Aligned Retouching

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In this lesson, I'm going to show you how I tackled a challenging retouching job using the Healing Brush, the Transform command and the Puppet Warp feature in Photoshop.

The top photo shows the finished image, with all the retouch work done. Directly above, you can see some of the elements I retouched out: The piping and the bench.

Retouching out the piping

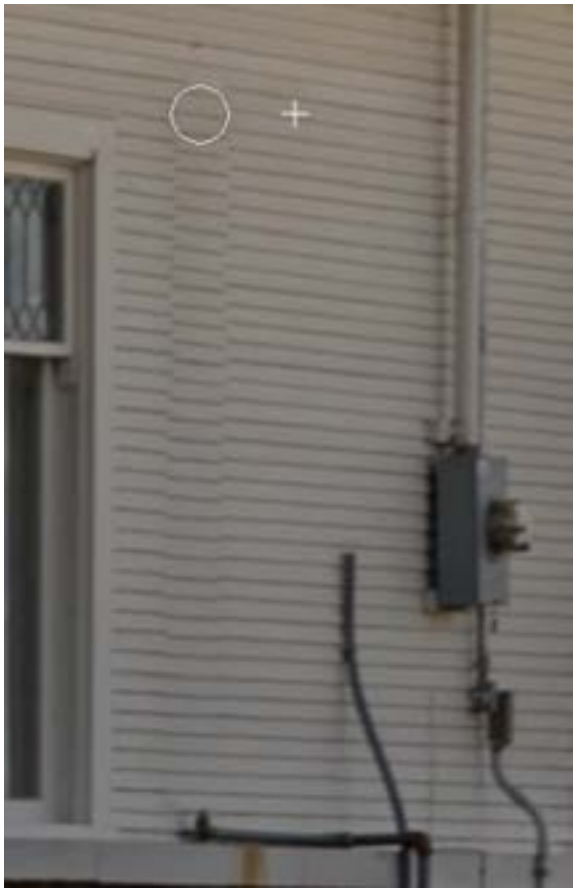
The first thing I want to do is remove the distracting piping from the side of the building. When working on a retouching task like this, I like to sever the object I'm removing from its surroundings using the Clone Stamp Tool, ensuring that the object is surrounded with the kind of content I want to use to fill in the area. In this instance, I want to create a gap between the clean area of pipe and the area where it converges with the horizontal ledge of the building. By isolating part of an object, it'll make it easier to remove using the Healing Brush.

To start, I'll create a new, empty layer and do all the retouch work on that layer. Note that when using the retouching tools while working on an empty layer, it's important that the Sample setting in the Options Bar is set to Sample All Layers or set to Sample Current & Below. This allows Photoshop to look at the content on the underlying layers when working with the retouching tools.

Here, I'm using the Clone Stamp Tool to sever the vertical stretch of pipe from the part of the pipe that intersects with the ledge of the building. This will make the vertical part easier to remove.

With the Clone Stamp Tool active, I'll hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) and click on the area I want to sample (an area just to the side of the pipe I want to remove). Then, I'll release the Option key and use the Clone Stamp Tool to paint over a small area of pipe, making sure that the lines of the siding stay lined up.

Attempt 1: The Healing Brush
Now I have severed the stretch of pipe. My next inclination would be to remove the stretch of pipe using the Healing Brush. When using the Healing Brush, it started off aligning things properly, but the more I painted, the more "off" the alignment got. Because this first "go-to" technique didn't work, I had to try something else.



At left, you can see the result of my first attempt at using the Healing Brush to remove the pipe. It started out looking nice at the bottom, but it became out of alignment at the top.

Attempt 2: Distort transform
I then tried to use the distort command in order to shape the layer into alignment. I used the Lasso Tool to create a selection of clean siding to the right of the pipe I want to remove and then I copied that selection to its own layer by going to the Edit menu and choosing Copy Merged. (I use this command any time I am doing retouch work because the content may

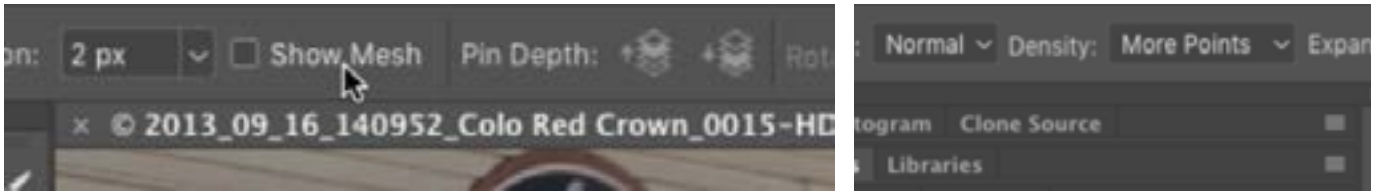
I used the Lasso Tool to make a selection of an area next to the pipe.

be made up of more than one layer, including the layer designed to contain retouch work.) I then pasted the content onto its own layer and used the Move Tool to move this layer to the left so that it covered up the pipe and its shadow.

I then went to the Edit menu and chose Transform > Distort. The Distort command allows us to adjust the four corners of the targeted content individually. A transform box appeared around the layer and I moved the four corners to try and line up the lines of the siding. When doing this, you will need to hold down the Shift key while moving the handles so that Photoshop does not try and scale things proportionally. I did my best to align the lines of the siding, but alas, this technique didn't work either.

I copied the selection to its own layer and moved that layer to cover the pipe. Here, I am using the Distort command to try and line up the layers. As you can see, the results are not perfect.

Attempt 3: Puppet Warp When the other retouching tools don't work in a scenario like this, I would then turn to the Puppet Warp feature. I will keep the layer duplicate that I created and then moved to cover the piping. With this layer active, I'll go to the Edit menu and choose Puppet Warp. By default, a mesh overlay will appear on the layer. If you don't want to see this mesh, you can turn off the "Show Mesh" check box in the Options Bar. That's what I did in the video. I also set the Density menu (also in the Options Bar) to More Points. This just allows the tool to be more precise.

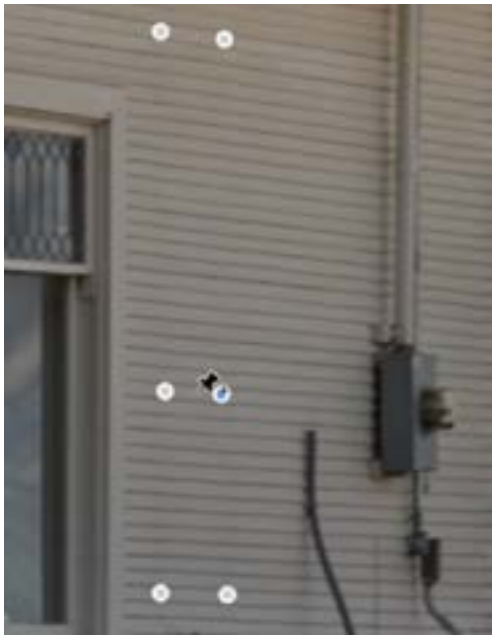


The Puppet Warp feature is active and there are some settings I changed in the Options Bar. At left, you can see that I turned off the "Show Mesh" check box. At right, I set the Density menu to More Points which gives the tool more precision.

Now, I will hover my cursor over one of the places where the lines in the layer duplicate aligns perfectly with the image in the background and I will click to add a point. Then I will find a location on the other side of the layer where it perfectly aligns with the background and I will click to add another point. Now I have points on the left and right sides of the layer. These points are going to serve as anchors, holding the layer in place.

Using Puppet Warp, I clicked to place two points in spots where the active layer aligned nicely with the underlying layer.

Next, I will hover my cursor over an area near the top of the layer, where it does NOT align with the underlying image. This time, I will click and drag. When you click and drag using Puppet Warp, you will add a point and move it up or down in order to align the content with the underlying layer. I will continue clicking and dragging to add points, positioning them so they line up with the underlying building. You can add as many points as you want here, but be careful about placing them too close to each other as this can result in less-than-optimal results.



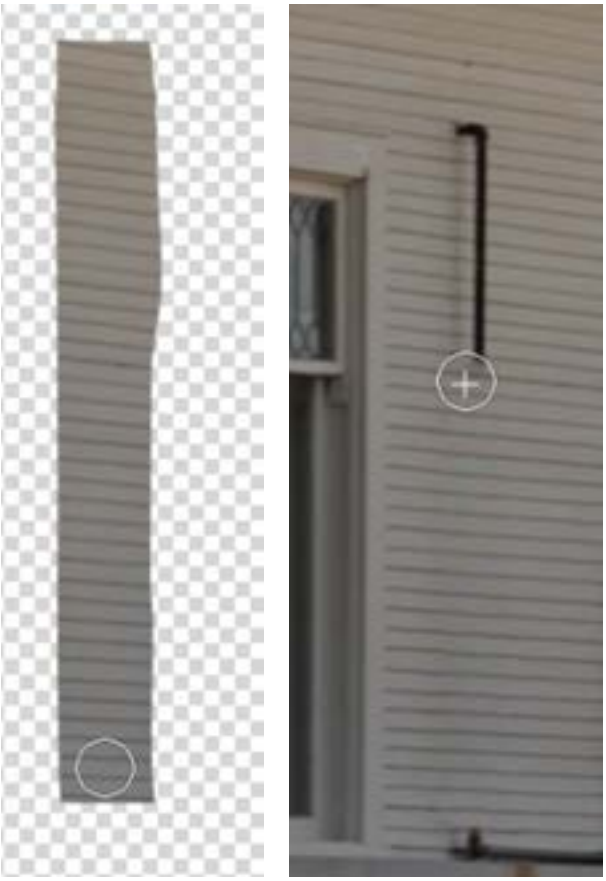
I clicked to add more points and dragged the content into alignment with the underlying layer.

Healing Brush Trick

I was able to successfully remove the pipe using the Puppet Warp feature, but I had originally wanted to use the Healing Brush, because the Healing Brush will match the color and brightness to the surrounding area. Let's look at a trick that might allow me to complete the retouch job using the Healing Brush.

I will still use the layer that I puppet-warped in the step above, but I will drag this layer to the very bottom of the layer stack. I'll then turn off the visibility of all the other layers.

With the Healing Brush active, I'll set the brush so that it fits within the strip of siding I have in the layer. I'll position the cursor somewhere within the layer (not overlapping any transparent area), hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) and I'll click once in order to copy that area. Then, without moving the cursor at all, I'll release the Option key and click again. This pastes the content in the exact spot we copied, but it also determines the sample area so that when I click again, it will remember where to copy from.



LEFT: I moved the layer duplicate to the bottom of the layer stack and am sampling an area of siding. RIGHT: I am using the Healing Brush to paint on the retouching layer, covering up the piping.

Now I'll turn on the visibility of the other layers and I will activate the first layer I created for applying the retouching (It should be at the top.). With the retouching layer active, I will use the Healing Brush to paint over the pipe in order to remove it. When I paint, it is using the source content from that bottom layer I sampled from and it is applying that content to the active layer, matching the colors and brightness to the image surroundings.

Retouching out the bench

Now I will try to remove the bench that is sitting in front of the building. To do this, I will have to think about what kind of content would be there if the bench was not present. Looking at the surroundings, I can tell that it would be brick wall that has the sun shining on it. Now I need to look at the rest of the image and see what areas contain bricks in the sun, because it is these areas that I will need to use in order to fill in the area where the bench is. In this image, the two pillars in the front of the building contain bricks in the sun, so I will try to sample from one of these pillars. The pillars don't contain enough bricks horizontally to fill in the area where the bench is, but that's ok because I can use what is there to manually create a brick wall.

I had to evaluate the image to determine what content I would use to cover up the bench. It needs to contain bricks in the sun, so I decided to use the pillar (circled).

I will use the Polygonal Lasso Tool to make a selection of the part of the far pillar that is in the sunlight. This selection needs to be copied to its own layer so I'll go to the Edit menu and choose Copy Merged. Then I'll go back to the Edit menu and choose Paste. Again, I am using the Copy Merged command instead of using the keyboard shortcut for duplicating a layer. This is because whenever I am doing re-

FAR LEFT: I used the Polygonal Lasso Tool to make a selection around the sunny bricks.

DIRECTLY LEFT: I copied the selection to its own layer and am positioning that layer to line up with the left edge of the building.

touch work, the content I want to copy may be contained on more than one layer and I just get into the habit of using the Copy Merged command so that I know I am copying the contents of the selection, along with any retouching applied to it.

I'll move the new layer of bricks over to the bench area and position the left edge so that it lines up with the edge of the building. Now I need to duplicate this layer a few times in order to create a large enough wall to cover the bench. To quickly duplicate a layer, you can hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) while clicking and dragging on the layer. By holding the Option key down, you will be dragging over a duplicate of the layer instead of the layer itself. That is what I will do in order to duplicate the bricks layer. I will use the Move Tool to try and position the layer duplicate so that it lines up with the bricks from the other layer. I can't get the bricks to perfectly align so I will use the Puppet Warp feature like I used to remove the

piping earlier in the lesson. I'll go to the Edit menu and choose Puppet Warp, then click to position a pin or two in the areas where the layers do line up. I'll then click on an area that doesn't line up and drag to position the content so the lines of the bricks align correctly. I'll hit Enter/Return to exit the Puppet Warp feature. I can still see some hard lines that show where the two layers meet, so I will activate the Eraser Tool and paint with a small, soft brush over some of the brick faces, softening the transition from one layer to another.

LEFT: I duplicated the bricks layer and am aligning the two layers using the Puppet Warp feature. ABOVE: I could still see a seam between the two layers so I am using the Eraser Tool, set to a small, soft brush, and am painting over some of the brick faces in order to soften the transition.

I'll now repeat the process of duplicating the brick layer, using Puppet Warp to align the duplicate to the underlying brick layer and then using the Eraser Tool to create a soft transition. Once I have done this a few times, I can start to duplicate more than one layer at a time to make the process go by faster. Once I have enough layers to cover the area where the bench is, I'll select all of the brick layers and then go to the Edit menu and choose Merge Layers. (You could also put the layers into a Group if you didn't want to merge them.)

Now that I have a large layer of bricks, I'll use the Move Tool to position them over the bench area. The first thing I notice is that the angle if the bricks is not correct.

I positioned the merged brick layer over the bench and you can see that the angle of the bricks is not correct. I will need to adjust this in order to make it look natural.

I made a selection around the area that I would like to fill with a brick wall.

I will hide the bricks layer and then make a selection of the area I want to fill with the bricks. With the selection active, I'll turn the visibility of the bricks layer back on and add a layer mask by clicking on the Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. This will hide the brick layer everywhere outside of the selection.

Now I want to warp the bricks so that they are at the appropriate angle. Before using the Transform command, however, I need to unlink the layer contents from the layer mask. If I don't do this, then the bricks will move ALONG with the layer mask. I want the bricks to move while the layer mask stays in place. To do this, I will click on the little link icon that appears between the layer icon and the mask icon in the Layers panel. Then, I'll click on the layer thumbnail in order to make it active. You can tell which one is active because it will have white brackets around it.

LEFT: The link icon indicates that the bricks layer is linked to its layer mask. RIGHT: I clicked on the link icon to unlink the layer from the mask. I also clicked on the layer thumbnail to make it active. You can tell which is active because there will be white brackets surrounding the thumbnail.

With the bricks active, I'll click on the Edit menu and choose Transform > Distort. Now I can drag the transform handles to position the bricks at the correct angle. Note that when doing this, you will need to hold down the Shift key in order to move the four corners independently of one another. When the bricks appear to be in the correct angle, I'll hit the Return/Enter key to lock in the transformation.

At left, the Distort command is being used to position the brick layer so that it lines up with the underlying layer.

Now, there should be a shadow along the top of the bricks, just beneath the concrete ledge. I will create a new, empty layer and activate the Brush Tool. I'll use a semi-soft brush and then sample a shadow area within the image in order to choose the right color. To sample a color while the Brush Tool is active, I'll hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) and the cursor will temporarily turn into an eyedropper. I'll use the eyedropper to click on the color I want to sample and then release the Option key to get back to the Brush Tool. I will use the Brush Tool to paint a line along the top of the bricks and then change the blending mode of the layer to Multiply. (The Blending Mode menu is located at the top of the Layers panel.)

I am working on an empty layer and painting a line of dark color (that was sampled from the shadow area in the image) over the bricks. This will simulate the shadow that is created by the concrete ledge.

The brush stroke covered part of the concrete and some of the gas pump, so I will need to mask the layer so that it appears only on the bricks. Because the shadow layer is positioned directly above the brick layer, I can use a clipping mask. A clipping mask will make the current layer only show up where there is content in the layer below. With the shadow layer active, I'll go to the Layer menu and choose "Create Clipping Mask." Now the shadow only appears over the bricks, which is where it should appear.