

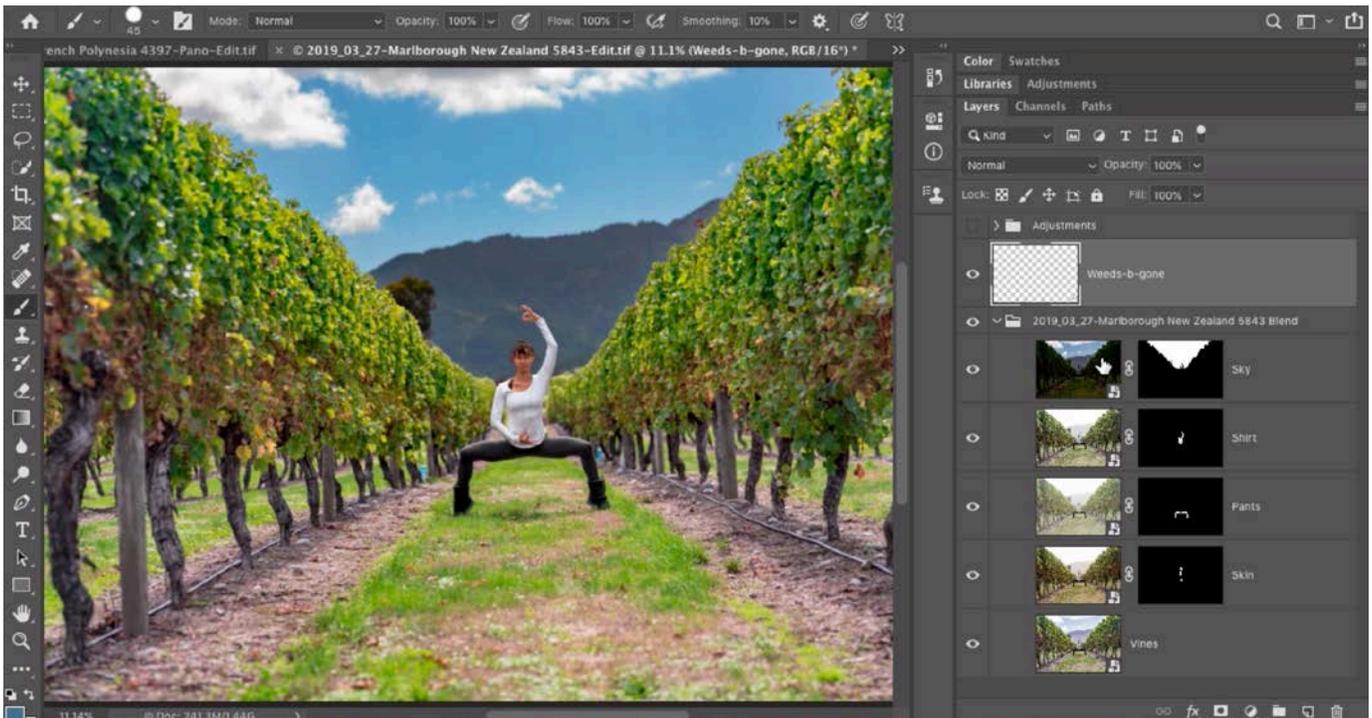


Image Refinements

Image Refinements

You can think of this lesson as an extension of last week's lesson, "Image Blending," where we merged five different versions of the same image to get the ideal result. To easily find that lesson, navigate to the lesson list on MastersAcademy.com and use the sort feature to sort the lessons by date.

In this lesson, we're going to look at the refinements I would make to an image after completing any merging and initial adjustments. With the example image, a lot of initial work was done to it. We have a document that has five image layers. Each layer is based on the exact same raw file. They were each processed to enhance a different area and then layer masks were used to merge all of the layers together, revealing only the parts that each layer was optimized for. All of these layers were placed inside of a folder, or layer Group. A retouching layer was placed above the folder in the layers panel, and this layer was used to remove any distracting elements from the image.



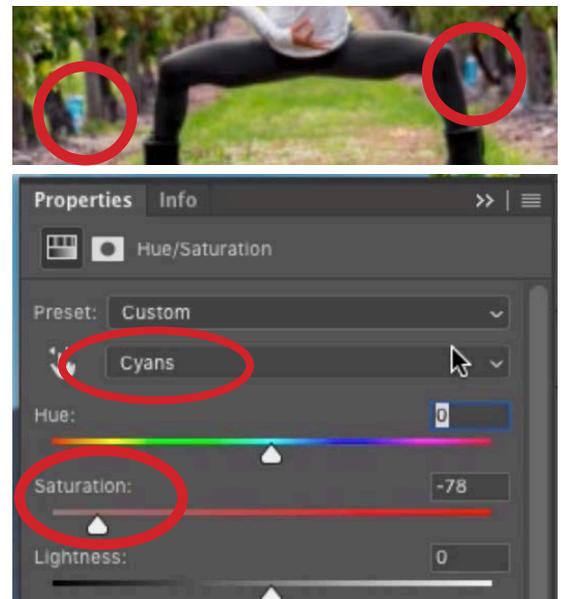
As you can see from the Layers panel, this image was processed five times and all five versions were merged together to create the final document. A retouching layer was placed on top of the merged layers. Now, we're going to refine the image with adjustment layers.

Now, I am going to further refine this image by using adjustment layers, and all of these adjustment layers will be placed inside of a layer group/folder at the top of the Layers panel. Each of these adjustment layers will contain a layer mask, which will be used to hide the adjustment in all areas except for the area that adjustment was designed to optimize. Note that this lesson is not about selections and masking, so I'm not going to cover the process of creating the individual layer masks here. I'm just going to focus on the purpose of each adjustment and how they are each used to refine the image.

To add an adjustment layer, click on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. It looks like a circle that is half black and half white. A pop-up menu will appear and this is where you will choose the type of adjustment layer you'd like to add. When you add an adjustment layer, the Properties panel will automatically open, containing all of the settings relating to that adjustment layer.

Hue/Saturation: Desaturate blue stakes

There are some blue objects in the ground behind the subject's legs, and I found these to be distracting. The first adjustment layer will be used to make these objects less noticeable. I'll create a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer and, within the Properties panel, I'll set the color menu to Cyans. Then, I'll move the Saturation slider far to the left. This makes the distracting objects much less colorful. The problem is that the sky also contains a lot of cyan and so it became less colorful as well. I don't want that, so I will use the adjustment layer's mask to limit the area where the adjustment is visible. I'll fill the entire mask with black, hiding the adjustment completely. Then, I'll use the Brush Tool to paint with white in the area where the stakes are.



A Hue/Saturation adjustment layer is being used to desaturate the blue objects. In the Properties panel, we targeted the Cyans and moved the Saturation slider to the left.

When a masked layer is active, there is a way to preview what part of the image is being masked. Simply tap the backslash key (/) and a red overlay will appear over the image. The areas that are red are the areas that are being masked, or hidden. The areas without the overlay are the parts of the layer that are not being masked, which means the layer (or adjustment layer) is still visible in these areas.



After painting on the layer mask, the backslash key (\) was tapped to get this view of the selection. The red areas are not selected.

Curves: Increase contrast in the mountains

You will see that I am going to use the same concept in an adjustment over and over again. This adjustment will be designed to selectively increase the contrast of different areas of the picture. Whenever you increase the contrast of something, it makes the details pop out and look a little more interesting.

The first part of the image that looks a bit dull, or flat, to my eye is the mountain area in the background. I'm going to create a Curves adjustment layer to increase the contrast in the mountain area.

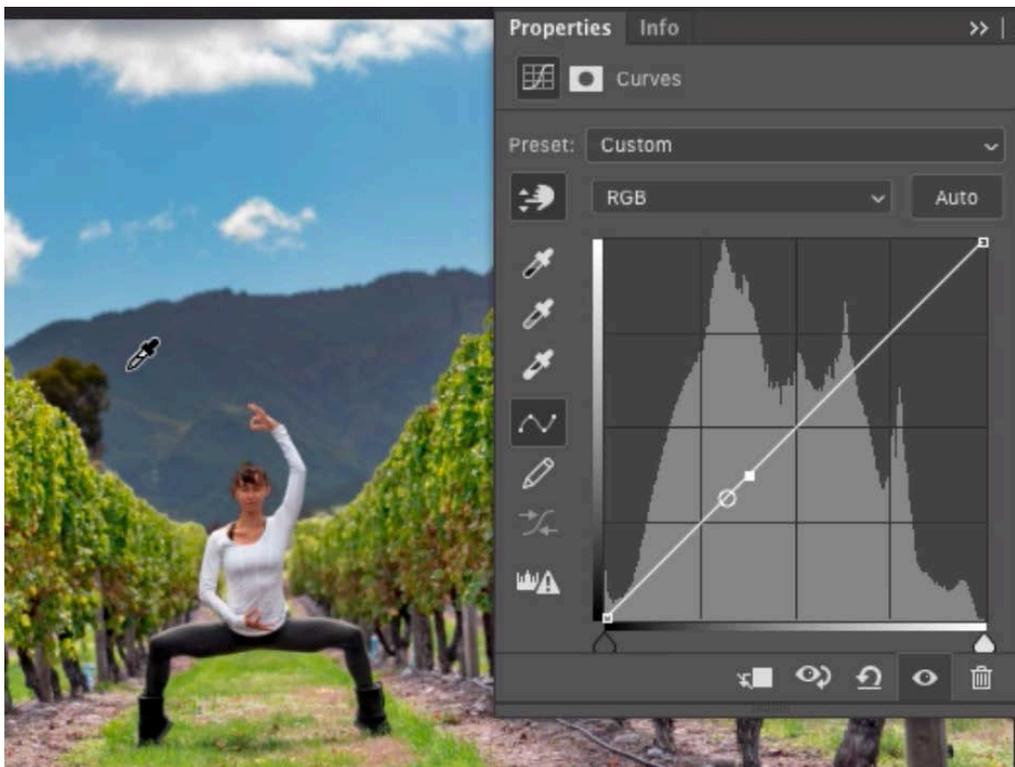
Before creating the curves adjustment layer, I want to isolate the mountains with a selection. This selection will automatically be applied to the layer mask attached to the adjustment layer and it will make it so the adjustment is only visible in the area that was selected.

Again, this lesson is not geared toward creating selections or masks, so I encourage you to visit last week's lesson, "Image Blending," for more details on that. In brief, I would use the Quick Selection Tool to make a rough selection of the targeted area. If the area is fuzzy or has complex edges, I would further refine the selection by using the Select & Mask command, which can be found under the Select menu.

With the selection active, I'll click on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choose "Curves" from the pop-up menu. The curves adjustment layer will appear in the Layers panel and the selection will automatically be applied to the layer mask attached to the adjustment layer. The area that was selected (the mountains) will be white, which means that the adjustment will be visible in this area.

The curve chart will appear within the Properties panel. I'm going to make sure that the little hand tool (or targeted adjustment tool) in the upper left side of the panel is turned on. I actually like to set things up so this tool is turned on all the time, and you can do that by clicking the little hamburger menu in the upper right corner of the panel and choosing "Auto-Select Targeted Adjustment Tool" from the pop-up menu.

Now I'm going to move my cursor into the area I want to adjust (the mountains) and click to place two points on the curve. One of the points should target the brightest area within the mountains and the other point should target the darkest area within the mountains.



After creating a Curves adjustment layer, I'm clicking within the image to place two points on the curve: one point for the darkest area in the mountains and one point for the brightest area in the mountains.

There are now two points on the curve chart. One point (the one higher in the chart) represents the bright area and the other point represents the dark area. You can look at the gradient beneath each of the dots to see exactly how bright the targeted areas are. I want to make the mountain area pop by adding contrast, and I can do that by making the curve steeper between these two points. You can make a curve steeper between two points by moving the lower dot down, by moving the upper dot up or by doing both of these things. By moving both points, I would get a more dramatic change. In this case, I think I will just make the bright areas brighter. I will click on the upper dot (the bright one) to make it active and then I'll use the arrow keys to move the dot up a bit. The mountain area will change as I do this.

Another way of moving points on a curve is to click within the image to create the point and then, without releasing the mouse button, dragging up or down to move the point up or down on the curve.



The upper dot, which represents the brighter areas in the mountains, is being moved up to create a steeper curve and this will therefore add more contrast.

To see a before and after view of the adjustment, I'll toggle the eyeball icon at the bottom of the Properties panel.

Whenever you increase the contrast, you will find that the picture may become more colorful. You can prevent this from happening by changing the blending mode of the adjustment layer to Luminosity. The Blending Mode menu can be found at the top of the Layers panel. When the blending mode of a layer is set to Luminosity, it will only be able to change the brightness of the image (not the color).

Curves: Increase contrast in the vines

Looking at the greenery in the image, certain areas of the vines look a bit dull. I'm going to use another Curves adjustment layer to give them more contrast. First, I'll make a selection around the areas I want to affect. It can be useful to use the Brush Tool to paint in a selection and I can do this by entering Quick Mask Mode. I'll make sure that the brush size is how I want it, I'll make sure the foreground color is set to black and then I'll tap the Q key to enter Quick Mask Mode. I won't see any visual indication that I'm in Quick Mask Mode because there is currently no active selection. I will start to paint (with black) on the vines and a red overlay will appear in the areas where I paint. I will paint over all the areas within the vines that could benefit from having more contrast. The problem is that the red overlay represents the area that is NOT selected, so I will need to invert the selection so that I get the opposite. To get the opposite of a selection while in Quick Mask Mode, I'll click on the Image menu and then choose Adjustments > Invert. Alternatively, I could use the keyboard shortcut Command+I (Ctrl+I on Win.) Now, everything has a red overlay EXCEPT for the area I want to target with the adjustment.



Quick Mask Mode is being used to create a selection. The Brush Tool was used to paint on the vines and then the mask was inverted so the vines are the only part selected.

I'll tap the Q key again to exit Quick Mask Mode and I'll see the "marching ants" selection. With the selection active, I'll click on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choose Curves from the pop-up menu. When I do this, the active selection will automatically be applied to the layer mask, where the selected area is the only part of the mask that is white. The Curves Properties panel will appear and I'll make sure the Targeted Adjustment Tool (the little hand icon) is turned on. I want to use this adjustment to increase the contrast in the part of the vines that I selected so I will first click on the darkest part of that area to place a point on the curve. Then I'll look for the lightest area within the part of the vines that is targeted. I'll click and drag up on that part, which will place a point on the curve and move that point upward, making that light tone even lighter. This will increase the contrast, making the area pop out a little more.

Curves: Increase contrast in the bottom of the vines

I'm going to make yet another Curves adjustment layer to increase the contrast in the lower part of the vines because I feel that this area is a bit dull as well. I didn't include this area in the last adjustment because I wanted to be able to use different Curves settings to add a different level of contrast. When you adjust the various areas independently like this, you're able to have complete control over each area.



A Curves adjustment layer was used to add a little contrast to the bottom half of the vines. Here is the before and after views of that area.

To add contrast to the bottom part of the vines, I'll follow the same process as above. I'll make a selection of the vines and then create a Curves Adjustment Layer, converting that selection into a layer mask. Two dots were added to the curve: one for the dark parts and one for the bright parts. The dot for the bright areas was moved up, making those areas even brighter and adding contrast to the targeted area.

Curves: Increase contrast in the trunks

Once again, the same technique will be used to increase the contrast in the “trunk” part of the vines. After the trunks are selected, I’ll create a Curves adjustment layer, add the two points and then move the point representing the bright areas up, making the brights even brighter.



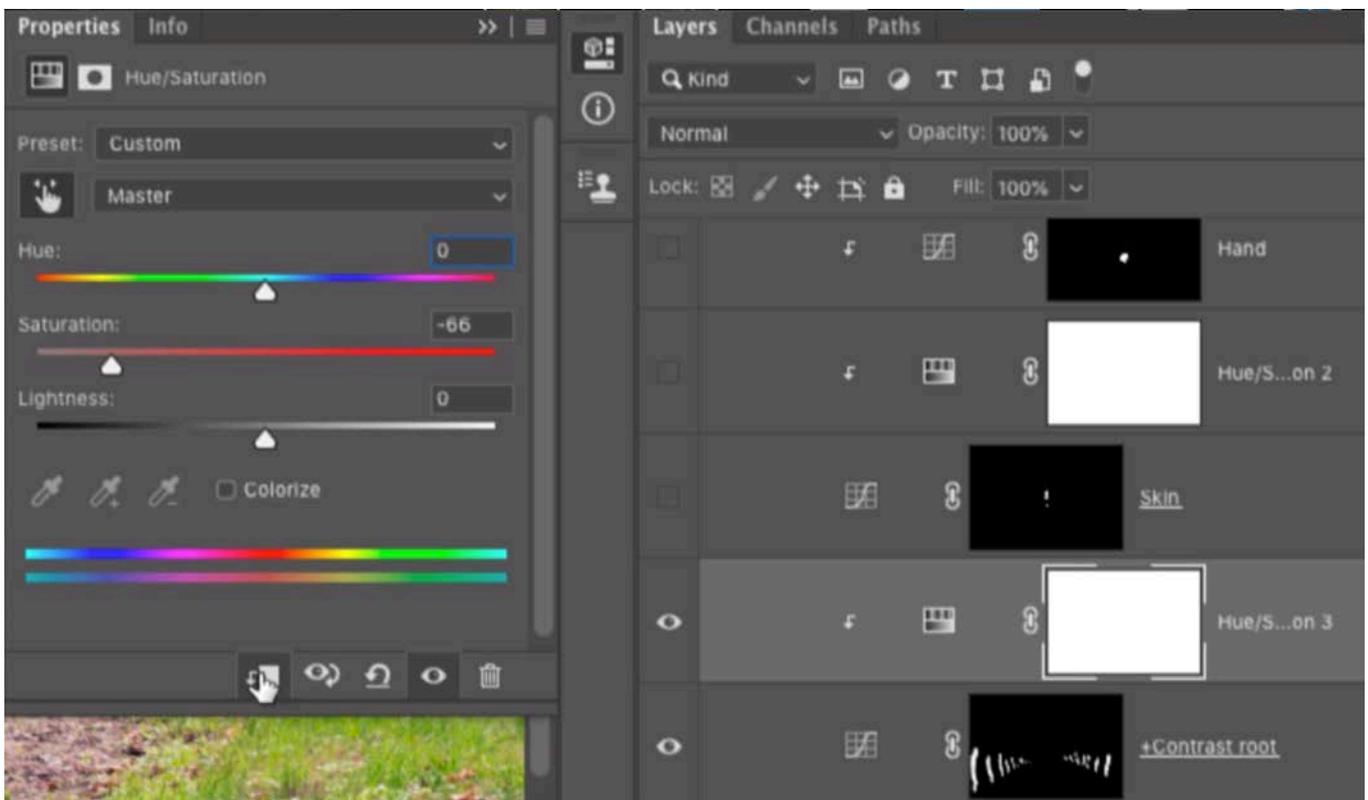
The trunk parts of the vines were isolated with a selection and a curves adjustment layer is being used to increase the contrast. Two points were placed on the curve and the point representing the bright areas is being moved up, making those areas even brighter.

Hue/Saturation: Decrease color in the trunks

After increasing contrast in the trunks of the vines, I notice that they became a little more colorful than I’d like. I can use a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer to correct this. I’ll click on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choose Hue/Saturation from the pop-up menu. In the Hue/Saturation Properties panel, I’ll drag the Saturation slider to the left to make things less colorful. Because the layer mask attached to the adjustment layer is completely white, this adjustment is happening to the entire picture, and that’s not what I want. I only want the adjustment to affect the trunks of the vines. I don’t need to create a new selection of this area because I already created the selection when I added the

previous adjustment layer. There is a way to make this adjustment show up in the areas where the underlying layer is visible, and that is by creating a clipping mask. I'll click on the left-most icon at the bottom of the Properties panel and this will link the layer to the one beneath it, creating a clipping mask. In the Layers panel, you can see that the adjustment layer icon becomes slightly indented and there is a downward-pointing arrow to the left, indicating that it is clipped to the layer beneath it. What's nice is that if I update the layer mask on that underlying layer, it will automatically be applied to this Hue/Saturation layer as well.

There are two other methods for clipping a layer to the layer beneath it. All of these methods do the same thing. With the layer you want to clip active, click on the Layer menu and choose "Create Clipping Mask." Alternatively, you can hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) and click on the line between the two layers in the Layers panel.



The Hue/Saturation adjustment layer is being clipped to the Curves layer beneath it. When a layer is clipped, it will only be visible in the area where the underlying layer is visible.

Curves: Increase contrast in the skin tones

Moving on to a different area of the image, I will focus on adjusting the subject's skin. Again, I want to increase the contrast by making the bright parts brighter, so I will make a selection of the skin, create a Curves adjustment layer and place two dots on the curve. I'll move the dot representing the bright areas upward, making those areas even brighter.

Hue/Saturation: Tone down the color in the skin

The increase in contrast made the skin area a little too colorful, so I'll create a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer to correct this. I'll click on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choose Hue/Saturation from the pop-up menu. In the Properties panel, I'll move the Saturation slider to the left, making things less colorful. The problem is that the entire image became less colorful. Again, I'll use a clipping mask to limit where this adjustment appears. The underlying Curves layer contains the layer mask that only reveals the skin area, so I'll click on the Clipping Mask icon at the bottom of the Properties panel to clip the Hue/Saturation adjustment layer to this underlying Curves adjustment layer. Now, the desaturation effect will only be visible in the areas where the underlying Curves layer is visible.

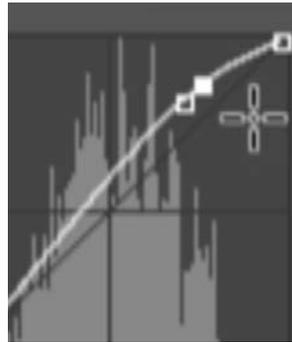
Curves: Lighten top of mountain

The very top of the mountain looks like it's a bit darker than the rest of the mountain, almost as if there is a shadow cast on it. I would like it to be the same brightness as the rest of the mountain and I'll use a Curves adjustment layer to achieve this. Note that this step was detailed in last week's lesson "Image Merging." In brief, I made a selection of the area I wanted to brighten and then created a Curves adjustment layer. The selection was automatically applied to the layer mask. I then clicked within that darker area to place a dot on the curve. This dot was moved up until the brightness of the target area matched the brightness of the rest of the mountains.

Curves: Add contrast to shirt

I want to increase the contrast in the shirt so I'll make a selection of the shirt and then create a Curves adjustment layer. The selection will be applied to the layer mask, so any changes I make using this curves layer will only be visible in the area where the shirt is. I'll place two dots on the curve: one for the darkest part of the shirt and one for the brightest part of the shirt. I'll move the dot for the bright areas up, making those areas even brighter and increasing the contrast in the shirt.

If you ever add a dot near the top of the curve and find that the top of the curve flattens out along the top of the chart, you can correct for this by adding another dot to the right of the existing dot and moving it down until the curve pulls away from the top of the chart again.



Adding a point near the top of the curve caused the curve line to flatten out along the top of the chart. Another dot was added (to the right of the existing dot) to smooth out the curve.

Hue/Saturation: Desaturate leaf

There is one leaf sticking out from the vines that is a vibrant red. It calls my attention a little too much so I'm going to create a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer to make that leaf a little less colorful and therefore less distracting. I'll click on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and choose Hue/Saturation from the pop-up menu. In the Hue/Saturation Properties panel, I will make sure that the Targeted Adjustment Tool (the little hand icon) is turned on and I will use this tool to click on the leaf and drag left. When I do this, Photoshop will automatically target the hue that's



A Hue/Saturation adjustment layer is being used to make the red leaf less colorful.

in the area where I click (red) and move the Saturation slider to the left, making everything that is red less colorful.

Now, I have done nothing to the layer mask, so it is completely white, which means that the adjustment will be applied to the entire image. I only want this adjustment to apply to the leaf, so I want the entire layer mask to be black except for the area where the leaf is. To achieve this, I will click on the Image menu at the top of the screen and choose Adjustments > Invert. This will invert the mask to make it entirely black. Now, I will activate the Brush Tool and make sure I'm painting with white as I paint over the leaf. This will reveal the adjustment in just that area.

Curves: Make the vines pop

I'm looking to refine this image further so I'm going to make the vines pop out even more than they currently do. I'll use another Curves adjustment layer, following the same exact process to achieve this.

Curves: Remove glow from vines

Part of the area where the vines meet the mountains looks like it has a glowing effect, or halo, around it. I'll create a Curves adjustment layer to correct this. With the Targeted Adjustment Tool active, I'll click on the area that I want to fix, which is the area that looks a little too bright where the vines meet the mountains. Now, I'm not going to place a second dot, but I'm going to hover my cursor over the part of the mountains that has the ideal brightness. A little circle will appear on the curve (tempo-



The cursor is positioned over the area that has the ideal brightness and the circle on the chart represents that brightness level.

rarily) and I will note the height of this circle on the curve. I would like the point I placed to match the height of this circle. What I'm basically saying is that I want to make the targeted area (the too-bright area) match the brightness of the ideal area. With the dot active, I'll use the down arrow key to move the dot down so that it matches the height of the circle.

This has a darkening effect on the entire image because the layer mask attached to this Curves adjustment layer is completely white, which means that the adjustment is applying everywhere. I'll invert the mask by clicking on the Image menu and choosing Adjustments > Invert. Now the mask is completely black so the adjustment is not applying anywhere.

Now, If I were to start painting with white on the mask to reveal the darkening effect in the target area, I'm going to get overspill into the vines. In order to prevent this, I need to create a selection of the mountains so that selection limits my paint strokes, preventing any overspill into the vines.

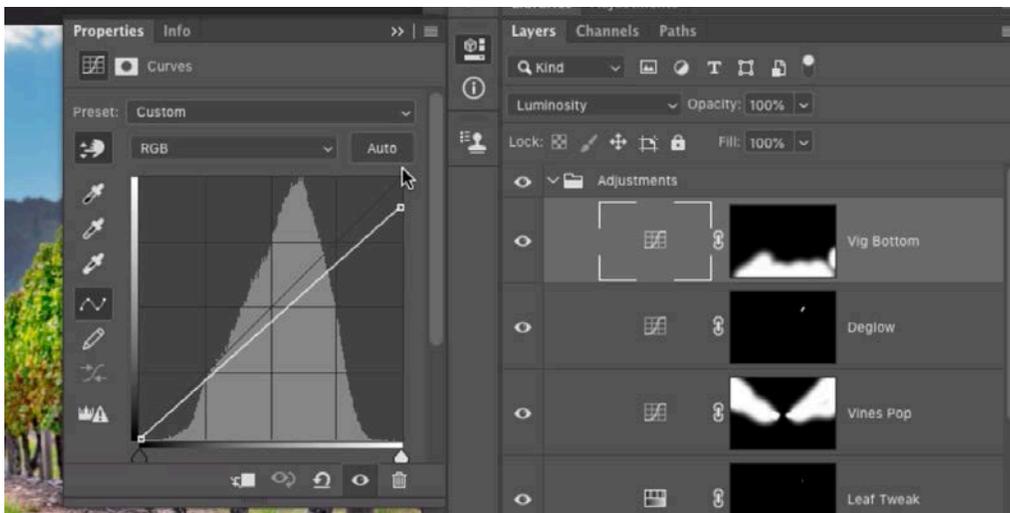
Looking down at the adjustment layers I've already created, there is already a mask that isolates the mountain area. I can use this mask to create the selection that I need for the new Curves adjustment layer. To create a selection based on this mask, I'll hold down the Command key (Ctrl on Win) and click on the thumbnail for that mask that isolates the mountains. A marching ants selection will become active and I can now paint with white on that area where the mountains meet the vines, knowing that the selection will make it so there will be no paint overspill into the vines.



The selection of the mountain area will be used to ensure that no paint overspill gets into the vines when I paint on the layer mask.

Curves: Vignette bottom of image

When we add a vignette, we're darkening the edge of the picture in order to draw the eye into the center of the image. In this image, I want to create this darkening effect on the bottom of the frame. I'll create a Curves adjustment layer and, instead of clicking within the image to add a point to the curve, I'll simply drag the far right end of the curve down a bit. This will darken all of the brighter areas in the image. I'll then invert the layer mask (Image > Adjustments > Invert) so that it's completely black and I'll use a soft brush to paint with white on the bottom of the frame, allowing the darkening effect to show through in this area only.



A Curves adjustment layer is being used to add a vignette to the bottom part of the image. The top right point of the curve is being dragged down, darkening all of the bright areas. A mask is then used to limit this adjustment to the bottom part of the image.

Place adjustment layers in a group

Now that I'm finished creating all of my adjustment layers, I will select all of these layers and then click on the little folder icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. This will place all of the selected layers into a layer group, or folder. I'll rename the group to "Adjustments."

Bora Bora Image

Here is another image where I'll follow a similar process of refinement. Before creating the adjustment layers, I created two new, empty layers on which to apply the retouch work. One of these layers was used to remove the tourists in the background and the other layer was used to remove any other distracting elements. The adjustment layers will be placed on top of these retouching layers in the Layers panel.

I have already detailed the process behind making the layers and working with the different adjustments, so here, we'll just quickly list each adjustment that was made as well as its purpose.

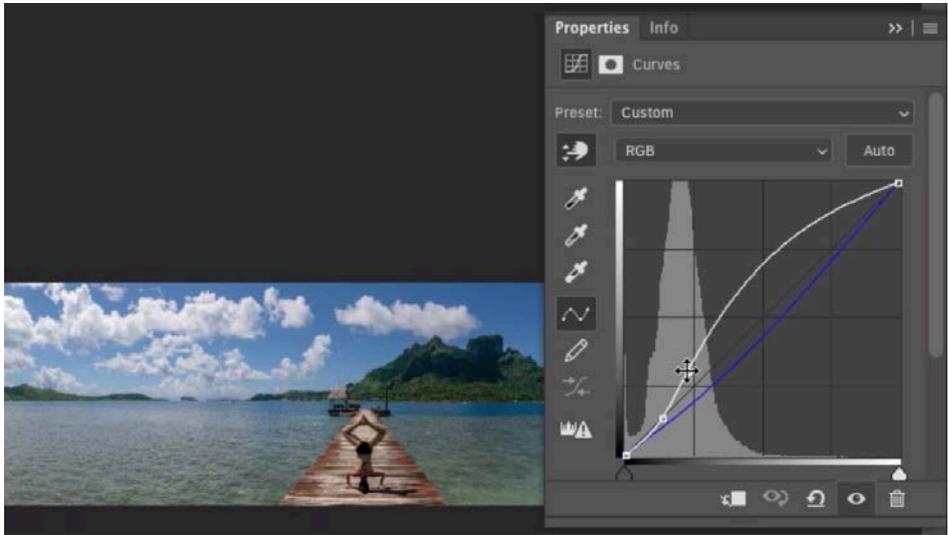
- 1. Curves: Increase contrast in dock** I wanted to make the dock pop out a little more, so I created a Curves adjustment layer to increase the contrast, using the layer mask to make sure that the adjustment only affected the dock. This adjustment made the dock more colorful, which is not something I wanted, so I changed the blending mode of this adjustment layer to Luminosity. (The blending mode menu can be found at the top of the Layers panel.) When in this mode, a layer can only affect the brightness and not the color of the image.



A layer mask was created to isolate the adjustment to the dock area.

- 2. Curves: Increase contrast in the mountains** The mountain area looked a bit dull, so I created another Curves adjustment layer to increase the contrast in the mountains, making them pop out a bit more. Two dots were placed on the curve: One dot for the dark area, which was not moved, and one dot for

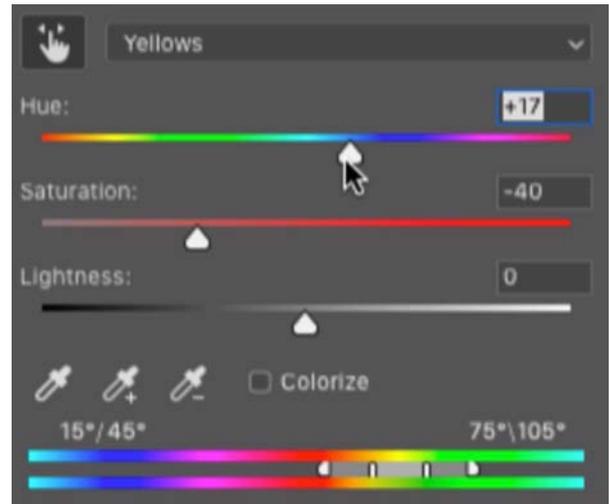
the bright area, which was moved up to make the area brighter. The area also looked a bit blue because it was in the shadows. Using the same curve adjustment, I changed the color menu to Blue and then moved the curve point down a bit, making the area a little less blue and a little more yellow. Whenever you decrease the blues in an image, you will be introducing more yellow because yellow is the opposite of blue.



The mountains in the back were isolated using the layer mask attached to this Curves adjustment layer. Two points were placed on the curve and the bright point was moved up, increasing contrast. The blue curve was also moved down, making the area more yellow and less blue.

- 3. Curves: Make the water pop** The next Curves adjustment layer was used to increase the contrast of the water area. Again, this was achieved by placing two dots on the curve and moving the brighter dot up a bit to make the bright area brighter. This increased the contrast as a result.
- 4. Hue/Saturation: Color correct mountains** I noticed that the color of the mountains on the right side of the frame are much more colorful than the rest of the mountains in the scene. I used a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer to correct this. I started off by creating a selection of the mountains so that this selection would automatically be applied to the adjustment layer's mask. After creating the adjustment layer, I made sure that the Targeted Adjustment Tool was active and I clicked within the area I wanted to correct (the colorful mountains). This caused Photoshop to set the color menu to yellows, which is the domi-

nant color in the targeted area. Then, I moved the Saturation slider to the left, which made all of the yellows in the image less colorful. I also moved the Hue slider to the right slightly. The Hue slider changes the actual color of the targeted area. In this case, moving the slider to the right a bit made the targeted color range more blue and less yellow.



Here, you can see a before and after view of the mountains and the Hue/Saturation adjustment layer that was used to make the change.

- 5. Curves: Water highlights** I already adjusted the water once, but I wanted to adjust it a second time to really make the highlights pop. I followed the same Curves technique that I've used many times in this lesson, creating two points on the curve and then moving the point representing the brights up a bit.
- 6. Curves: Karen Pop** Next, I wanted to make the subject pop out of the frame a bit more, so I made a selection of the subject and then created a Curves adjustment layer so that the selection would automatically be applied to the layer mask. I added two dots to the curve (one for the bright area and another for the dark area). In this case, I moved both of the points up a bit, which brightened both the highlights AND the shadows.

7. Curves: Sky pop Finally, the last adjustment layer I added was to make the sky look better. I made a selection of the sky and then created a Curves adjustment layer so the selection was automatically applied to the adjustment layer's mask. I added one point for the bright area and one point for the dark area. In this case, I moved the point representing the dark areas down, darkening those areas that were already dark.



The final result, after creating all of the adjustment layers.