we're working on the overall brightness or on a specific color channel.



The channels panel shows you the different color channels in your image.

blue channels. It can be convenient to have the Channels panel open when working with the color Blend If sliders because it will give you a good idea of what areas the sliders will be affecting.

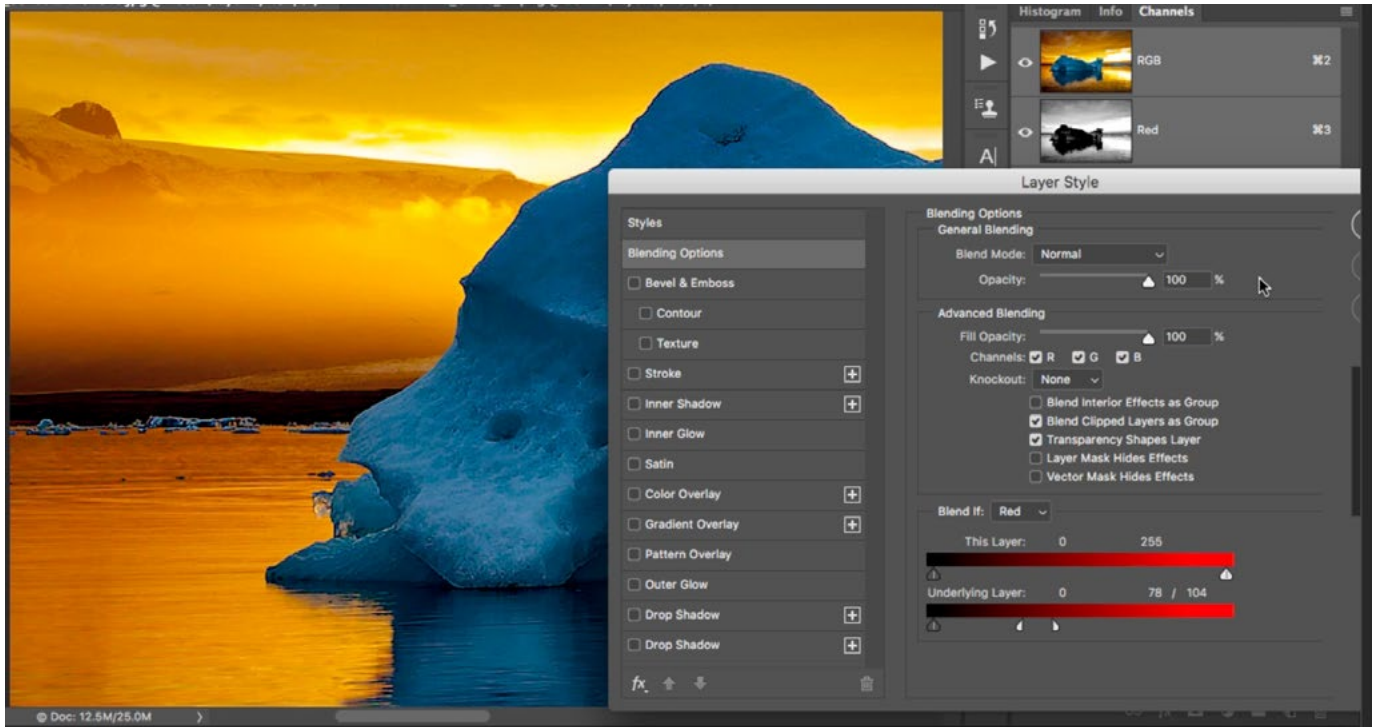
The options in this Blend If menu can be useful when you want to isolate an area that's a completely different color from its surroundings. In the example image, we have a blue iceberg set against a very orange sky and water. If I wanted to make a change to the iceberg, I could easily use a color blending slider because the iceberg is a very different color from the rest of the image. To determine which color slider to use, we can first look at the Channels panel for guidance. We want to look at the three channels and determine which one creates the most separation between the iceberg and its surroundings. In this case, it's the red channel.



**In this iceberg image, we can see that the red channel creates the most separation between the iceberg and the background.**

For this image, we want to sharpen only the iceberg and the blue reflection underneath it. To do that, we'll first duplicate the background layer by using the keyboard shortcut Command+J (Ctrl+J on Win) and then we'll apply our sharpening to this duplicate. There are several different options for sharpening an image, but we'll use the Smart Sharpen command, which can be accessed by going to the main menu and choosing Filter > Sharpen > Smart Sharpen. We'll dial in our sharpening settings and then click OK. Now we need to make it so that sharpening is only applied to the iceberg area. We'll double-click in the area to the right of the layer name (for the top layer) to bring up the blending sliders and we will set the Blend If menu to Red, because that's the channel where the iceberg best separated from the background. Looking at the red channel, the background is the area





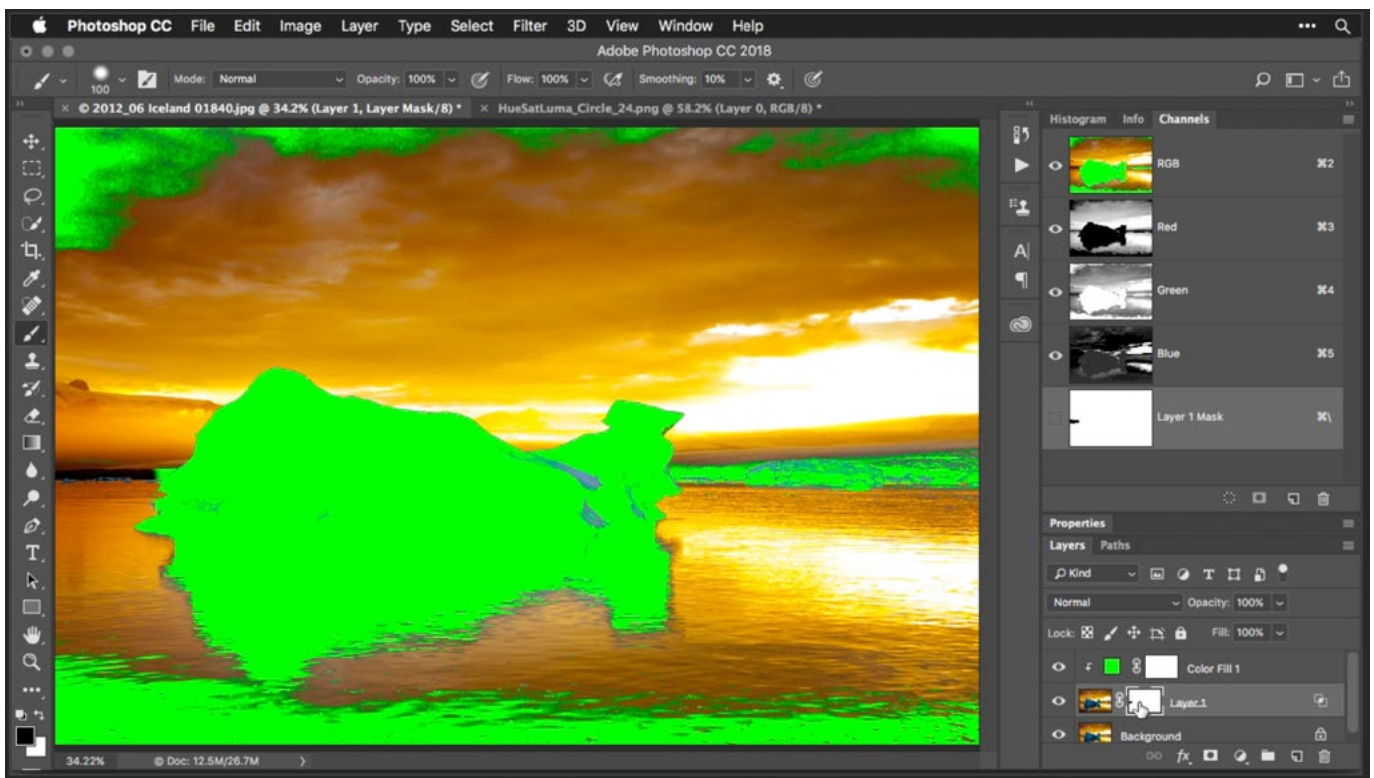
**The Underlying Layer slider is set to work with the red channel and we're dragging the red slider to the left, revealing the underlying, unsharpened image in the bright areas.**

that's bright, and the background area is the part that we DON'T want to sharpen. Knowing this, we can take the Underlying Layer sliders and move the red slider to the left until the underlying, unsharpened layer appears in the background area. As always, we'll separate the slider to create a smooth transition.

When we are using this technique to apply an effect like sharpening, the result will be subtle, which can make it hard to visualize where the effect is visible and where it's not. In an instance like this, we might need to take extra measures in order to visualize where the effect is being added. Here's one way of doing that. We'll create a Color Fill layer by clicking on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choosing Solid Color from the menu that pops up. The color picker will appear and we will choose a color that is blatantly different from the rest of the image. In our example, we chose a bright lime green color. Next, we want to make it so this layer is only visible in the areas where the underlying layer

is also visible. To do this, we'll make sure the color fill layer is active and then we'll go to the Layer menu and choose Create Clipping Mask. Now, the bright green color layer will only appear in the areas where the underlying, sharpened layer is visible and this will give us a better visual reference to go by. We can now easily paint on a layer mask attached to the sharpening layer and hide the layer in areas where we don't want the sharpening to be applied.

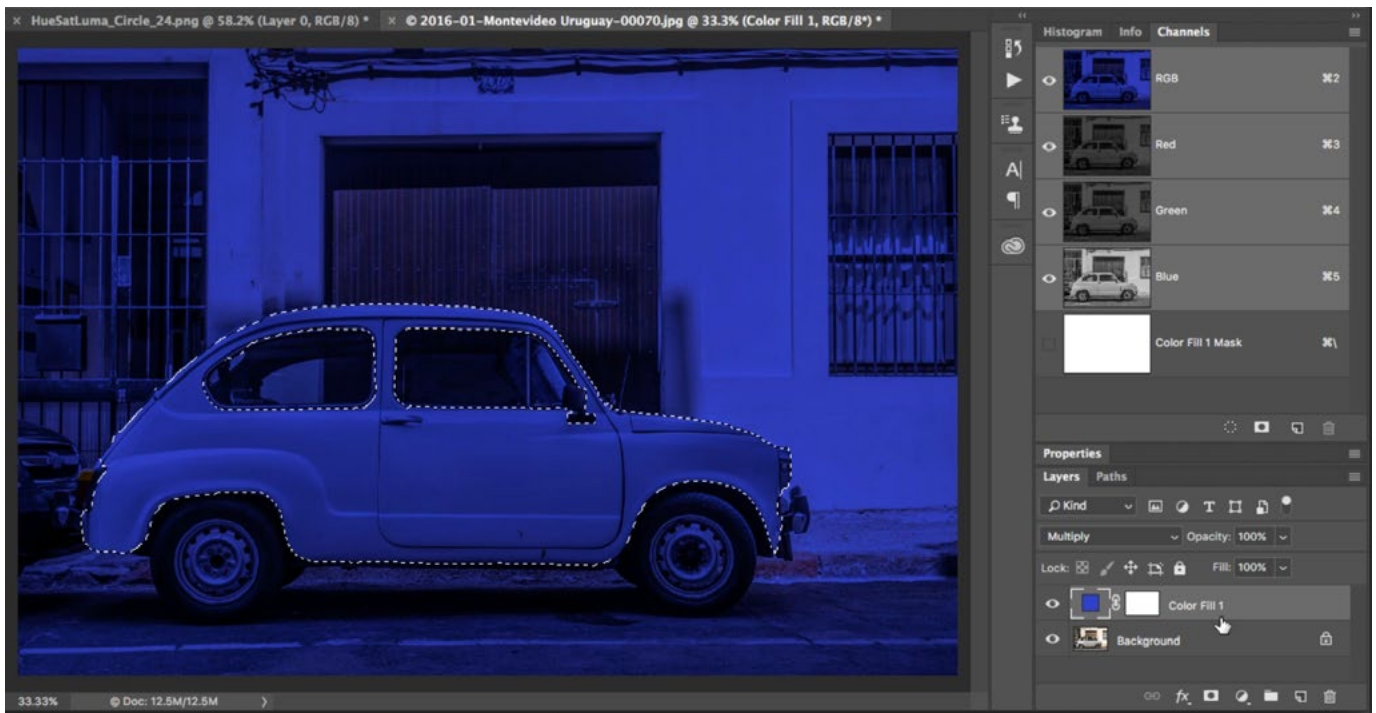
Note that you can also create a clipping mask by holding down the Option key (Alt on Win) and clicking on the horizontal line between the active layer and the layer beneath it within the Layers panel.



Here, we created a green solid color layer and then added a clipping mask so that it only appeared in the areas where the underlying layer contained pixels.

**Add color to an object that doesn't currently have color** In the next example, we have an image of a white car and we'd like to colorize it. Usually, when adding color to an object like this, we'd have to apply separate colors to the highlights, the shadows and the midtones in order for the result to look natural. Here's how we can go about it. We'll first create a solid color layer by clicking on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choosing Solid Color from the menu that appears. The Color Picker will pop up and we'll choose the general color for the car. In this example, we'll choose a blue color and then click OK. To apply the color to the car, we'll set the blending mode of the solid color layer to Multiply. The Multiply mode acts like ink.

Now the blue color is covering the entire image and we'd like to make it so it only covers the car. To do this, we'll temporarily turn off the color layer so that we can accurately make a selection around the car using the Quick Selection Tool. To ensure that the selection is accurate, we can tap the Q key to enter Quick Mask



A color fill layer was created and set to the Multiply blending mode. Then, we created a selection around the car, which is the only area we want to contain the blue color.

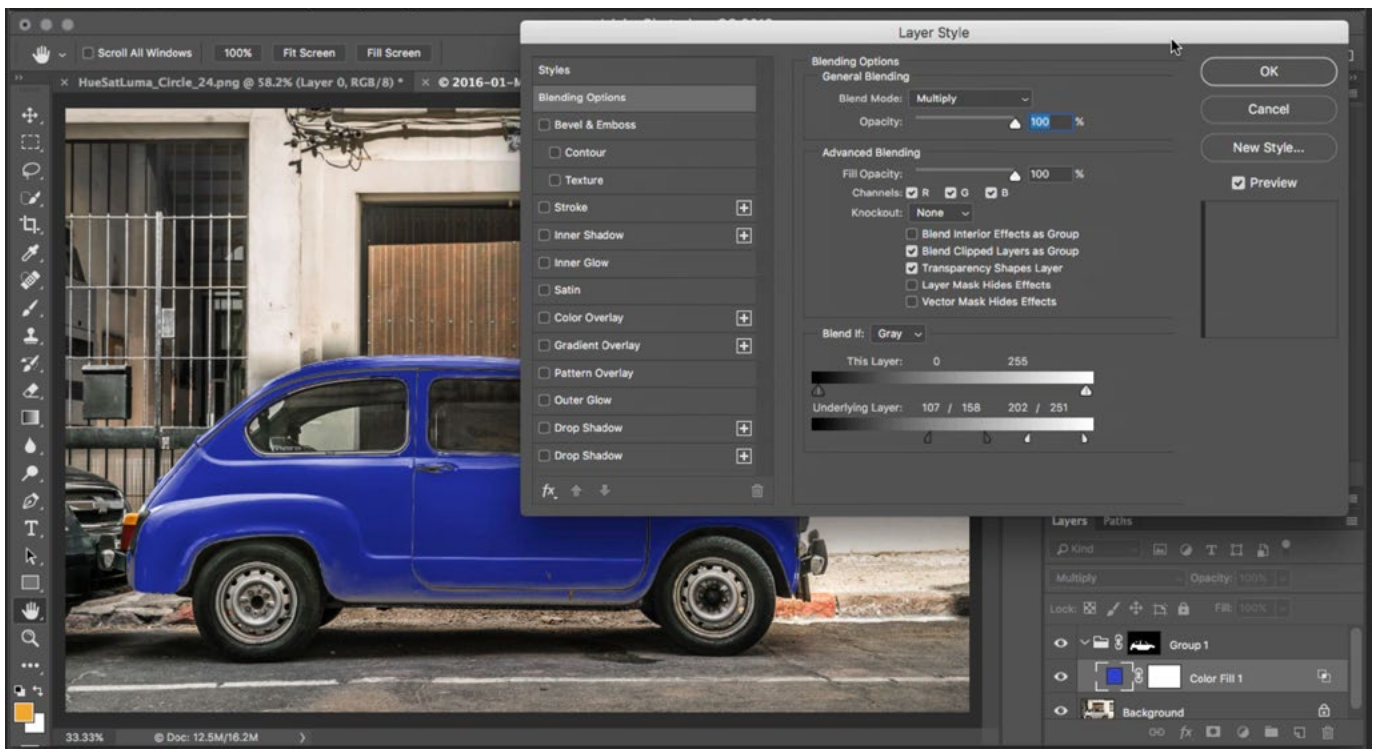
Mode, which will give us a view of our selection as a red overlay. Once we've fine-tuned the selection, we'll tap the Q key again to exit Quick Mask Mode and we'll turn the visibility of the color layer back on.

With the selection active, we need to apply that selection to the layer mask so that it limits where the blue color is appearing on the image. Because we're going to need more than one layer to apply the different shades of blue necessary, we'll create a layer group (aka folder) by clicking on the folder icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. Then, with the group active, we'll click the Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. Because there was a selection active, it will automatically be applied to the layer mask. Anything we place inside this group will only show up where the mask allows it to (where the mask is white). We'll drag the color fill layer into this layer group so that the blue only appears on the car.



The blue solid color layer was placed into a layer group and the selection was used to apply a layer mask to the group. This limited the blue color to the car.

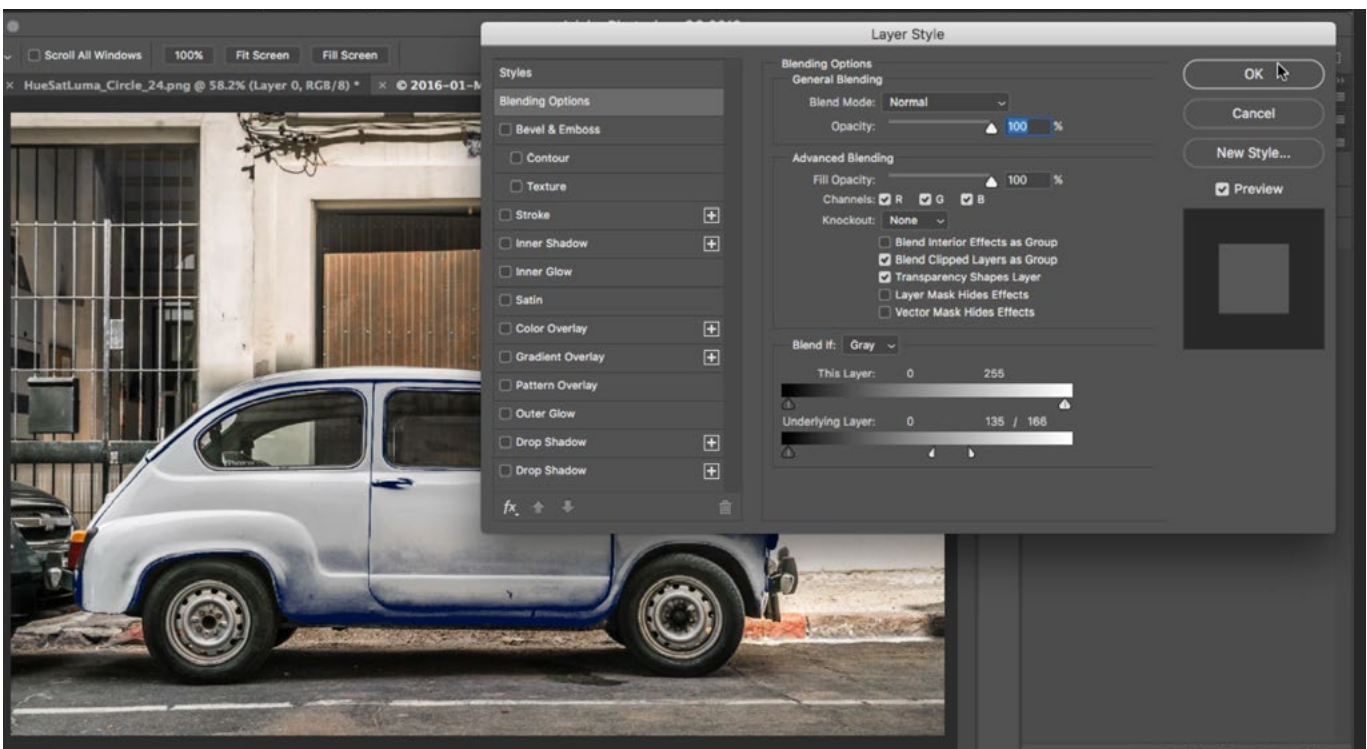
At this point, the car doesn't look completely natural because the highlights are the same color as the shadows and the midtones. To fix this, we need to limit which parts of the car the solid color layer can affect. We'll double-click in the area to the right of the solid color layer name to call up the blending sliders. We'll use the Underlying Layer sliders, dragging the white slider to the left in order to hide the blue color in the highlight areas in the car. We'll also drag the black slider in to hide the blue color in the shadows. We'll then split both sliders to create soft transitions and then click ok.



The blending sliders are being used to hide the blue effect in the highlights and shadows of the car.

Next, we want to insert different, less colorful, shades of blue into the highlight and shadow areas of the car. We'll create a new solid color layer inside of the layer group, we'll choose a darker, less saturated color for the shadows and then we'll click OK. This color should only appear in the shadow areas of the car, so we'll access the blending sliders, use the Underlying Layer sliders and drag the white

slider to the left, until the dark hue only appears in the shadow areas. Note that it may be easier to see what's going on if the visibility of the original solid color layer is turned off. After clicking OK, we'll set the blending mode of this dark blue layer to Multiply. Then, we'll follow a similar procedure for the highlight areas. We'll create another solid color layer inside of the layer group and we'll set the color to a lighter, less saturated version of the blue color. We'll set the blending mode of this color layer to Multiply as well. We'll access the blending sliders and use the Underlying Layer sliders, dragging the black slider way to the right, hiding the dark blue in all areas except for the shadow areas.



**A darker, less saturated color layer was created for the shadow areas of the car. The white Underlying Layer slider is being used to limit the dark blue color to those shadow areas.**

Now the car is starting to look more natural because there is the main blue that covers the majority of the car, and there are lighter and darker versions of the same blue for the highlights and shadows. We can finally fine-tune the results using layer masks.