



Layer Style Examples

# Layer Style Examples

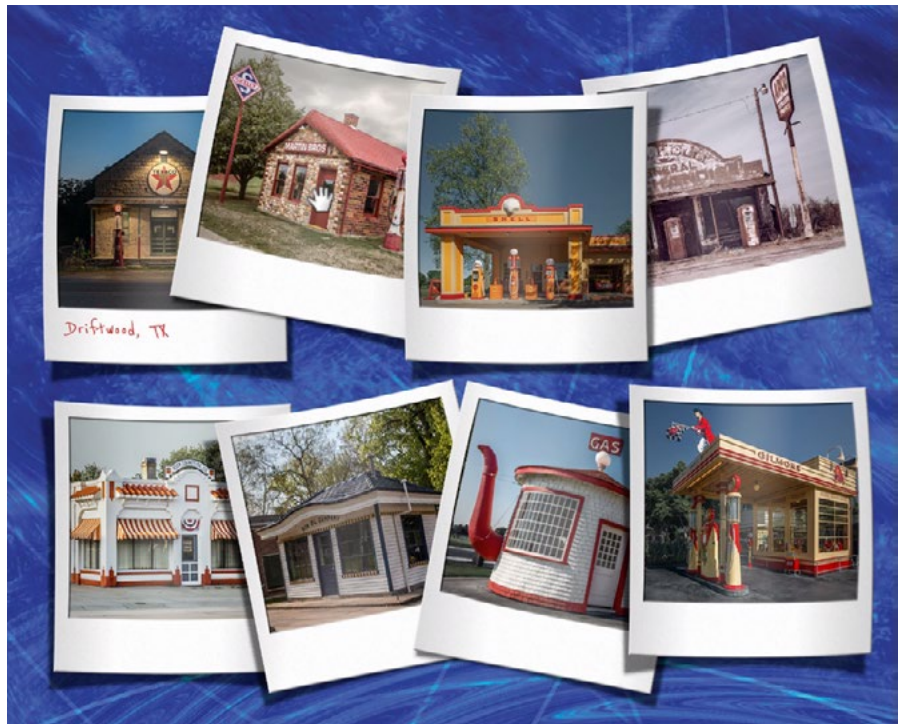
This lesson is going to have a different format than the others. Instead of covering a new or different feature, we're going to take a feature that we have already discussed and we're going to look at a series of in-depth uses for it. The feature we're talking about here is layer styles, or layer effects. There are several different types of effects and many different applications for them, so we're going to look at a series of documents that incorporate them in interesting ways.

## Using layer styles to simulate Polaroid prints

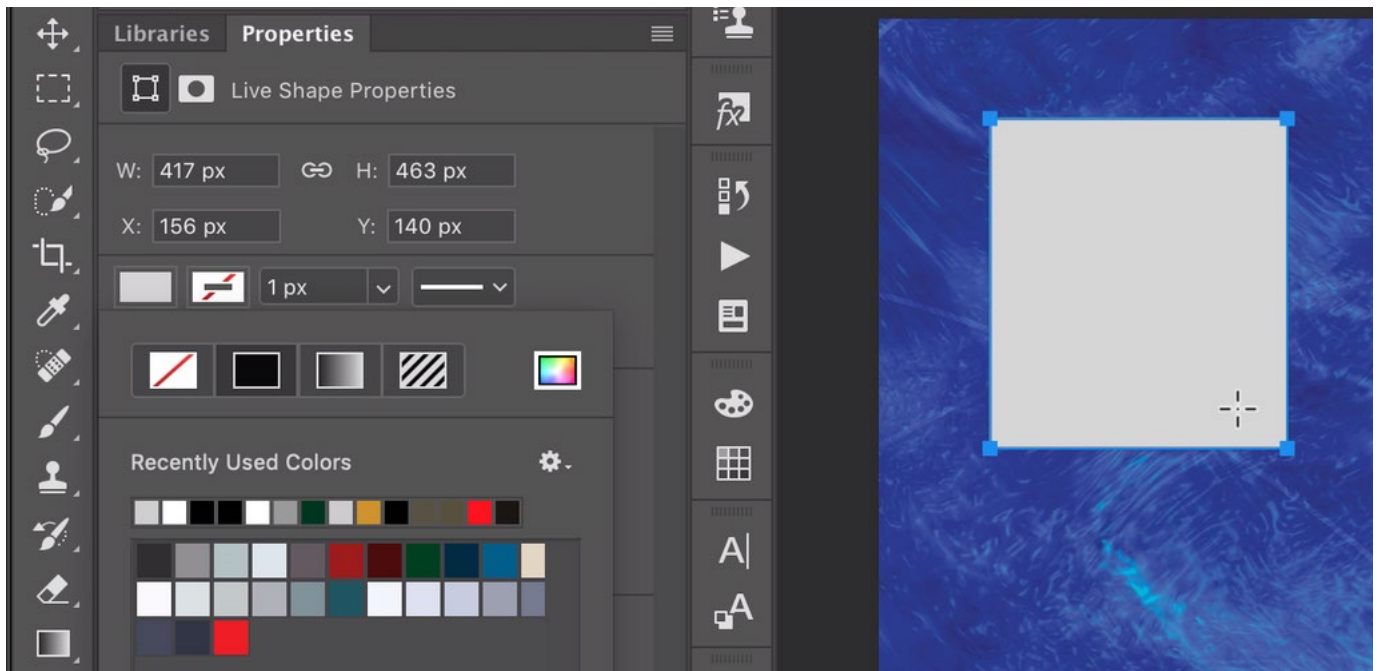
### **The Shape Tool is used to create the Polaroid outline**

In the first example, we're going to use a combination of both shapes and styles in order to create a complex image consisting of realistic-looking Polaroid pictures sitting on a background. We'll start by activating the Shape Tool, set to the rectangular shape, and dragging out a rectangle in the shape of a Polaroid print. We'll open the Properties panel for this shape layer and click on the color

swatch so that we can access the Color Picker and use it to choose a color that is almost white, but not quite pure white.

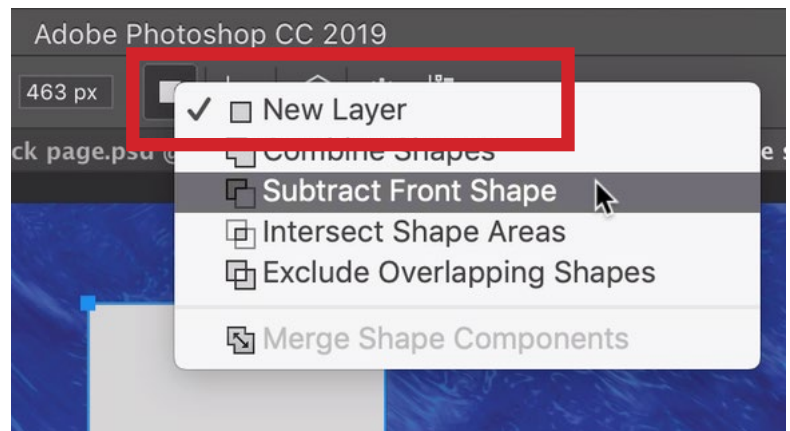


**A series of layer styles are used to create these realistic-looking Polaroids.**

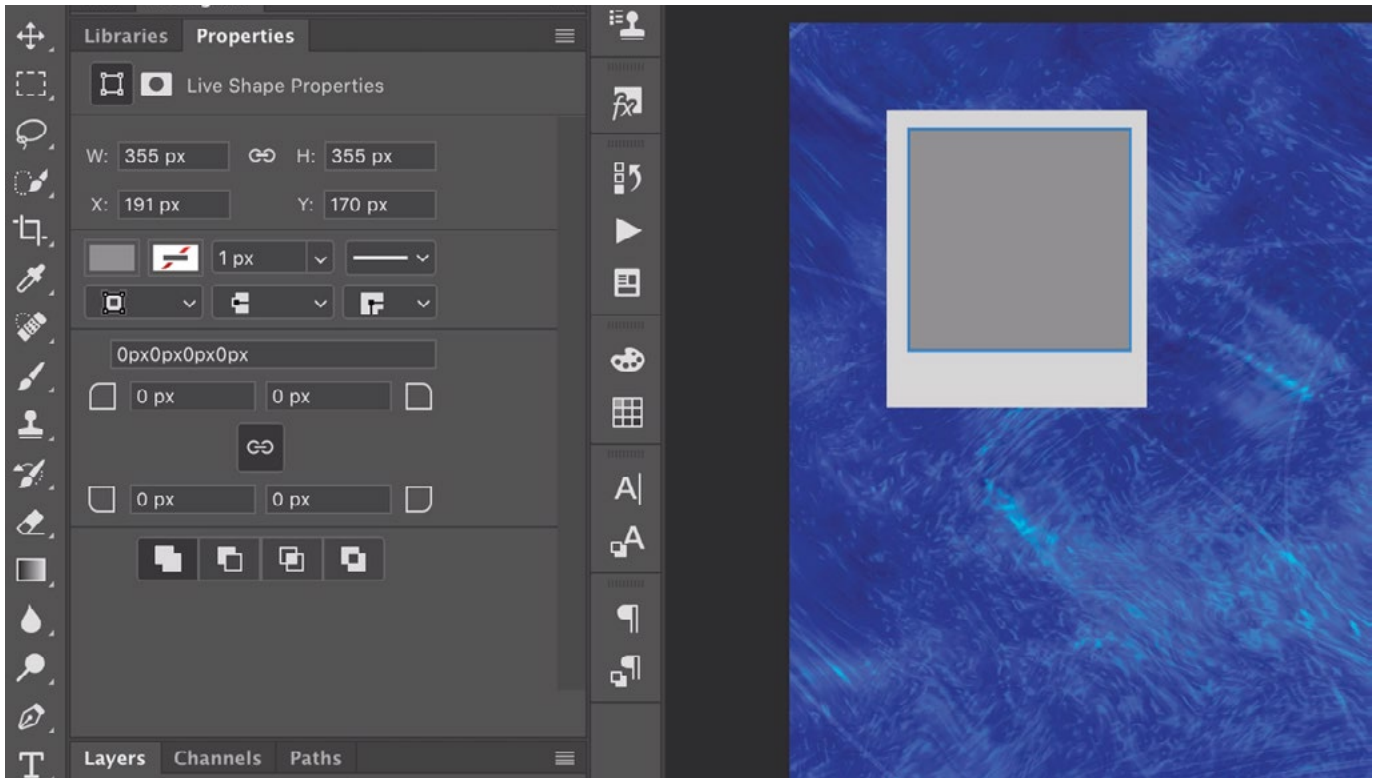


The Shape Layer was used to create this rectangle and we used the Properties panel to set the color of the shape to a very light (almost white) gray.

Next, we want to create a hole for the photograph to be contained in. We'll make sure the Shape Tool is still active and we'll click on the menu in the Options Bar that determines what will happen when we use the Shape Tool again. We want to make sure this menu is set to "New Layer." This will create a new shape layer when we use the tool a second time. We will now drag out a second shape positioned over the first one and we will hold down the Shift key in order to constrain the proportions to a perfect square. We'll also use the Properties panel to change the color of this square, just so that it differentiates from the original shape.



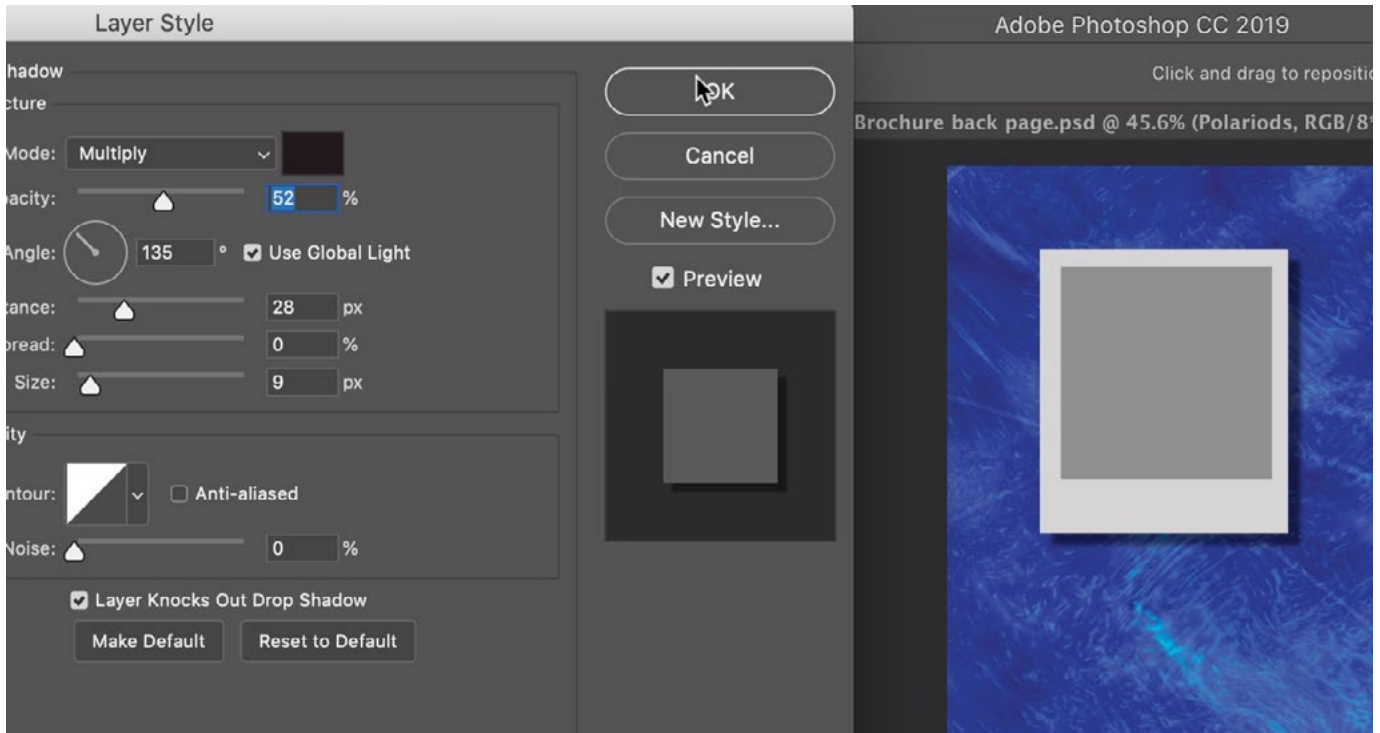
Before we drag out the second shape, we want to make sure this menu is set to New Layer.



A second shape layer is being created to create the photo hole for the Polaroid print. We're setting this shape to a darker gray just so that it differentiates from the first shape.

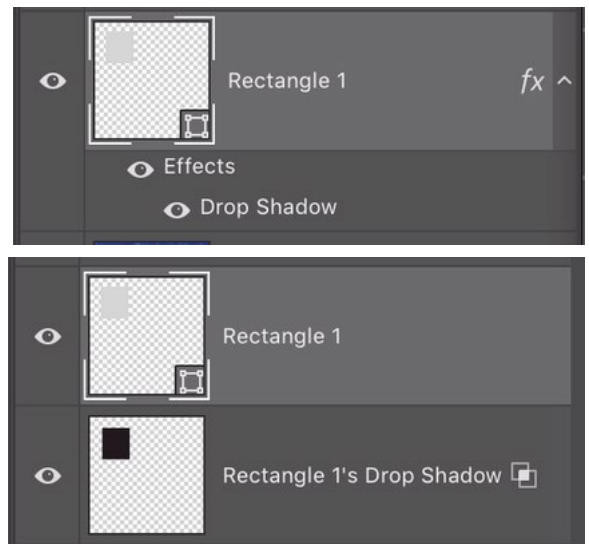
**Add a drop shadow** Now let's add the shadow. We'll activate the layer that contains the larger of the two shapes, we'll click on the FX icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choose Drop Shadow from the pop-up menu. The Layer Style dialog will appear and the drop shadow settings will be at the forefront. While we're viewing the drop shadow settings, we can click and drag within our image to manually position the shadow.

Drop shadows will be crisper and darker when the object that's casting the shadow is close to the background. If we want to make the object look as if it's floating farther from the background, then we would make the shadow softer and lighter. In this example, we want to make the Polaroid look as if it's close to the background, so we'll keep the Size and Distance settings fairly low and drag the Opacity slider to the right until the shadow becomes darker. We'll click OK to exit the Layer Style dialog.



A Drop Shadow layer style is being added to the Polaroid layer. The Size and Distance sliders are at low settings, making it look as if the Polaroid is hovering close to the background.

**Warping the Polaroid and the shadow** Now the Polaroid has a drop shadow but it still looks like something we created in Photoshop. In order to make it look more natural, we're going to make it look as if the photo has a bit of a curve to it. We can achieve this by altering the Polaroid separately from the shadow, but we'll first need to separate that shadow onto its own layer. We'll go to the Layer menu and choose Layer Style > Create Layer. This will remove the drop shadow layer style from the Polaroid layer and place it onto its own layer, just beneath the Polaroid layer.

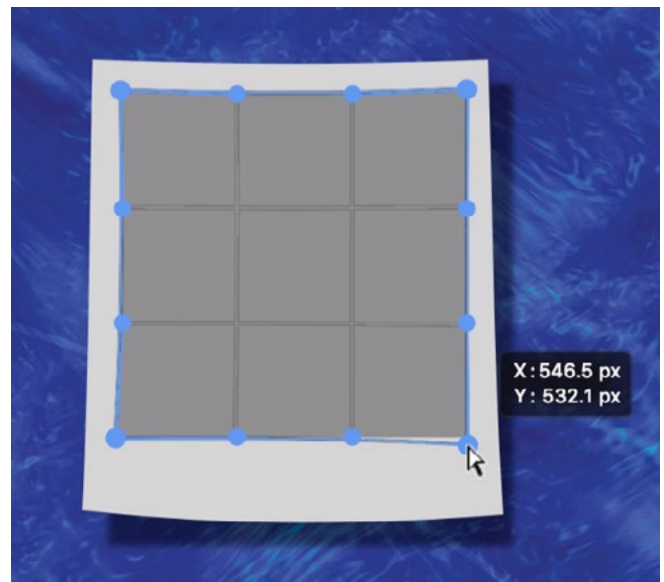
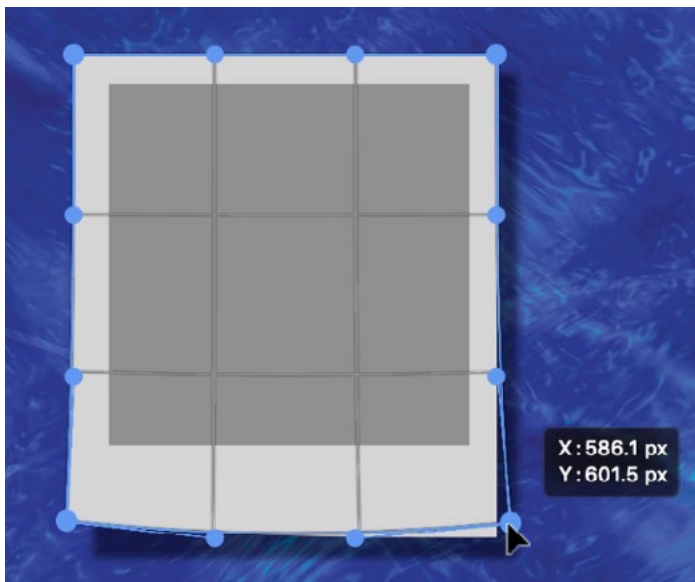


The Drop Shadow was attached to the shape layer via a layer style (top). The shadow was then removed from the shape layer and placed on its own layer.



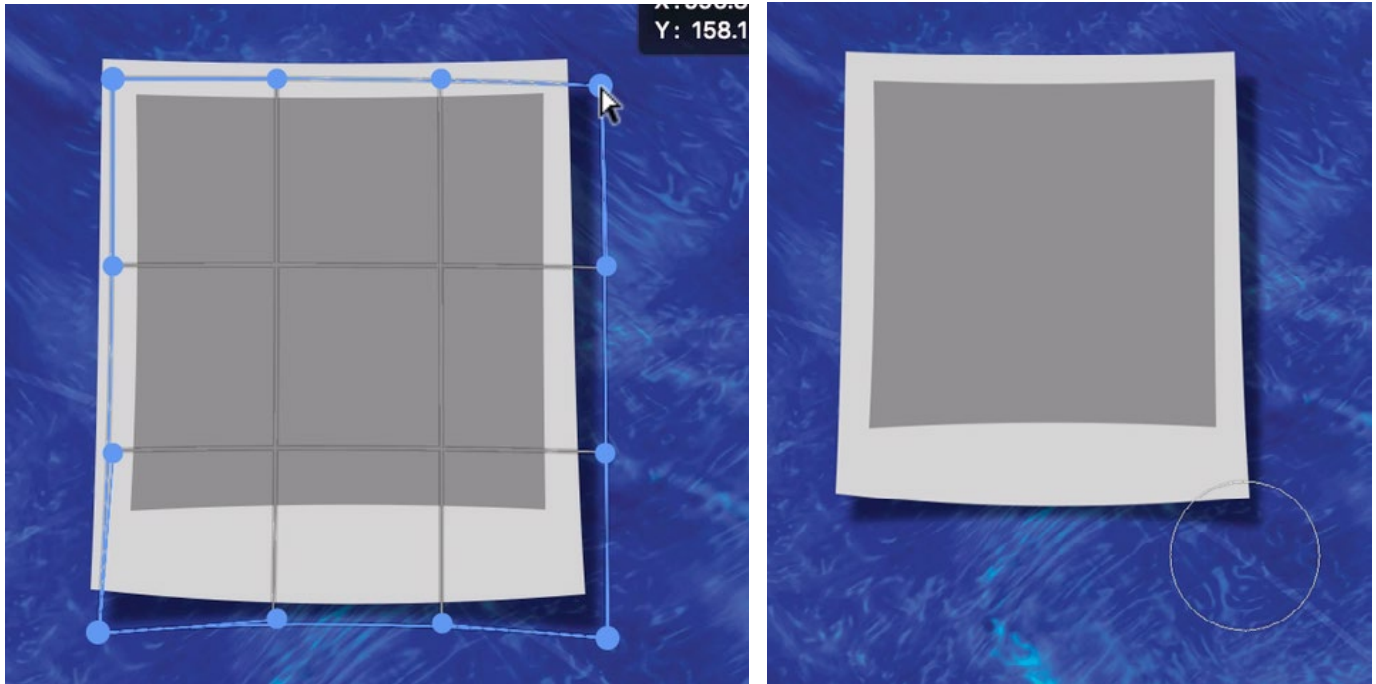
We will now warp the Polaroid layer. We'll make sure this layer is active and then go to the Edit menu and choose Transform Path > Warp. Warp handles will appear around the Polaroid and we'll use the corner handles to pull those corners outward and up a bit to make it look like the photo is bowing a little. We'll tap the Enter/Return key to lock in the transformation and Photoshop might ask us if we want to convert the shape into a live path. We'll click Yes to continue.

Now, we need to make sure the photo part of the Polaroid matches the outer white paper so we'll warp the inner square in the same way that we warped the outer, lighter part of the Polaroid.



**LEFT: The Free Transform command is being used to warp the larger of the two shape layers to make it look as if the Polaroid is bowing slightly. RIGHT: The smaller of the two shape layers is being warped to match the curve of the first shape.**

In order to make it look as if the Polaroid is truly curving, we also need to adjust the shadow. As the Polaroid moves farther from the background, the shadow will need to come farther away and become softer. We'll activate the shadow layer, go to the Edit menu and choose Transform > Warp. Transform handles will appear around the shadow and we'll use them to warp the shadow in the opposite way that we warped the Polaroid, dragging the corners down instead of up. We'll hit Enter/Return to lock in the transformation.



**LEFT:** The shadow layer is being warped in the opposite direction that we warped the Polaroid layer. **RIGHT:** The Blur Tool is being used to blur the corners of the shadow.

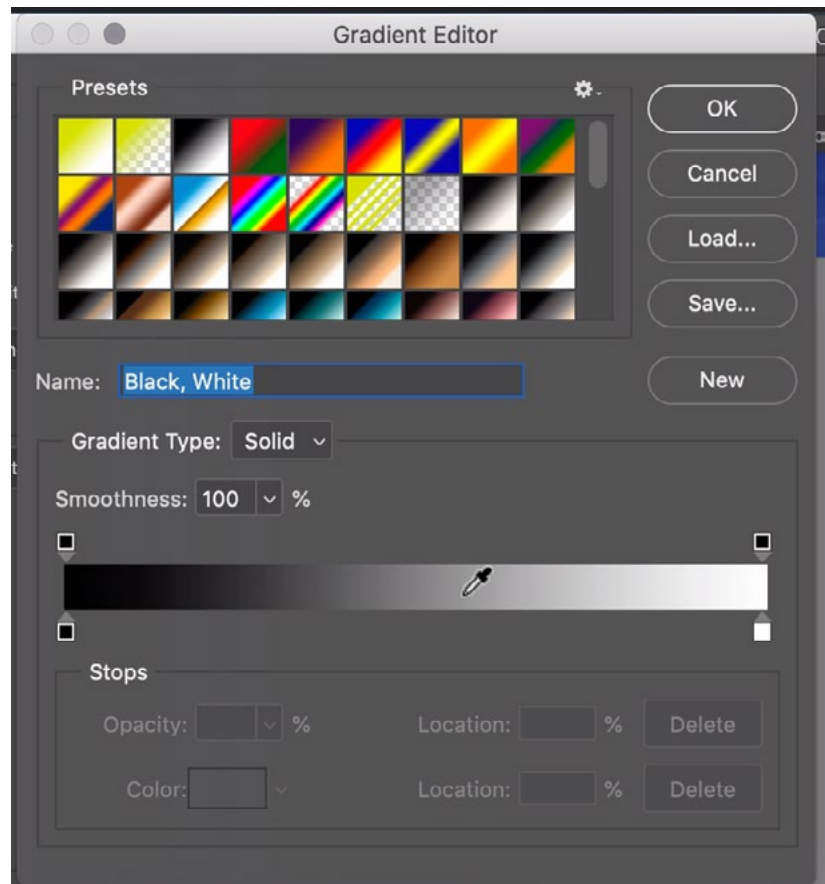
To make this look even more realistic, we'll blur the corners of the shadow, because the areas of the Polaroid that are "farther" from the background should cast a softer shadow. We'll activate the Blur Tool (it looks like a little water drop icon) and use it to paint over the corners of the shadow.

**Add a Gradient Overlay** The somewhat three-dimensional effect can be enhanced by adding shadows and highlights to the Polaroid and we will do that by adding the Gradient Overlay layer style. With the Polaroid layer active, we'll click on the FX icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choose Gradient Overlay from the pop-up menu. The Layer Style dialog will appear and the gradient settings will be at the forefront. We'd like the edges of the photo to look a bit darker than the center. To start, we'll use the gradient menu to choose the black-to-white gradient. The Angle setting should be set to 180 degrees, which will give us a horizontal gradient. Then, we'll click within the preview of the gradient in order to bring up the Gradient Editor, which will allow us to make changes to the chosen gradient. We chose a gradient that has black on the left and white on the right, but we want black on both

sides with white in the middle. Below the gradient bar, there are sliders for each gradient “stop” and we can move these sliders to change where the colors appear on the gradient. Extra stops can also be added. We’ll drag the slider on the right (the white one) to the left, positioning it in the middle of the gradient bar. Note that you can also use the Location field at the bottom of this dialog in order to precisely place the active gradient stop. If you want it to be placed right in the middle of the gradient, type in 50%. Now we need to add another black stop on the far right side of the gradient. To create a copy of the black stop on the left, we’ll hold down the Option

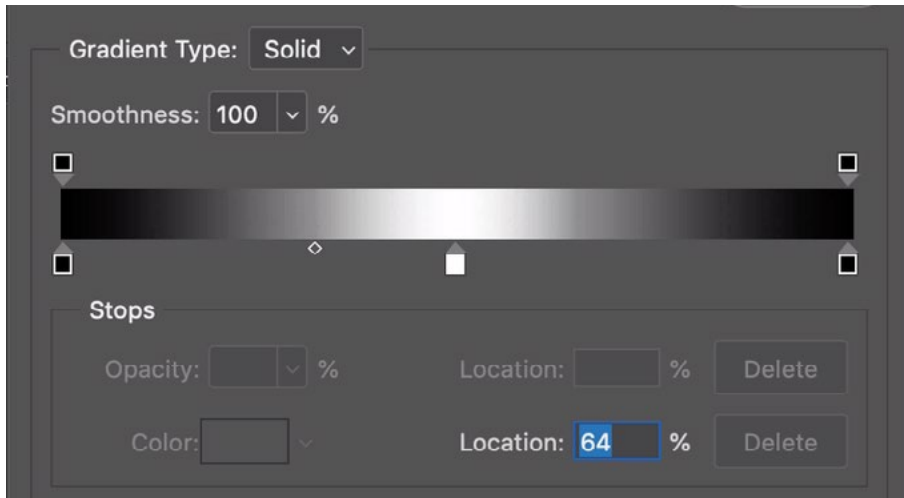
key (Alt on Win) as we click and drag on the left stop. This will create a duplicate of the black stop and we’ll drag this all the way to the right side.

We’ll click on the middle, white stop to make it active. You can tell that a stop is active because the arrow pointing above it will be black. The active stop will have two little diamonds on either side of it and these represent the mid-points of the transition. We can drag these diamonds to control the transitions. We’ll drag the diamonds in toward the white stop so that there is more black in the transitions and then click OK.



**Within the Layer Style dialog, we chose to create a Black to White gradient and then clicked on the gradient preview bar in order to access the Gradient Editor, which is what you see above.**



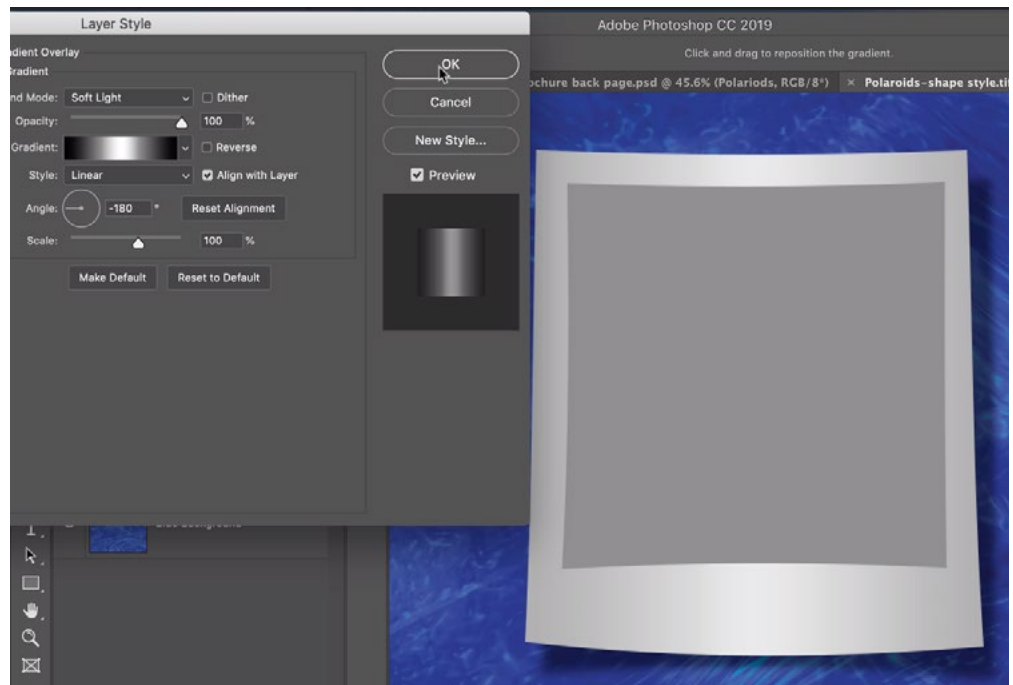


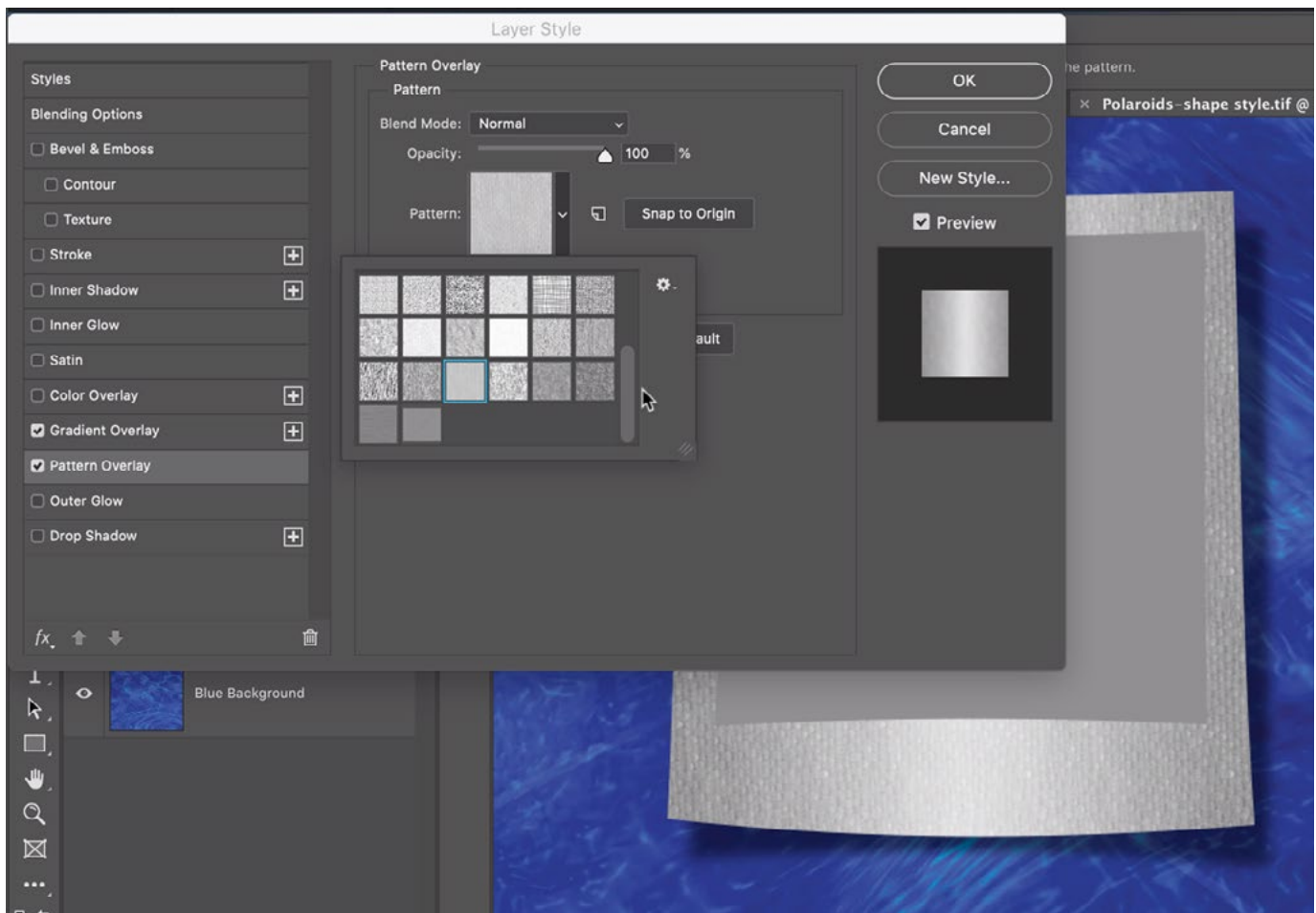
In the Gradient Editor, we now have three stops, which will create a gradient with black on the sides and white in the middle. We are dragging the little diamond (circled) to determine where the middle of the transition will be.

We can now see what the gradient looks like in the main document window. It is too extreme, so we need to tone it down a bit. This can be done by either lowering the opacity or changing the blending mode. We'll change the blending mode to Soft Light and then click OK to exit the Layer Style dialog. You can now see that the gradient is very subtle but still gives the feeling that we're looking at a Polaroid that is curved.



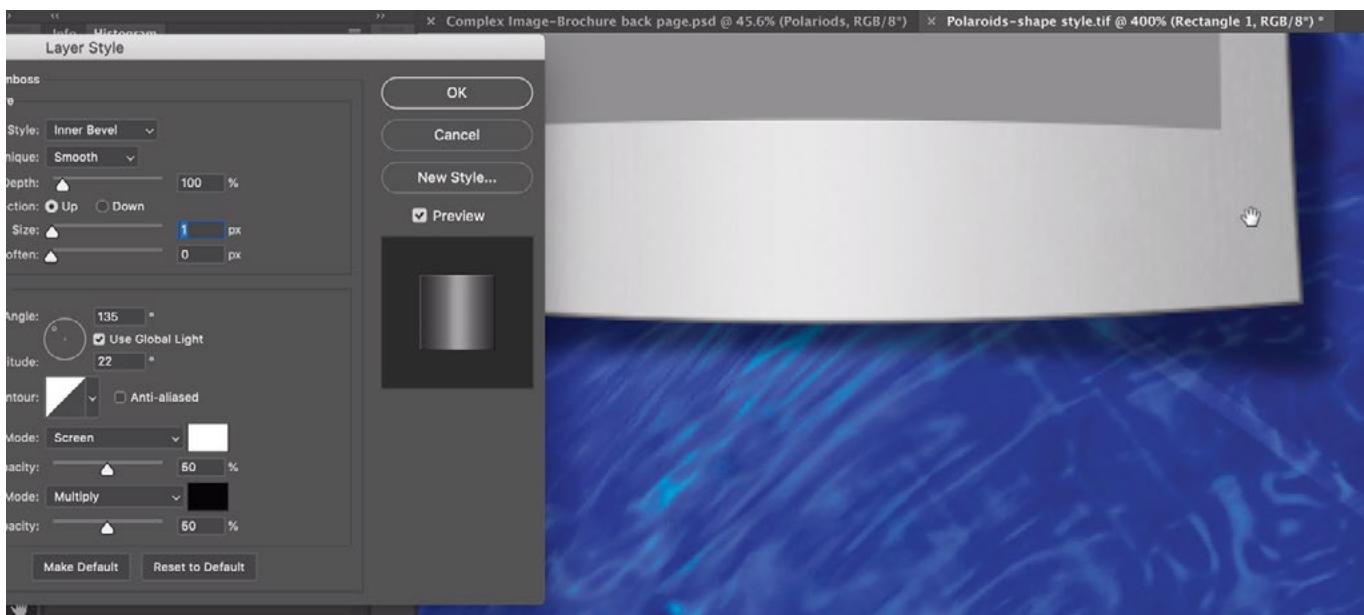
**ABOVE:** The gradient is far too extreme.  
**RIGHT:** The gradient layer style is being set to the Soft Light blending mode, which makes the gradient much more subtle.





**A Texture Overlay is being added to the Polaroid layer. We're trying to choose a pattern that, when more transparent, will simulate the look of paper.**

**Create texture** The Polaroid is starting to look more realistic and we're going to take it a step further by adding some texture. With the Polaroid layer active, we'll again click on the FX icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and we'll choose Pattern Overlay from the pop-up menu. The Layer Style dialog will come back and this time, the Pattern Overlay settings will be in the forefront. We'll click on the Pattern menu and experiment with the different patterns, looking for one that best stimulates the texture of paper. After choosing one, the Opacity setting will need to be lowered significantly so that it is an extremely subtle effect. You can also use the Scale slider here in order to make the texture larger or finer. We'll click OK.



**A Bevel & Emboss layer style is being added to the Polaroid layer. We're keeping the Size slider to a low setting so that it only looks as if the far edges of the layer are curved.**

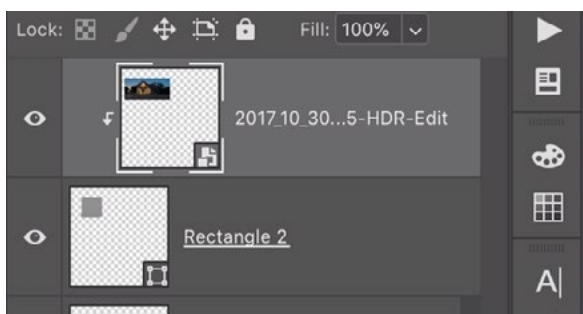
**Adding thickness** If you imagine what a real Polaroid print looks like, you will probably picture something that's much thicker than a sheet of paper. We'll simulate this thickness with another layer style. We'll open the FX menu again and this time choose Bevel & Emboss. The Layer Style dialog will appear and the appropriate settings will be visible. This dialog will remember the last settings that were used here so we'll click the "Reset to Default" button in order to revert all of the settings back to their defaults. We'll move the Size slider to a very low setting, looking at the preview in the image window, so that there is just a small curve on the very edge of the Polaroid. We'll click OK.

**Insert a photo** Now it's time to insert a placeholder image. If we drag an image file directly into the Photoshop document, it will be placed as a smart object layer. It will also have active transform handles that we can use to resize the image so that it best fits the photo opening in the Polaroid print. We'll click Return/Enter to lock in the transformation. We need to make it so the photo only appears inside of the photo opening and we can do that by creating a clipping mask. We'll make sure that the photo layer is positioned directly above the layer containing the square



We dragged a photo right into the Photoshop document and it was added as a smart object layer. Transform handles appear around the photo and we are using them to scale and position the image over the photo part of the Polaroid.

shape that represents the photo opening. Then we'll click on the Layer menu and choose Create Clipping Mask. Alternatively, we could hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) and click on the horizontal line between the two layers in the Layers panel. The layer thumbnail will become indented and there will be a down-pointing arrow that indicates it is clipped to the layer beneath it. Now, the photo only appears in the area where there is content in the underlying shape layer.

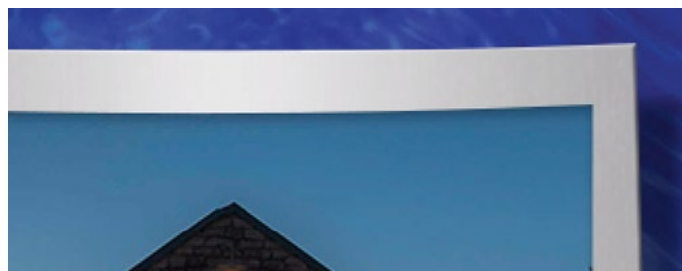


**ABOVE:** When a layer is clipped to the layer beneath it, the layer will become indented in the Layers panel and a little arrow will point down to the layer it's clipped to. **RIGHT:** The photo layer is clipped to the square shape layer, so it only appears inside that shape.





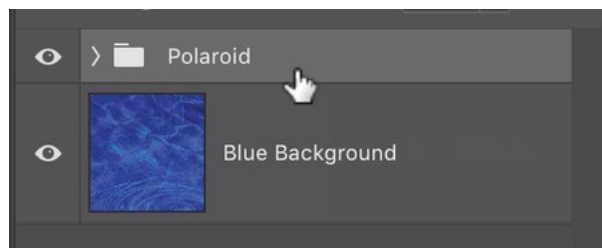
**Create a bevel around the photo** A real Polaroid print has a bit of a raised edge around the photograph and we want to replicate this. We'll add a layer style, but we're not going to add it to the photo layer itself. We're going to add it to the underlying shape layer, which is the layer that the photo is clipped to.



**An Inner Shadow style is being used to make it look like the photo is recessed.**

We'll use the FX menu to choose the Inner Shadow layer style, which is going to make the layer look as if it is recessed. We'll adjust the Size and Distance sliders to make it look like the image is appropriately recessed into the Polaroid. To add to this effect, we could also add a Bevel & Emboss layer style, setting the Direction option to Down, making it look like it is more recessed.

**Cleaning up the Layers panel** The Polaroid is looking pretty realistic now, so it's safe to call it "finished." The entire Polaroid can be duplicated as many times as we'd like, but it is first a good idea to clean up the Layers panel. We'll first rename each of the layers so that it's easy to tell what they are. We'll also collapse the lists of layer styles beneath the layer thumbnails. Then, we'll select all of the layers that make up the Polaroid and we'll click on the Folder icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. This will place all of the layers into a folder, or group, inside the Layers panel and we can rename this folder, in order to stay organized.

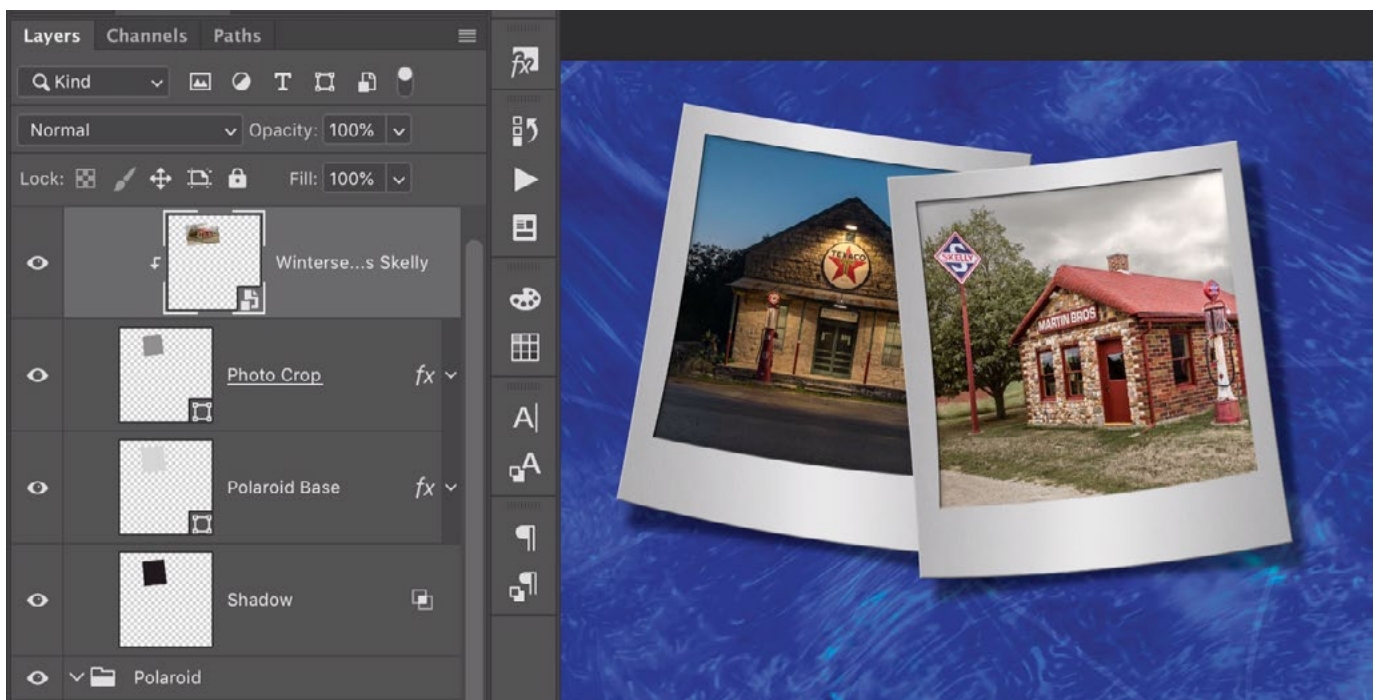


**All of the layers that make up the Polaroid were placed inside of a layer folder, or group.**

**Duplicating the Polaroid** Now that the Polaroid is finished, we can create multiple instances of it in our document. We'll activate the Move Tool and then pay attention to the Auto-Select Layers setting that can be found in the Options Bar. When this setting is turned on, we can click within the document and Photoshop will automatically activate the layer that is beneath the cursor. I usually keep this setting turned off because it can be annoying (to me). When the setting is turned off, you can hold down the Command key and then click within the document in



order to activate the layer that is directly beneath your cursor. (Basically, the Command key is temporarily turning the Auto-Select Layers setting on for the entire time you have the key held down.) In the Options Bar, there is a menu to the right of the Auto-Select Layers button and we can use this menu to change the setting from the default “Layer” to “Group.” When we set this to Group, then it’s going to auto-select the entire group that the targeted layer is contained within. That means we can click and drag on the Polaroid and the entire thing will move, not just the layer directly beneath the cursor. If we hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) as we click and drag on the group, we will be dragging out a duplicate of that group. We can use the Free Transform command to then reposition that second Polaroid and we can replace the image layer with a different photo, making sure that we clip the new photo to the underlying shape layer so that it only appears in the photo opening.



**We placed all of the Polaroid layers into a folder and then that folder was duplicated and repositioned. We also replaced the photo layer in the duplicate.**

We can quickly create many Polaroids by duplicating multiple layers at once. Any time you use the Auto-Select Layer feature and you add the Shift key, you'll be adding to the selection, so we'll turn on the Auto-Select Layers setting, make sure it is set to "Group" and then click on the first Polaroid. We'll hold down the Shift key and then click on the second Polaroid. Now both groups are selected and we can duplicate them by holding down the Option key (Alt on Win) as we click and drag on the groups. This will drag out duplicates of both Polaroids. Now we have four.

While the two Polaroid duplicates are still selected, we'll flip them horizontally so that they don't look exactly like the first two. To do this, we'll go to the Edit menu and choose Transform > Flip Horizontal. We'll also activate each Polaroid, one at a time, and use the Free Transform command to rotate/reposition them slightly so that they differ more from one another.

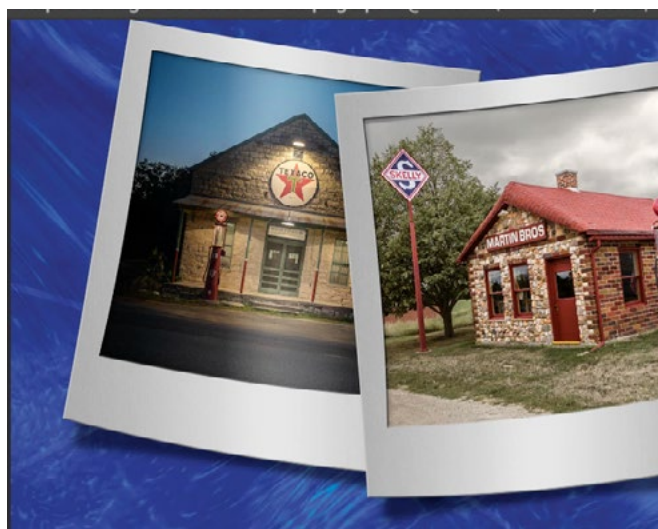
The photos in the second two Polaroids need to be replaced so that they are not copies of the first two. We'll set the Auto-Select menu back to "Layer" and then click on one of the photos to make it active in the Layers panel. We'll drag another image directly into the Photoshop document and it will show up as a new smart object layer. We'll use the Free Transform handles to resize and position the photo over one of the new Polaroids and then click Enter/Return to lock in the transformation. We'll then clip the photo layer to the underlying layer so that it only appears within the photo window in the Polaroid. All of the steps detailed above can be used to create more Polaroids and fill the document.

## Additional tips

**How we could make this process "smarter"** We could have created the above document in a smarter way by turning the base layer of the Polaroid (the white layer) in to a smart object before warping it or adding any layer styles. If we had done this, then we would be able to go back and make changes to that one smart object and it would have updated in every instance of that smart object. In other words, we could make changes to one Polaroid and all of the other Polaroids would update to match.

**Copying and pasting layer styles** A lot of layer effects were used to create the Polaroid style. It can be useful to know how to copy the layer style (aka effects) from one layer to another. To copy a layer's styles, right-click on the name of the layer in the Layers panel and choose Copy Layer Style from the pop-up menu. Then, right-click on the name of the layer you want to paste the effects to and choose Paste Layer Style from the pop-up menu. You can also paste the style to multiple layers by selecting more than one layer, right-clicking on one of the names and choosing Paste Layer Style.

**Add a sheen to the photo layer** Another thing we could do is add a sheen to the photo layer. We already did that to the Polaroid layer by adding the Gradient Overlay effect. We could take that same style, copy it and paste it to the square shape layer that the photo is clipped to. An easy way to do this would be to hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) while dragging the Gradient Overlay style from one layer to the other. (If we did not hold down the Option key while doing this, the layer style would be removed from the first layer and added to the second. We don't want that. We want the style to remain on the original layer and then be copied to the shape layer.)



**We copied the Gradient Overlay effect from the white Polaroid layer to the square shape layer that the photo is clipped to. This added the sheen effect to the photo.**

## Metal bar effect

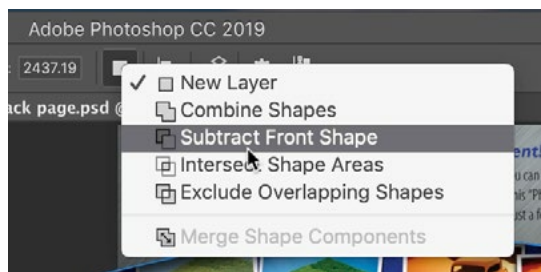
In the next example, we have a metal bar that is curved on the bottom and runs along the top of a brochure. Let's look at how the bar was created. The bar started as a simple rectangular shape layer that was placed at the top of the document. The

curve was then created by dragging out a second shape, using the "Subtract from Layer" setting in the Options Bar. When you have a shape layer that is active in the Layers panel and you go to create another shape, this menu in the Options Bar will determine what the new shape will do. If you choose "Subtract from Shape," then the new shape is going to subtract content from the original shape. In this example, we set the Shape Tool to create an Ellipse and we dragged out a giant ellipse that cut into the bottom of the original rectangular bar. This subtracted content from the bar, making it look like the bottom edge is curved upward.

We then added some layer styles to this rectangular bar layer. A Drop Shadow layer style was added, projecting a shadow downward and making it look like the bar is raised off the background. A Gradient Overlay effect was also added, making the layer brighter in the middle and darker on the edges.



This metal bar was created using a series of layer styles.

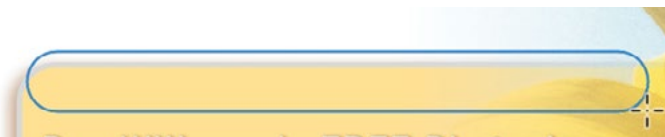
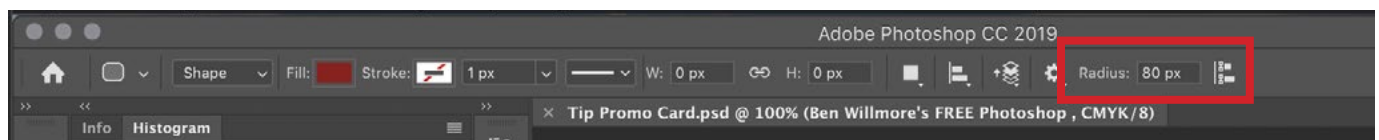


A second shape is being drawn out (the giant ellipse) and, because the "Subtract from Shape" option is being used, it's taking away content from the first shape (the rectangular bar).



## Shiny 3D effect

One frequently-used effect creates a shiny, dimensional gel style that is commonly used to create buttons and raised text. Let's start by creating a button. We'll activate the Rounded Rectangle Shape Tool and use the Radius setting in the Options Bar to determine how round the corners of the rectangle should be. We're going to set this at a high setting (80) so that the corners are extremely rounded. We'll also use the Fill setting in the Options Bar to choose a color. (It isn't super important what color we choose, because we can specify the color later using layer styles.) We'll drag out the new shape in our document.

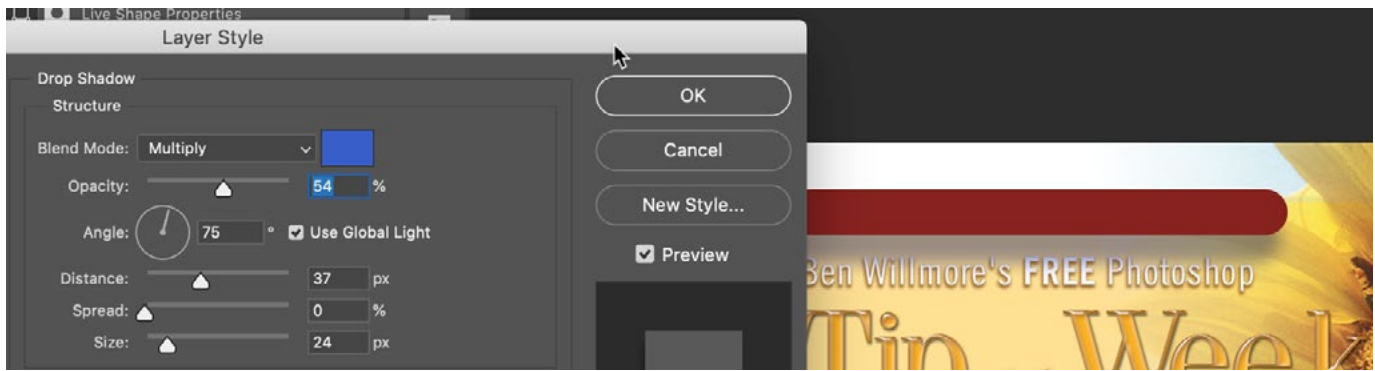


**The Rounded Rectangle Shape Tool is active and we set the Radius to a high number. This is making the corners extremely rounded.**

Now we'll start styling the shape. (Note: If you don't want to see the blue shape outline while the shape layer is active, you can use the keyboard shortcut Command+H [Ctrl+H on Win] key to hide it.)

**Drop Shadow:** We'll click on the FX icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choose Drop Shadow from the pop-up menu. While the Drop Shadow settings are visible, we can click and drag within the document to reposition the shadow. When we do this, the Angle and Distance settings will be updated to reflect the changes. We'll drag up the Size slider in order to create a really soft shadow. (The higher you set this slider, the softer the shadow will be.) We can change the color of the shadow by clicking on the color swatch at the top of the dialog and using the Color Picker to choose a different color. We'll choose a blue color here. Finally, we'll fine-tune the Opacity slider so that the shadow is our desired darkness.



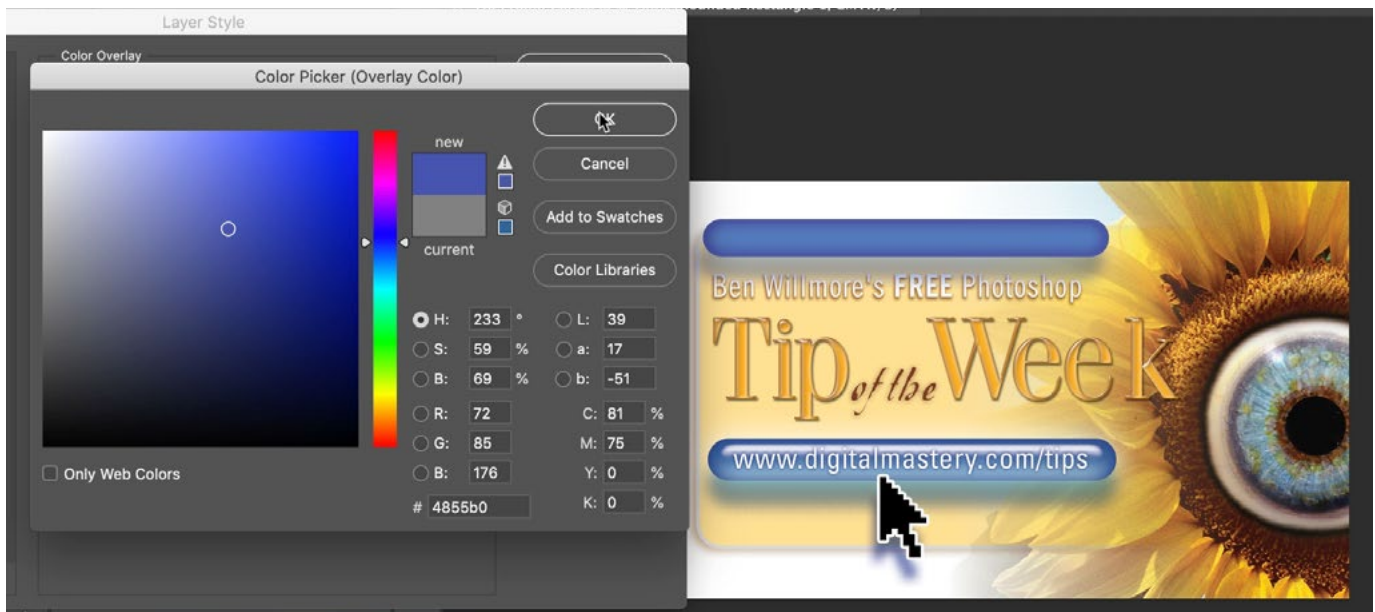


The Drop Shadow layer effect is being added to the bar shape. The size setting is very high, making the shadow quite soft. We also changed the color of the shadow to a blue hue.

**Outer Glow:** After changing the Drop Shadow settings, we don't need to click OK to exit the Layer Style dialog. Instead, we'll change which type of effect we're working on by clicking on the name of a different effect on the left side of the dialog. We're going to add a glowing effect around the shape we created and we'll do that by clicking on the Outer Glow effect. (Note that we need to click on the word "Outer Glow" and not just the check box in order to access the settings.) This will bring up all of the Outer Glow settings in the main dialog box. We'll adjust the Size slider, which determines how far the glow should extend from the shape, and then we'll choose the color of the glow by clicking on the color swatch to access the Color Picker. We'll choose a cyan color and then click OK. We can also adjust the Opacity and Blend Mode in order to make the glow more or less intense.

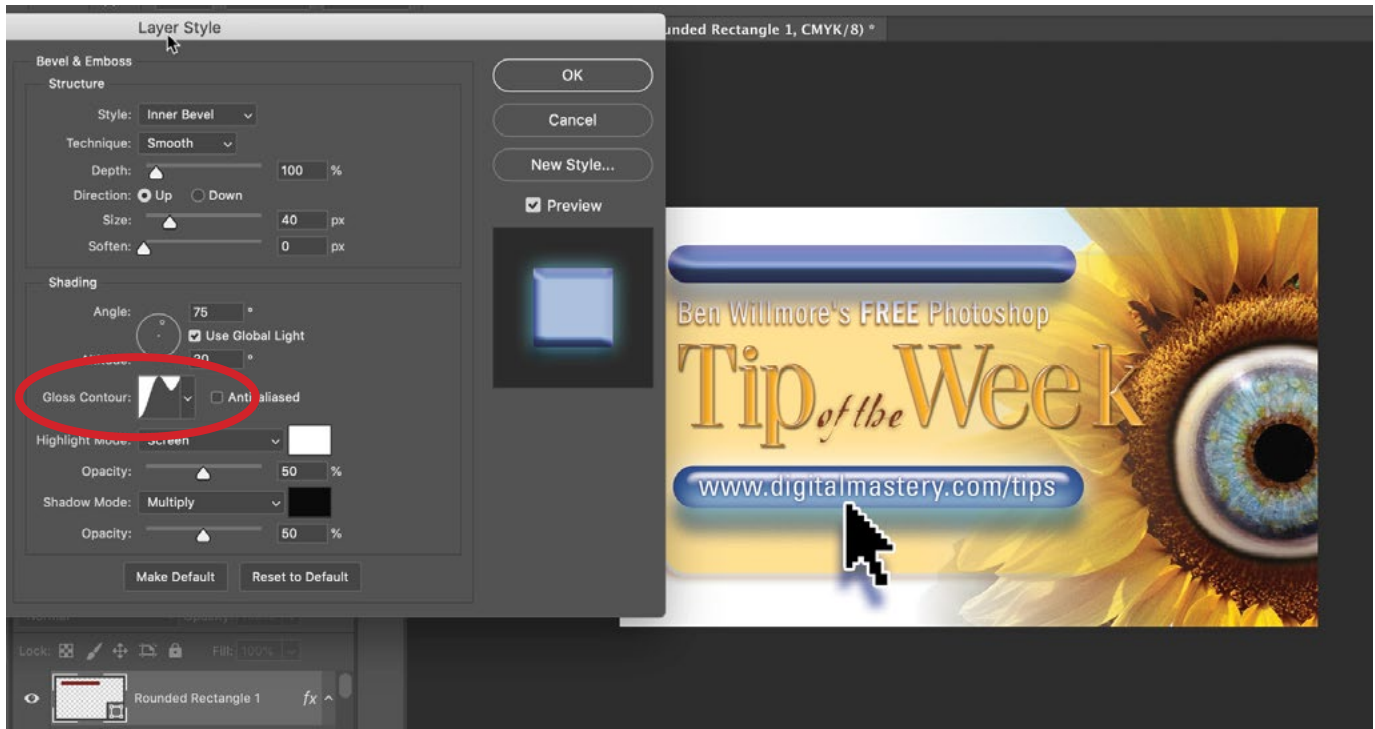
**Inner Glow:** The shiny part of the effect is created by adding an Inner Glow layer style. We'll click on the name "Inner Glow" on the left side of the Layer Style dialog in order to access the settings. Here, there is a Source setting and this will determine whether the glow should come from the edges of the shape and extend toward the center, or if the glow should start in the center and extend out toward the edges. We'll set this option to Center, which will make it look like there is a shine to the middle of the shape. The color of the glow can be specified by clicking on the color swatch rectangle. This will call up the Color Picker where you can select the color. We'll again choose a cyan color for the glow.

**Color Overlay** When initially creating the shape, we weren't particular about the color we used because we knew we were going to change the color later. We'll do that now by clicking on the Color Overlay effect on the left side of the Layer Style dialog. Within the Color Overlay settings, we'll click on the color swatch to call up the Color Picker. We'll choose a darker blue color and then click OK. Now our entire shape is blue.



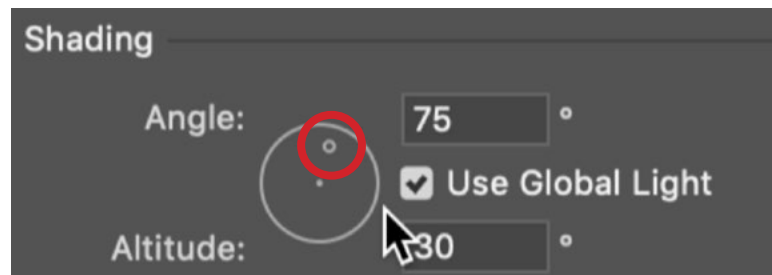
We opened the settings for the Color Overlay effect and then clicked on the color swatch in order to open the Color Picker. Here, we are choosing a blue color for the overlay.

**Bevel & Emboss:** The Bevel & Emboss layer style will be used to create the highlight part of the effect. We'll click on "Bevel & Emboss" on the left side of the Layer Style dialog to access the Bevel & Emboss settings. We'll drag the Size slider up until the raised effect covers the entire shape and makes it look rounded. If we want the shape to look really shiny, we can accomplish that by altering two settings: the Gloss Contour setting, which is located on the bottom half of the Bevel & Emboss settings, and the Contour setting, which can be accessed by clicking on the word "Contour" directly beneath the Bevel & Emboss category on the left side of the Layer style dialog. The Gloss Contour is going to change the shape of the shine



**A Bevel & Emboss effect is being added to the shape. We are choosing the Gloss Contour (circled), which determines the shape of the shine.**

and the Contour setting is going to change the shape of the object itself. The combination of these two will really determine how the shine is going to look and it's really a matter of experimentation to find the settings that you like. In the middle of the Bevel & Emboss options are the Angle and Altitude settings. These can play a big role in crafting an effect like this. With these settings, there is a tiny circle inside of a big circle. We can move around the tiny circle to determine where the light source should come from. Both the Angle (direction of the light source) and Altitude (height of the light source) will change when we position this tiny circle.



**Within the Bevel & Emboss settings, we can move this tiny circle to determine the Angle of the light and the Altitude (how high the light source is).**

We can copy this layer style and paste it onto a text layer in order to give the text the same shiny, raised look. The problem is that the settings used for each effect on the shape will also be applied to the text and these settings

may not be appropriate because the text is likely much thinner than the shape. In order to fix this, we can go to the Layer menu and choose Layer Style > Scale Effects. A little dialog will appear and we can use the Scale setting to lower the percent number until the style looks appropriate on the text.



**The Bevel & Emboss style was copied from the shape to this text, but you can see that the settings used for the shape are not appropriate for this text.**

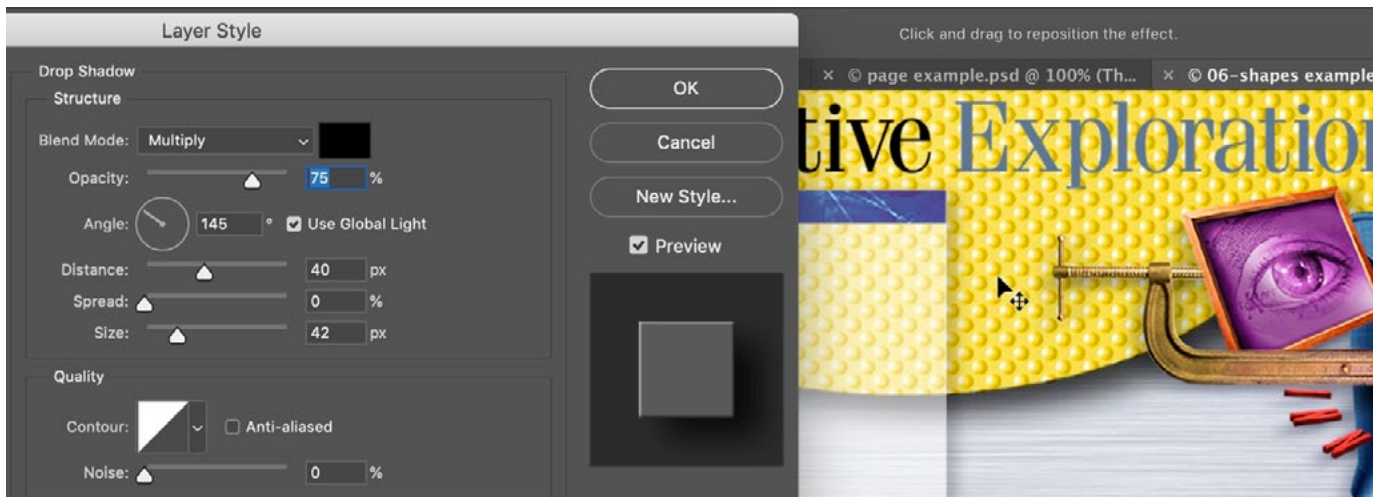


**The Bevel & Emboss effect is being scaled so that it looks more appropriate on the text.**

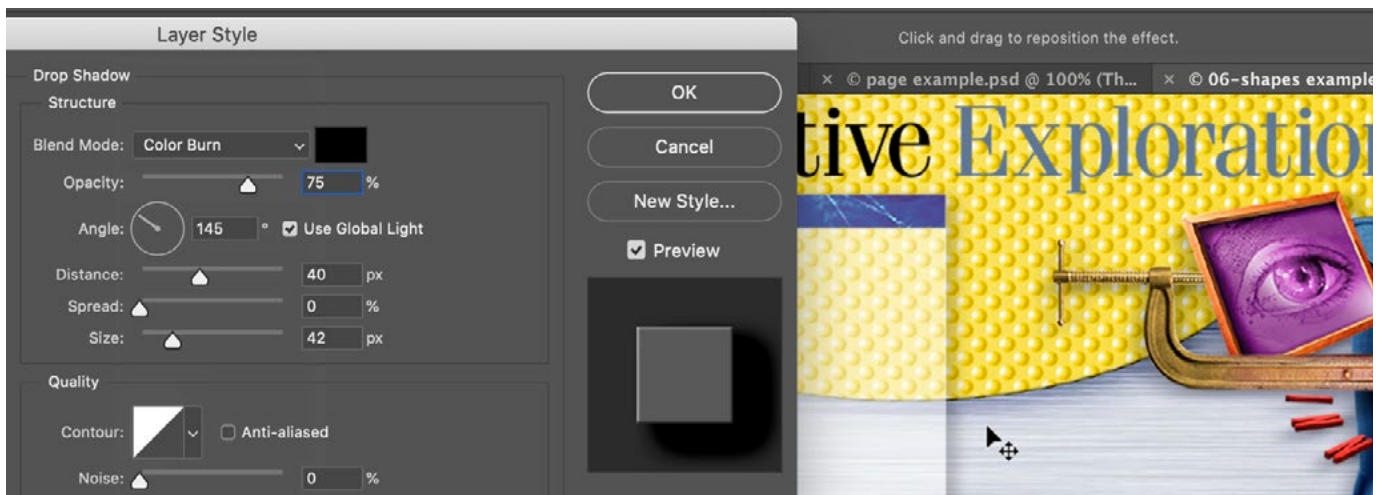


## Layer styles and blending modes

When applying layer effects, remember to experiment with the Blend Mode setting within the Layer Style dialog. The different modes can change the way that the style interacts with the background, and this can be useful, especially with the shadow effects. In the example image, you can see that when the Drop Shadow was set to Multiply (its default setting), it was hard to see the underlying texture. We changed the blend mode to Color Burn and this allowed the texture to show through more.



The Drop Shadow Blend Mode is set to Multiply here, which makes it difficult to see the underlying texture.



The Drop Shadow Blend Mode was changed to Color Burn, and this mode makes it easier to see the underlying texture.