



**Dramatic B&W Architecture**

# Dramatic B&W Architecture

A few Masters Academy members have recently inquired about a black and white technique that is commonly applied to architecture. This technique creates a really dramatic look and controls where the eye goes in the image. When looking at a black and white image, the eye is naturally drawn to the brightest area, and we will use this knowledge in creating the end result.



**This is the dramatic black & white effect that we're going to create in this lesson.**

## Create Two Versions of the Image (Timestamp 1:55)

In order to create this black and white effect, we're going to need two versions of the picture. One version will be dark and dull-looking. The other version will be so bright that it's close to losing detail. After we create these two versions, they will be merged together.

**Create the dark, dull version** We'll create the dark and dull version of the image first. We'll open the image as a smart object in Photoshop. If you are using Lightroom, you will select the image, click on the Photo menu and choose Edit in > Open as Smart Object in Photoshop. If you are using Adobe Camera Raw, you will hold down the Shift key so that the "Open Image" button (in the lower right) turns into the "Open Object" button and then click that button.

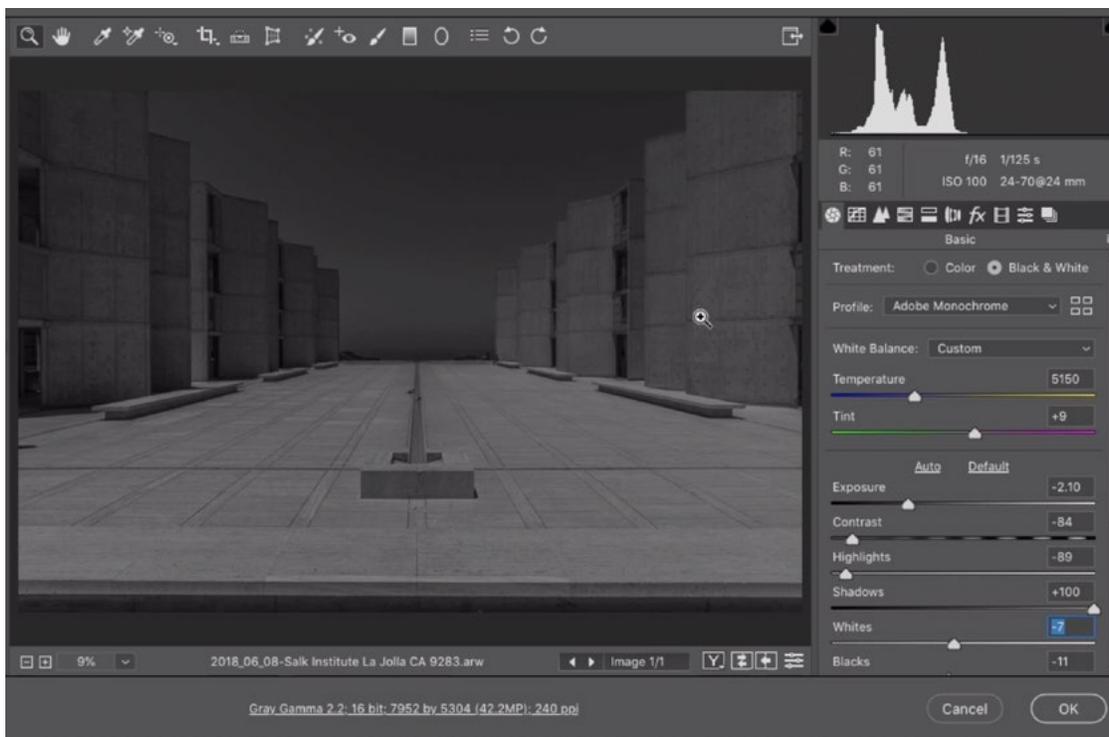


**You can tell a layer is a smart object because it will have the icon in the bottom right corner of the thumbnail.**

In Photoshop, we'll double-click on the thumbnail for the image layer. This will open the smart object to show its contents in a separate window. Because the contents of this smart object is a raw file, it's going to open the image in Camera Raw.

The first thing we'll do here is convert the image to black and white by turning on the Black & White check box that appears at the top of the Basic Panel, on the right side of the interface. Next, we'll use the Basic Panel sliders to darken the image. We don't want it to look so dark that we can't see any detail, but it should look dark and dull. In the video example, the Exposure slider was set to around -2 and the Highlights slider was moved almost all the way to the left. This caused some areas to become so dark that they lost detail, so we moved the Shadows slider up until some of that detail returned. We also want the image to look dull, so we moved the Contrast slider far to the left as well.

We'll click OK to exit Camera Raw and return to Photoshop's main interface. The image will be updated here and this will be the base image that we're going to build on.

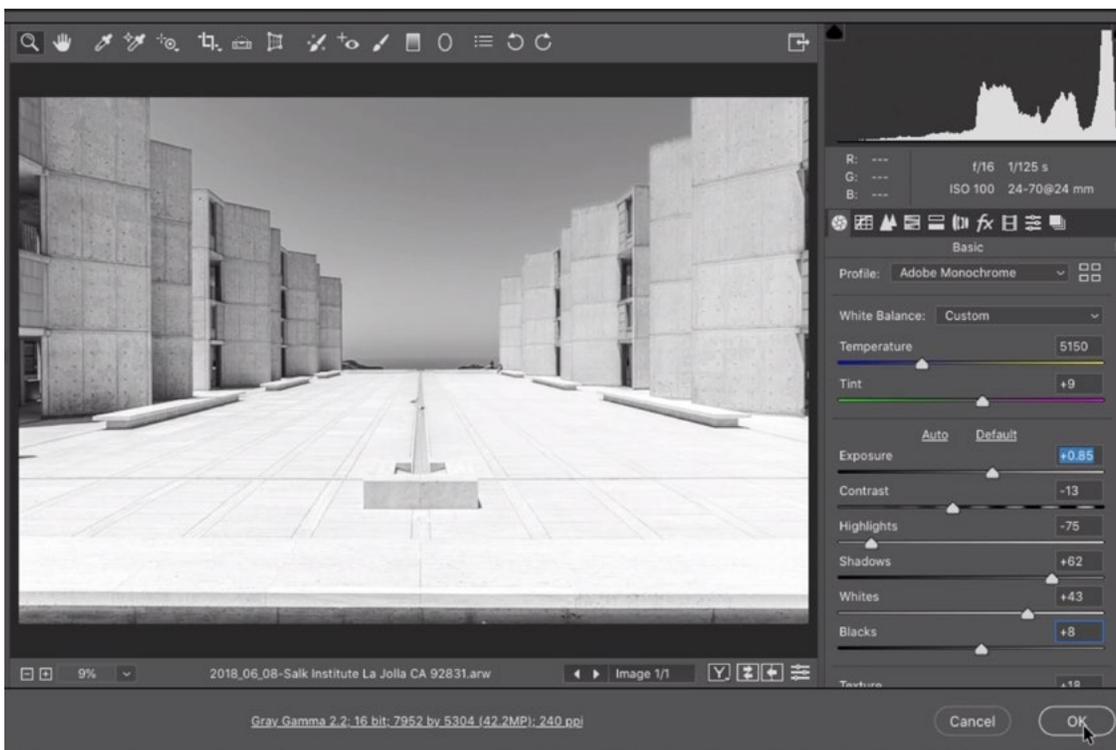


The smart object was opened in Camera Raw and we are using the Basic Panel sliders to create the dark version of the image.

**Create the bright version** Now we're going to create a second version of the image. This version will be extremely bright. We will duplicate the original smart object, but we need to do so in a special way. If we were to simply duplicate the layer by using the standard method (Command+J, Ctrl+J on Win), we would be creating a second instance of the SAME smart object. If we were to make a change to one instance of the smart object, all other instances of that same smart object would be changed as well. We DON'T want that.

We need to create a duplicate of the smart object that is independent of the original. We can do this by clicking on the Layer menu and choosing Smart Objects > New Smart Object Via Copy. We now have two smart object layers in the Layers Panel. We'll rename the bottom layer to "Dark" and the top layer to "Bright."

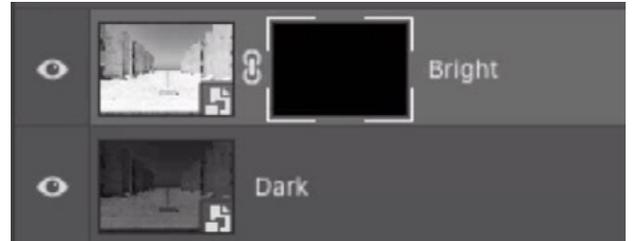
We need to adjust the "Bright" layer to make it really bright and really pop. We'll double-click on the image thumbnail in the Layers Panel. This will open the contents of the Smart Object and, since it's a raw file, it will again open the image into Camera Raw. Here, we'll use the sliders in the Basic Panel on the right side of the screen.



The second smart object was opened in Camera Raw. In this version, we are brightening the image and making the details pop.

We'll move the Exposure, Shadows and Whites sliders to the right, brightening the image. The image should be extremely bright, but not so bright that it's losing detail. If it starts to lose detail, we can always move the Highlights slider down a bit to compensate. We'll also move the Texture and Clarity sliders to the right a bit, making the details pop out more. After making these adjustments, we'll click on the OK button to exit Camera Raw and return to Photoshop's main interface.

The dark layer is on the bottom and the bright layer is on the top. We'll make sure the top, bright layer is active and we'll click on the Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the Layers Panel. This adds a completely white mask to the layer. White areas of a layer mask reveal the layer, so the entire layer will be visible. We actually want the opposite here. We'd like the entire mask to be black so that it hides the entirety of this bright layer. We can get this by clicking on the Image menu and choosing Adjustments > Invert. The entire mask will now be black. (Note that the layer mask must be active when choosing the Invert command.)



**We have two versions of the image: a dark version and a bright version. A black layer mask was added to the bright version, hiding the layer completely.**

## Use Layer Mask to Selectively Lighten the Building (7:15)

Now we're going to use the layer mask to selectively reveal the layer in certain areas. We'll activate the Polygonal Lasso Tool, which is hidden behind the Lasso Tool in the Toolbar on the left side of the interface. The Polygonal Lasso Tool can be used to create selections with straight lines. It will automatically create a straight line between each point in which you click. When you click back where you started, closing the shape, it will turn that shape into a "marching ants" selection.



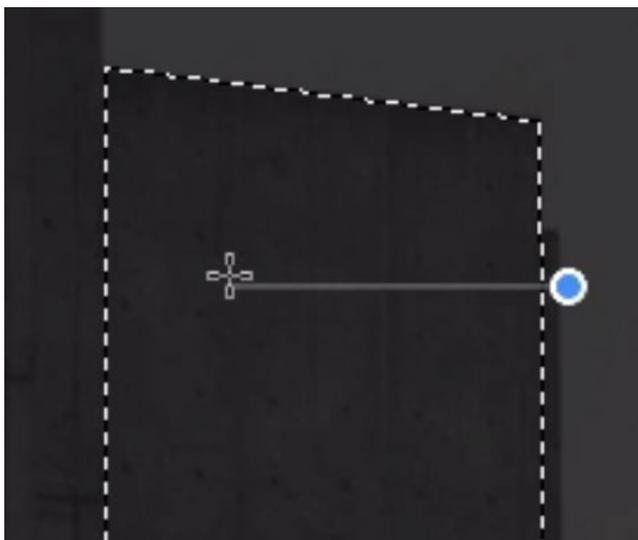
**The Polygonal Lasso Tool is grouped with the regular Lasso Tool in the Toolbar.**

We'll use the Polygonal Lasso Tool to select one of the rectangular surfaces on the building in the video example image. We will only be able to change the area inside this active selection. It's important to make sure that the layer mask is active, because that is where we want the change to take place.



**A selection was made around one of the rectangular panels on the building.**

The black layer mask is attached to the bright layer, so any areas where we add white to the mask will allow this bright layer to be visible. We want the bright layer to be visible on the right edge of the selection and then fade out as it moves to the left edge. We can accomplish that by using the Gradient Tool, which is also found in the Toolbar on the left side of the screen. With this tool active, we'll use the gradient menu in the Options Bar (at the top of the screen) to choose the "Foreground to Background" gradient. This is the first gradient in the menu and it will use the



**The Gradient Tool is being used to define where the gradient will be applied inside the selection.**

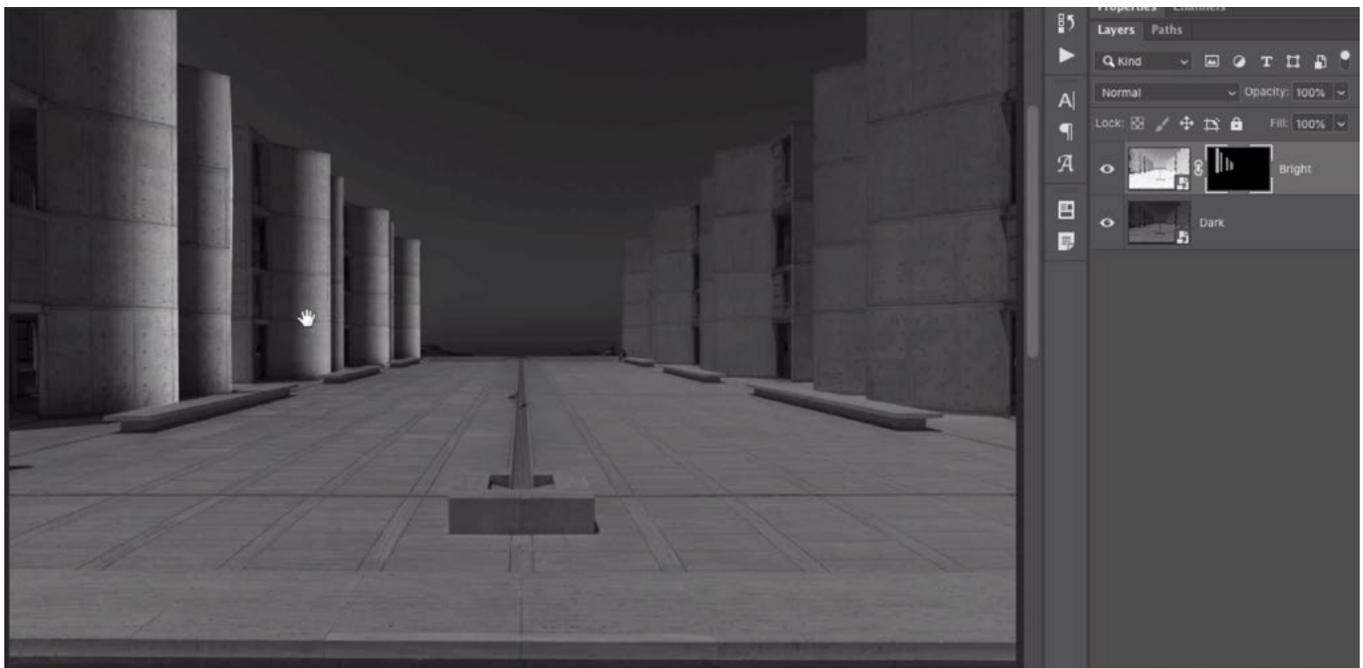
foreground and background colors that are specified at the bottom of the Toolbar. We'll make sure that the foreground color is white and the background color is black. We'll use the Gradient Tool to click just outside the right edge of the selection and we'll drag about 3/4 of the way to the left edge of the selection before releasing the mouse button. As we do this, we'll hold down the Shift key so that we get a perfectly horizontal line. This will create that white-to-black gradient in between the point in which we click and the point in which we release the mouse button.

When we release the mouse button, the gradient will be applied to the mask, but only inside the active selection. This will reveal the bright layer on the right side of the building panel and it will slowly fade to get darker toward the left side of the panel.

Now we will follow the same process for the other panels on the left side of the building. After doing so, the right side of each panel will be highlighted and the left side will be dark. You can see how this is starting to create a dramatic effect.



**The gradient was applied to the layer mask, inside the active selection. This revealed part of the bright layer.**



**The same gradient technique was applied to all the panels on the left side of the building.**

**Fix overly crisp edges** If we zoom in to inspect the edges of the masks, we can see that the selections were not quite perfect (in the video example). If this happens, you can try to fix the edges using the Blur Tool. With the Blur Tool active, paint over those edges to soften the edge of the mask. This will make a smoother transition so the mask edge is less noticeable.



**LEFT:** The selection was not perfectly accurate and has overly crisp edges.  
**RIGHT:** The Blur Tool (thumbnail at right) is being used to soften the edges on the layer mask.



We could also try to prevent these overly crisp edges from occurring when we make the initial selections. Let's do that for the panels on the right side of the building. We'll use the Lasso Tool to make a selection of the first panel. Now we'll soften the edges of that selection. We'll click on the Select menu at the top of the screen and choose Modify > Feather. A dialog will appear and this is where we determine how soft the selection edge should be. A one-pixel radius will create a good edge



**After creating a selection, the Feather command is being used to soften the selection edges by one pixel.**

in an example like this. We'll enter 1 into the field and then click OK. The edge of the selection will be softened by one pixel. Now we can use the Gradient Tool to apply the white-to-black gradient to the layer mask. We'll follow the same process for the rest of the panels on the right side of the building.

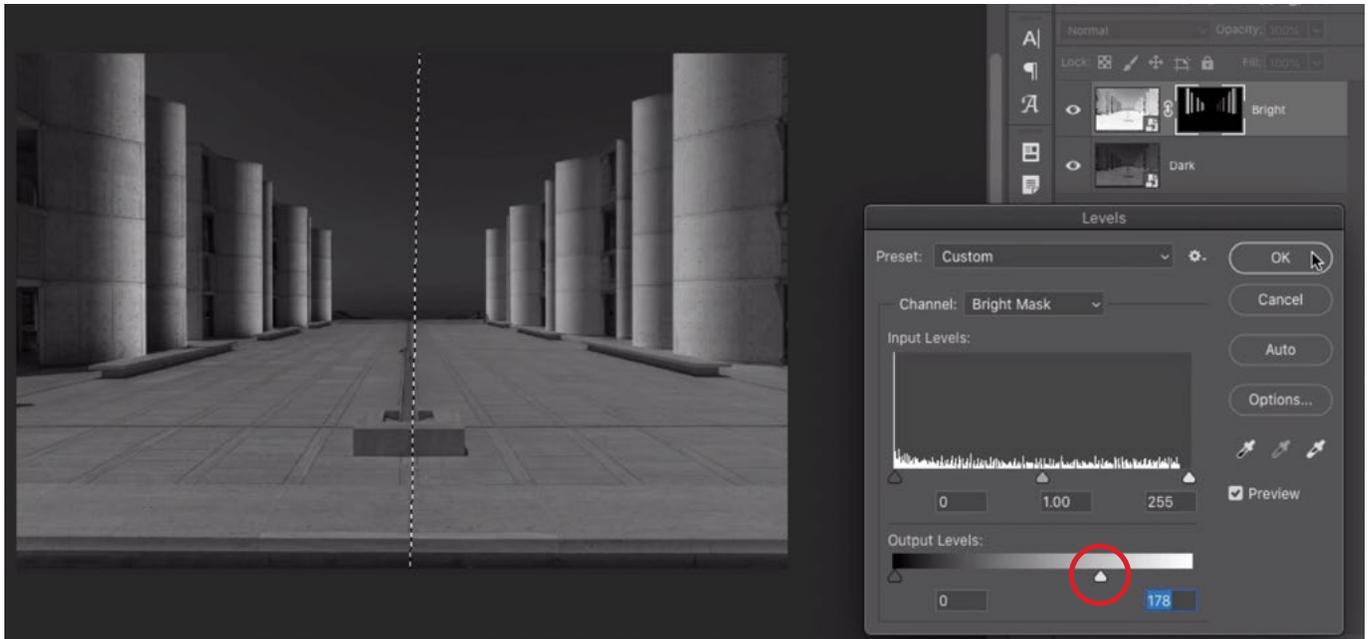
## Even Out Brightness on Left and Right Sides (18:50)

At this stage, we have the overall addition of the highlights. In the original photograph, the right side of the building was brighter than the left, so that is also the case in this resulting black and white version. We are going to tone down the right side of the building so that it better matches the left side. We'll start by using the Polygonal Lasso Tool to create a selection of the right side of the image. This is the side where the building is brighter.



**The highlights on the right side are much brighter than the highlights on the left. We'll use a Levels adjustment to even them out.**

We are still working on the mask, and we want to adjust the right side of the mask so that it does not allow 100% of the bright layer to appear. If we slightly darken the white parts of the mask, it will slightly hide that bright layer. We'll accomplish that with a Levels adjustment. We'll click on the Image menu at the top of the screen and choose Adjustments > Levels. The Levels dialog will appear. Here, there are a few sliders. We'll focus on the sliders beneath the gradient bar. The right (white) slider handle takes areas that used to be white and changes those areas to take on the tone that the slider is pointing to on the gradient bar. We'll drag that slider to the left slightly in order to darken the white parts of the layer mask. Because we isolated the right side of the image with a selection, that is the only side being affected by this Levels adjustment. We'll watch the image as we drag the slider, stopping when the right side of the building starts to match the left. Then we'll click the OK button in order to close the Levels dialog. We'll get rid of the selection by clicking on the Select menu and choosing Deselect.

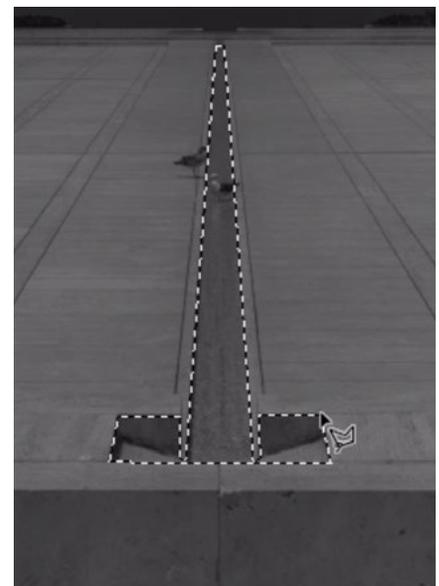


A selection was made around the right side of the image and a Levels adjustment is being used to adjust the mask. We're dragging the white slider (circled) to the left slightly, darkening the brightest tones.

## Add Highlights to Central Water Element (20:28)

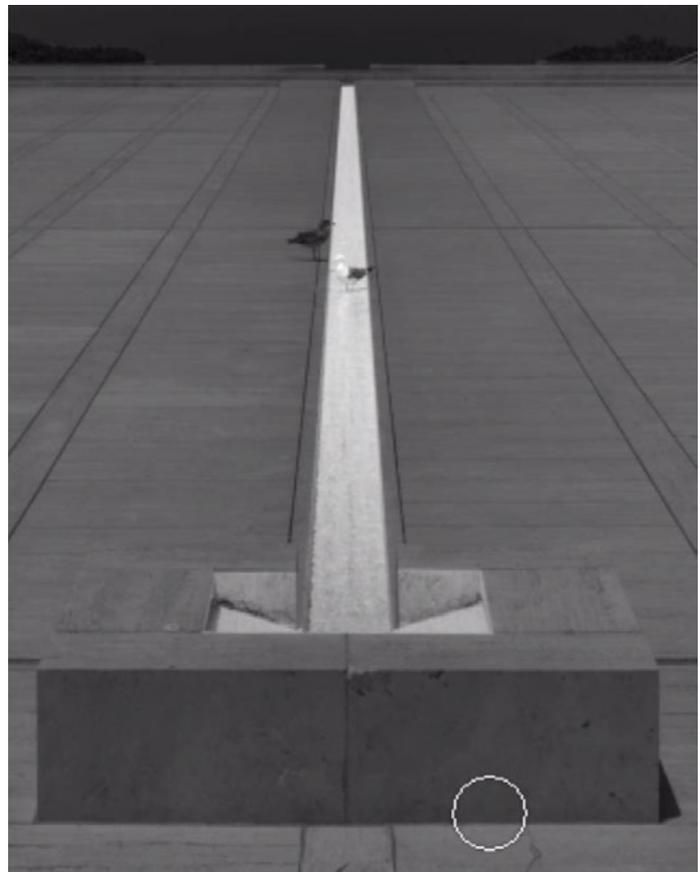
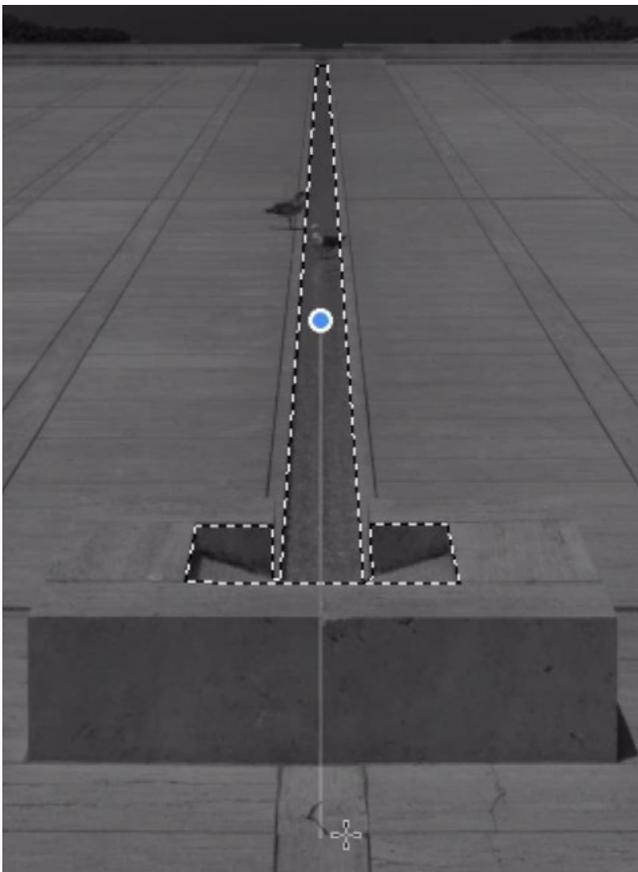
The left and right sides of the building are looking pretty dramatic now. The rest of the image is still looking dull. We need to enhance the sky and other elements of the building structure in order to improve the look of the rest of the scene.

Let's focus on the central element that has water running through it. We'll again use the Polygonal Lasso Tool to make a selection of the areas holding the water. These are the areas that we're going to lighten. It's best to zoom in on the image when doing this in order to make as accurate a selection as possible. After the selection has been made, we could use the Feather command to soften the selection edges. Alternatively, you could later use the Blur Tool to soften the edges on the layer mask.



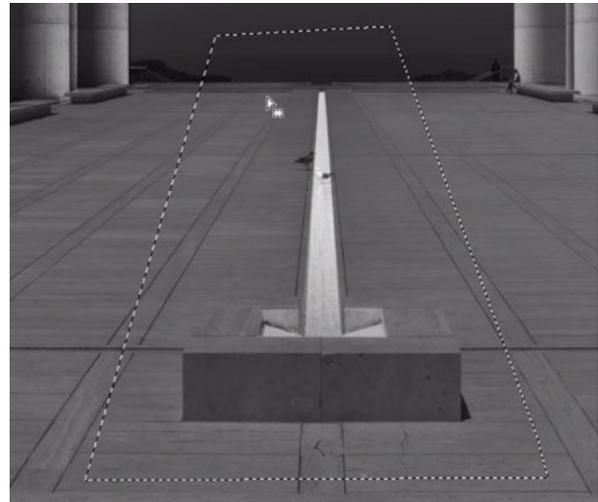
The Polygonal Lasso Tool was used to create a selection around the water element.

We're going to use the Gradient Tool to make the majority of the selection brighter, only fading out a bit when it reaches the bottom, which is the nearest part of the water element. To do this, we'll start the gradient about halfway down the vertical element and we'll drag straight down (by holding the Shift key) and release the mouse button below the bottom of the selection. This will tell the gradient to start in the middle of the selection, which means everything above the area where we initially click will make the layer mask completely white. The white areas of the mask will receive the full brightening effect from this "Bright" layer. After applying the gradient to the layer mask, we can get rid of the selection by clicking on the Select menu and choosing Deselect.



**LEFT: The Gradient Tool is being used to define the location of the gradient within the selection. RIGHT: The gradient was applied, lightening the water element in the image.**

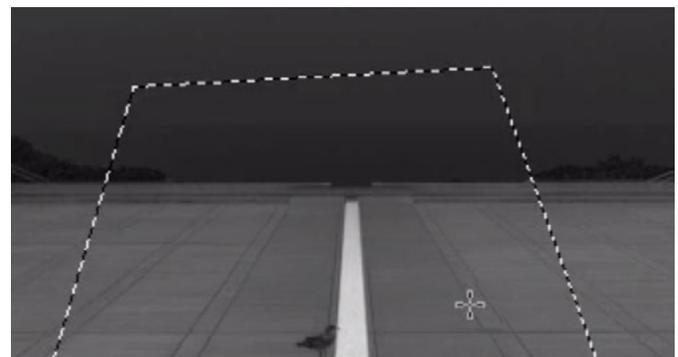
Now let's make the very back part of this vertical element fade out in brightness. This will be tricky because adding another gradient at this point will affect the entire image. We'll use the Polygonal Lasso Tool to make a very generic selection around this central portion of the image. This will simply separate the area from the work that we did on the left and right sides of the building. We'll again activate the Gradient Tool, we'll set the foreground color to black and the background color to white. This will allow us to create a black to white gradient. This time, we only want the gradient to be able to darken the back part of that vertical element.



**The Polygonal Lasso Tool was used to create a selection around the middle of the image. This will ensure that any changes will not affect the building on the left and right sides.**

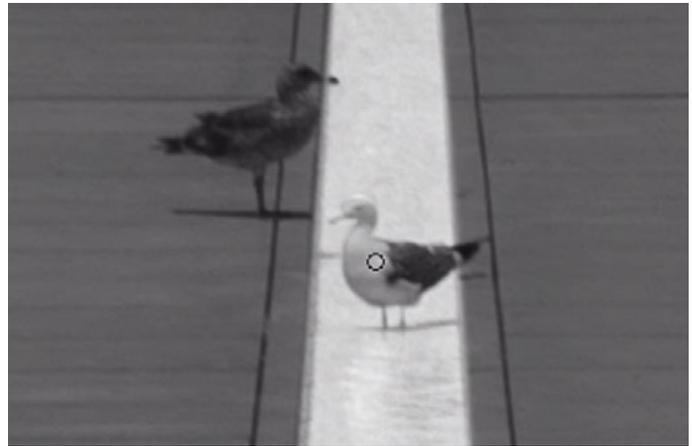
We don't want any part of it to be lightened. To achieve this, we'll change the blending mode of the Gradient Tool to Darken. This can be done by using the Mode menu in the Options Bar. When the tool is set to darken, it will be incapable of brightening anything that is currently in the mask. It can only darken things.

Now we'll use the Gradient Tool to click and drag above the vertical element and drag straight down, about a quarter of the way down. When we release the mouse button, it will apply the darkening gradient effect to just the top part of that element.



**LEFT: The Gradient Tool is being used to define the gradient near the top of the vertical water element. RIGHT: The gradient was applied, darkening the top area very slightly.**

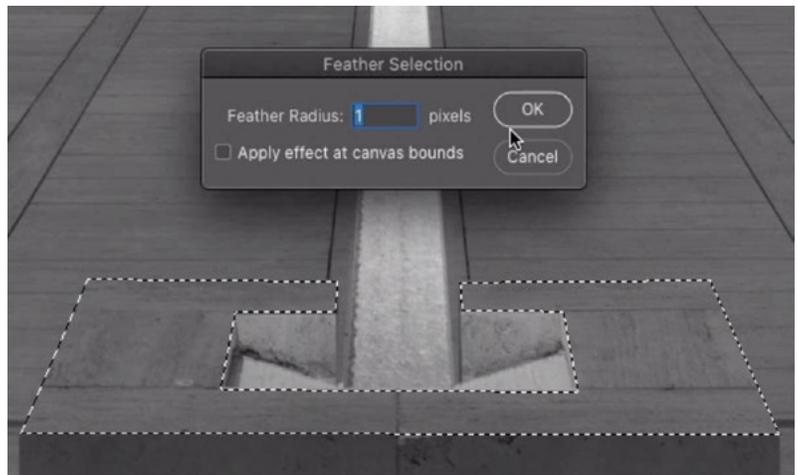
There are some birds standing in this water element and they received some of the brightening effect as well. If we'd like to remove the effect from them, we'll need to add black to the mask in the area where they are. We could do that by creating a selection around the birds and filling it with black. We could also simply activate the Brush Tool and paint with black over the birds, removing the brightening effect.



**The Brush Tool is being used to paint with black on the mask, removing the brightening effect from the birds.**

## Use Levels Adjustment to Lighten the Mask (28:04)

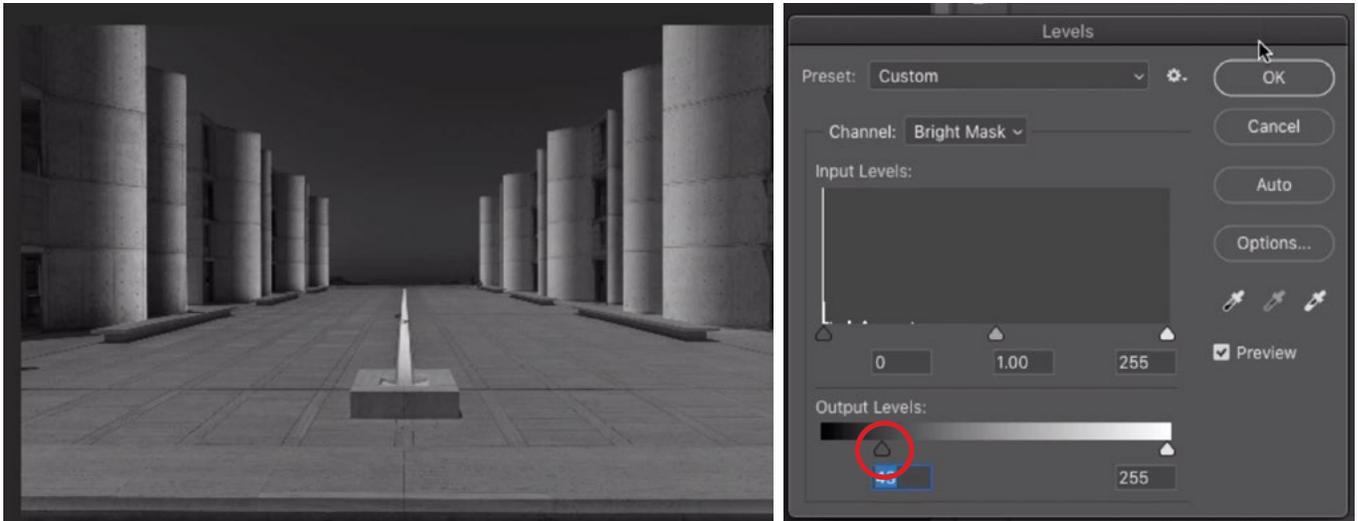
Now you have seen how we can add drama by introducing the bright layer via the Gradient Tool. We can also lighten specific elements using the Levels adjustment. Let's do that with the square concrete central structure at the front of the water element. We'll again use the Polygonal Lasso Tool to make a selection around the element. We'll also use the Feather command to soften the selection by one pixel.



**A selection was made around the concrete square element and we are using the Feather command to soften the selection by one pixel.**

Now, we'll click on the Image menu and choose Adjustments > Levels. Remember, the layer mask is active so this adjustment will be lightening the mask within the area that is selected. We'll use the black slider underneath the gradient bar in the Levels dialog. This will take any areas that used to be black and change them to reflect the brightness that we point the slider to.

We'll move this slider about a fifth of the way to the right, watching the selected area to determine just how bright we'd like it. When we're satisfied, we'll click OK to exit the Levels dialog.

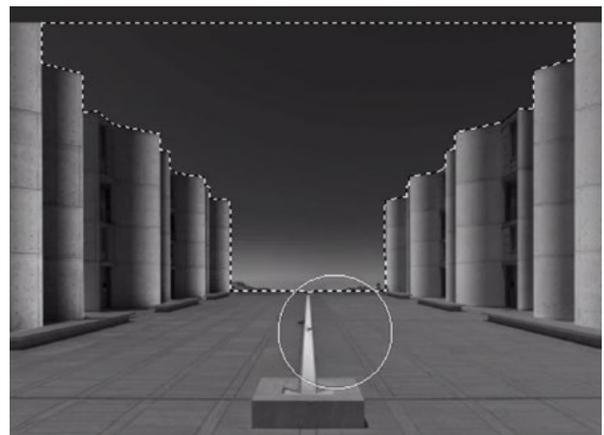


A Levels adjustment is being used to lighten the square element in the image. The black slider (circled) is being dragged to the right, lightening all the darkest tones in the selection.

## Lighten the Bottom Portion of the Sky (29:42)

Something now needs to be done with the sky. We're going to apply a gradient to the sky so that it is lighter on the bottom. This will make it look as if this part of the sky is the source of light that is hitting the other areas that have received highlights.

We'll start by making a selection of the sky area and feathering that selection by one pixel. Then we'll activate the Brush Tool and set the foreground color to white. We'll use a medium size brush to paint in full opacity and the very bottom of the selection, where the sky meets the concrete.



A selection was made of the sky and a soft brush is being used to paint with black on the mask in the bottom portion of the sky.

Next, we want the middle part of the sky to fade gradually, so we'll change the opacity of the Brush Tool to about 20%. We'll use a really large brush to paint again over the bottom to middle part of the sky. The effect will be light, allowing us to gradually build up the brightness.

There is a small amount of ocean at the very bottom of the sky and this became brightened accidentally. If something like this happens. We can always use the Brush Tool to paint with black on the mask, hiding the bright layer and therefore re-darkening the area.



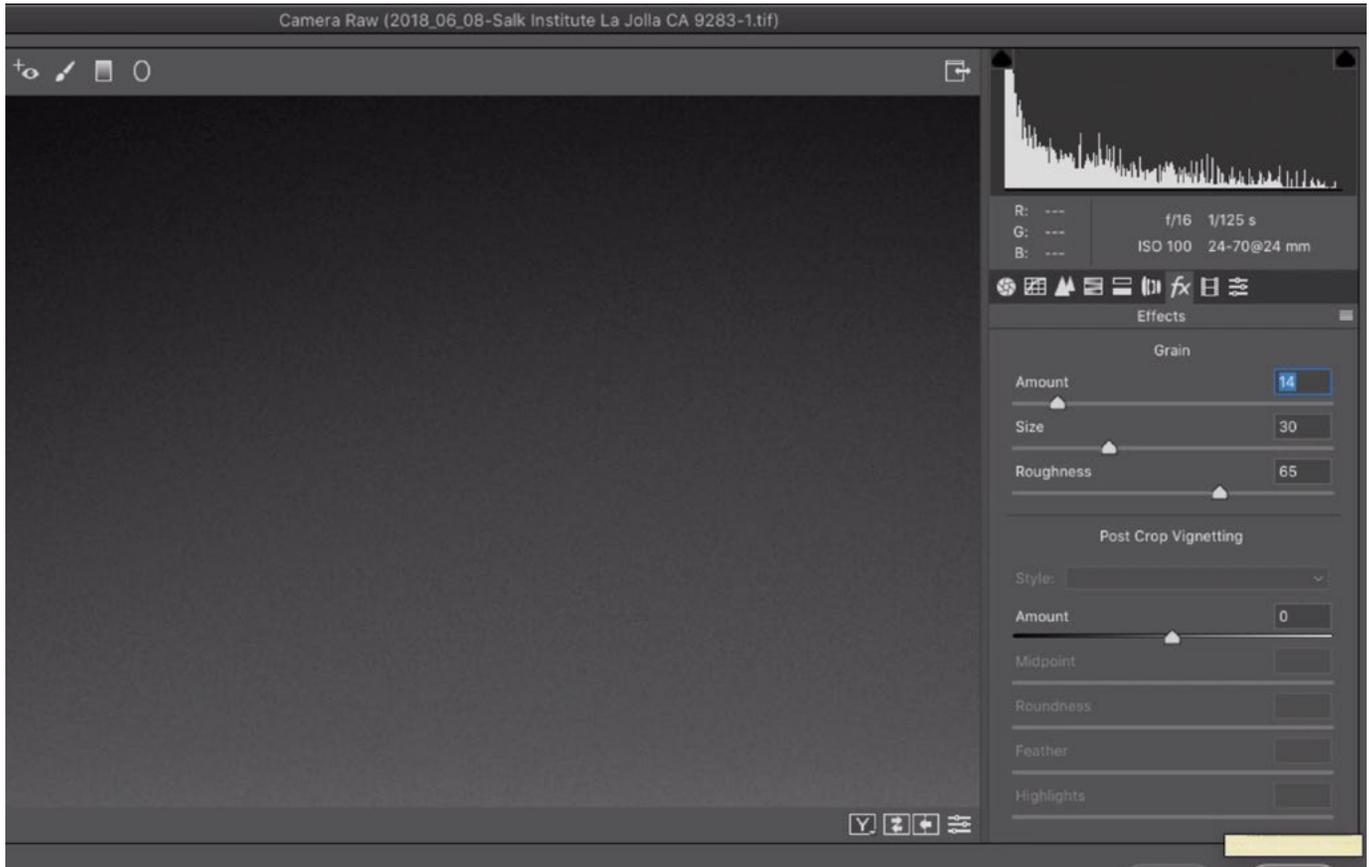
**A larger brush is being used to paint on the mask at a low opacity (20%) to gradually lighten the sky, from the bottom to the middle area.**



**The ocean was accidentally lightened, so we are using a smaller brush to paint with black on the mask, hiding the brightening effect from the water.**

**Fix posterization in the sky** Whenever we apply a gradient across a vast expanse of color, like this sky, we risk getting some posterization artifact. This occurred in the example image. We can use the Camera Raw filter to try and remove it. With the sky selection still active, we'll click on the Filter menu and choose Camera Raw Filter. The layer mask is active, so it's the layer mask that will open in Camera Raw. That's what we want.

In Camera Raw, we'll click on the FX icon at the top of the adjustment settings to open the Effects Panel. This is where we'll find the Grain settings. The Amount slider will add grain to the image and we'll move this up, just until we can no longer see the posterization effect in the sky. We'll click OK to exit the Camera Raw window. This grain effect will only be applied to the area that was selected.

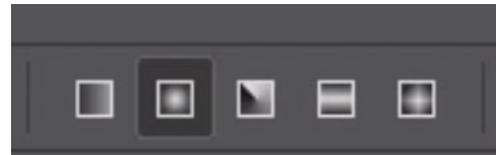


**In the Camera Raw filter, the Grain settings are being used to introduce some grain into the selected sky area. This helps to minimize the undesirable posterization.**

## Other Types of Gradients (35:15)

So far, we have been using the default, linear gradient. Know that there are other types of gradients that may be useful in adding highlights to images like this. These gradients are available as icons in the Options Bar when the Gradient Tool is active.

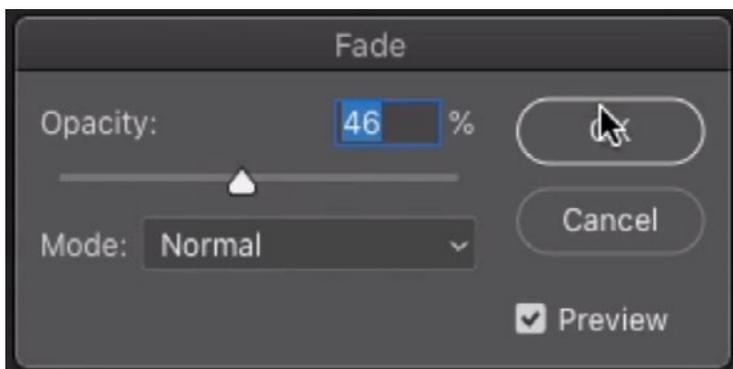
If you ever have a round object, like a sphere, you can use the radial gradient to place a round highlight on it. The reflective gradient can also be great for applying to columns.



**The different gradient options are available in the Options Bar when the Gradient Tool is active.**

## Refinements & the Fade Command (36:43)

The only work left on this image is to refine the areas that still look dull. Parts of the building still have no highlight applied and we would follow the same exact techniques for adding those highlights. We'll make selections around the areas and then apply gradients to those selections.



**The Fade command (found under the Edit menu) is being used to fade the effect of the gradient that was just applied.**

If you ever apply a gradient and realize that the effect is too extreme, there is a way to tone down that effect that was just applied. Right after using the Gradient Tool, you can click on the Edit menu and choose "Fade Gradient." This will present you with an opacity slider that will allow you to fade the effect from the command that was last applied in Photoshop.