Transform Shadow into Light II

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In this lesson, we're going to learn a technique that will allow us to introduce light into shady areas in order to make them look more sunlit. There are actually a couple of techniques for doing this, and we covered another in a previous lesson with the same name (Transform Shadow into Light). The other lesson uses a technique that combines two different versions of the same raw image or two bracketed exposures. The technique we're going to use in this lesson will involve using adjustment layers in Photoshop. Curves will be the primary adjustment layer, with Hue/Saturation being used in a supporting role as well.

We will first look at the very basic concept and then look at how it's been applied on many different images.

What Differentiates Shady Areas & Sunny Areas (Timestamp 1:11)

The histogram In order to demonstrate the difference between shady and sunlit areas, we're going to look at the Histogram. The Histogram shows you the brightness range that's found in your image. If it's not already visible in your Photoshop interface, you can access it by clicking on the Window menu and choosing Histogram. Black is on the far left. White is on the far right, and everything in between are all the shades of gray. The bars of the histogram show you what shades can be found in your picture.
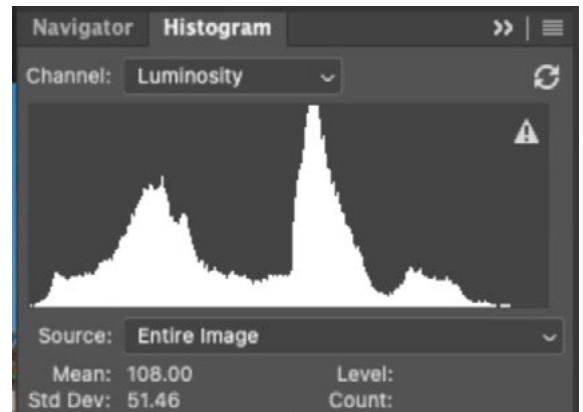

In the Histogram Panel, the bars on the chart represent the tones that are found in the image.

Note: The histogram will either show you the tones or all of the colors combined. You only need to see the tones for this demonstration. If you are instead seeing the colors, click on the menu in the upper right corner and choose Expanded View. Then use the Channel menu above the histogram to choose Luminosity.

If you make a selection in the image, the histogram will show you the tonal range of the contents of the selection and nothing else. Make a selection of the shaded area in your image and you can see how it's reflected in the histogram. When you select the area that's in the shade, the histogram bars will likely be limited to the left side of the chart. This is the side that represents the darker tones. There will probably be a huge gap on the right side.

The goal in adjusting these images is to minimize that gap in order to make the histogram for the shadow area look more like the histogram we see when viewing the entire image. We want to close the gap in order to make the shady area look more like the sunny area.
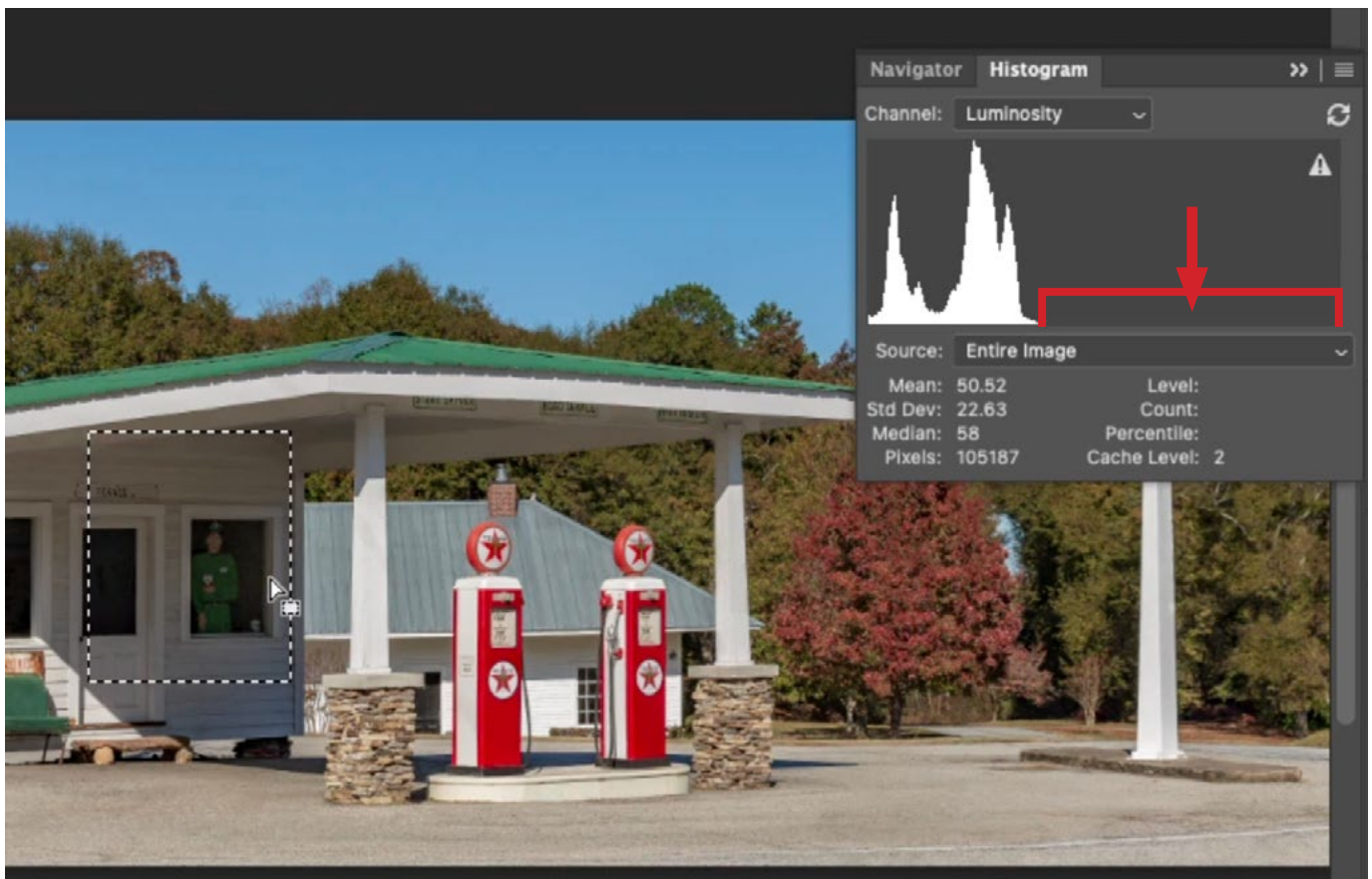
A selection is made of the shaded area and the histogram displays the tonal range found in that selected area. You can see that the histogram bars are limited to the left side of the chart, which means that the selected area contains only dark tones.

Lighten the Shady Area Using Curves (5:10)

Now let's look at how to lighten that shady area so that it better matches the sunny area. First, make a rough selection of the shady area. It doesn't need to be precise to begin with. It just needs to encompass enough of the shady area that the histogram knows what tonal range you want to target. In the video example, we just used the rectangular marquee tool.

With that selection active, create a Curves adjustment layer by clicking on the adjustment layer icon at the bottom of the Layers Panel and choosing Curves. The adjustment layer will appear in the Layers Panel and the selection will automatically be applied to the layer mask that's attached to the layer. The areas that were selected will become the white part of the mask, which is the part of the mask where the adjustment will be visible. The Curves Properties Panel will also appear, displaying the Curves chart. The histogram can also be viewed within this chart, and it will only represent the areas that you had selected.

We started off by making a basic selection of the shadow area we want to target and lighten.

There are two ways that you can get rid of the gap on the right side of the histogram and brighten up the area.

Place point on the curve and move it up Look at where the right side of the histogram bars really start getting tall. Click on the curve line to add a point at that spot. Then, move the point up, either by clicking and dragging on it or by using the up arrow on your keyboard. As you do this, you will see the selected part of the image become brighter and brighter.

Normally, when working with Curves, I would be very mindful to not let the curve line cling to the top edge of the chart. That's because this indicates that part of the image is being blown out to white. That's not going to be an issue in this case, however, because the histogram bars do not extend far enough to the right to be affected by this top-off. That means that it's really not affecting anything in the targeted area we're working on.

A point was placed on the curve, located on the right end of the histogram bars. Here, that point is being moved up and the targeted area is becoming lighter.

Move the white slider to the left The second method for eliminating the gap on the right side of the histogram is to click and drag on the white slider (just below the histogram chart), moving it to the left until it lines up with the end of the histogram bars. This will cause the brightest portion of the shady area to become white. If the effect is too extreme, you can always lower the opacity of the Curves adjustment layer.
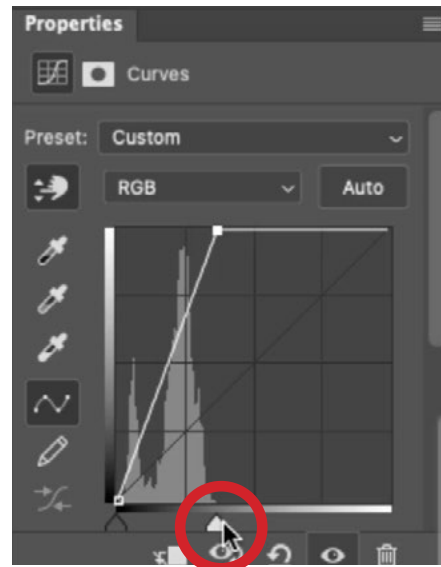
The white slider is being moved left so that it lines up with the right end of the histogram bars.

Refine the mask After using the Curves settings to lighten the shadows, you will likely need to refine the mask so that it precisely targets the shady area. Up until now, the selection/mask was very rough. In the video example, we actually started from scratch when re-creating the mask. We filled the entire mask with black (Edit > Fill) so that the adjustment was completely hidden across the whole im-

We're now using the Brush Tool to fine-tune the layer mask so that the brightening effect is only applied in the shadowed area.

age. Then, we used the Brush Tool to paint with white over the shadow area that should receive the lightening effect. If you get any overspray with the brush, you can always switch to painting with black in order to hide the effect again. Note that you can quickly swap the foreground and background colors by tapping the X key. If the effect is too extreme, you can lower the opacity of the adjustment layer. I like to move the Opacity slider (at the top of the Layers Panel) all the way to the left and then gradually increase the opacity until the effect looks ideal and natural.

Let's say that one part of the shadow area needs less of an adjustment than the rest. You can use the Fade command to control this. Adjust the opacity of the adjustment layer until the majority of the targeted area looks good. Then, paint with black (on the mask) over the area that requires less of an adjustment. Use one single brush stroke to do this. This will hide the adjustment completely. Then, click on the Edit menu and choose Fade. The Fade dialog will appear and it will allow you to reduce the strength of the very last thing you did in Photoshop. In this case, it's the strength of that last brush stroke. Adjust the Fade Amount slider until the area looks natural. Then click OK to exit the Fade dialog.

You can follow the processes above multiple times in a document, creating a Curves adjustment to target and adjust a specific area.
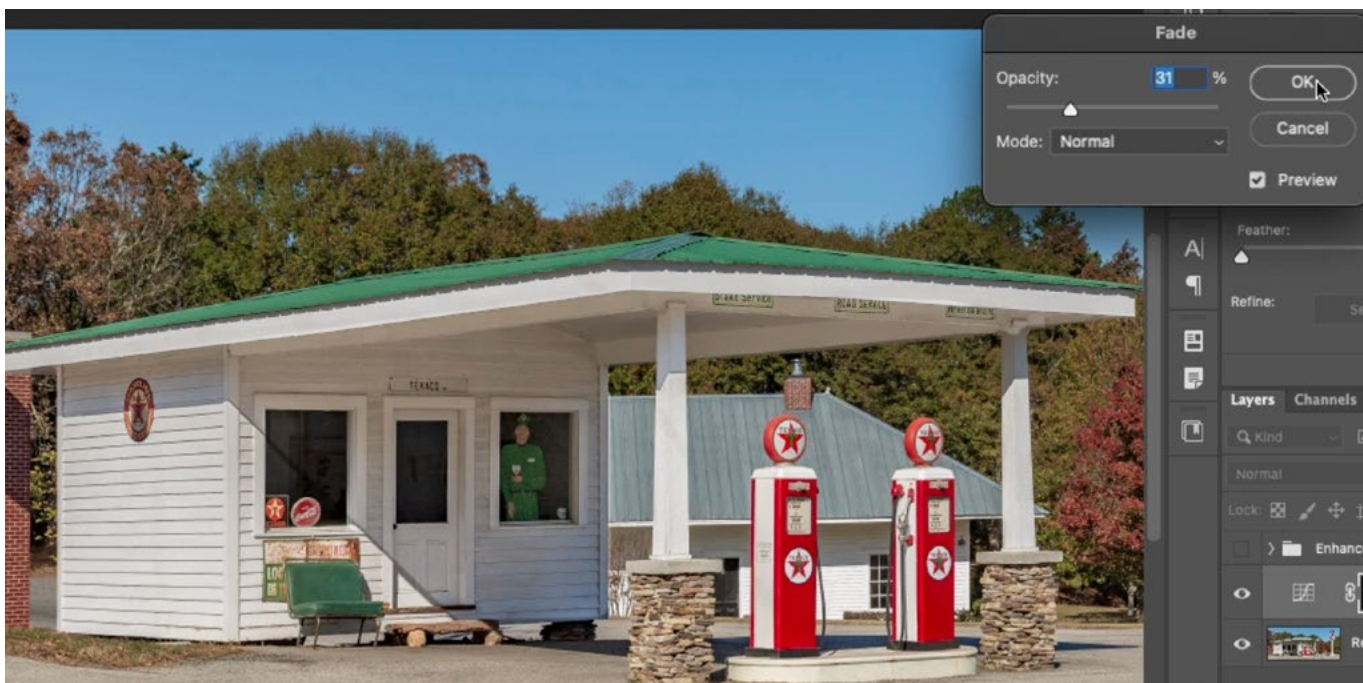

The left side of the building needed less of the effect, so we painted (on the mask) over that area with black and then used the Fade command to lessen the effect of the brush stroke that was just made.

Now let's look at a few tips related to the technique detailed above.

Lock in brightness of dark areas (13:38)

I will sometimes add an extra dot on the curve in order to lock in the brightness of the dark areas so that they will not be unnecessarily brightened. If the darkest tones become brightened, the area might start to lack contrast and appear dull. You can click on the curve line, somewhere near the black end, in order to add that dot, but I like to use the Targeted Adjustment Tool. It looks like a little hand icon on the left side of the Curves Properties Panel. With this active, you can click within your image and it will place a point on the curve that represents the tone/brightness level that you clicked on. I will focus on the shadow area and click on one of the darkest areas within it.
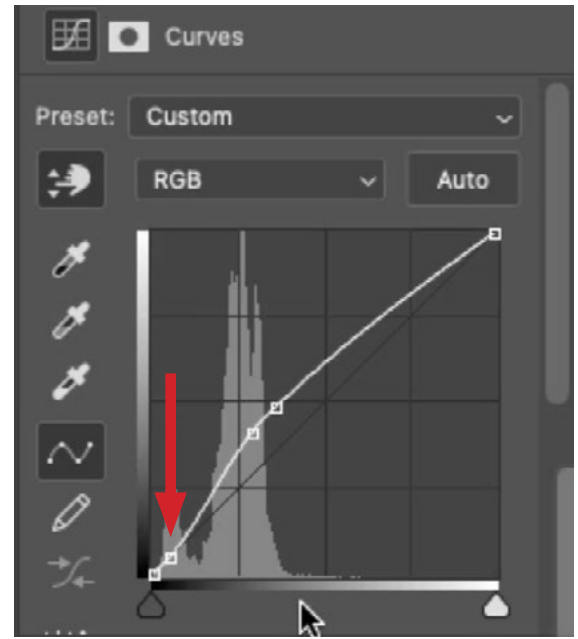
An additional point is added to lock in the brightness of the dark areas so that they can't be affected by the other curve points.

Clip one Adjustment Layer to another (14:24)

After adjusting or brightening a large area of shade, you may want to go in and make additional adjustments for smaller areas within that large shaded area. The layer mask for the new adjustment layer[s] will still need to limit the adjustment from affecting the sunny area and there is a trick for creating this mask quickly. You can clip one adjustment layer to an underlying adjustment layer in order to limit the adjustment so that it's as if it is using the layer mask for the underlying layer. This means that the underlying layer's mask is limiting where the adjustment is being applied. Place the new adjustment layer above the original adjustment layer for the shadow area and add an all-black mask. Then click

on the Layer menu and choose Create Clip-ping Mask. When you clip one layer to an-other, the clipped layer thumbnail becomes indented and a little down-pointing arrow appears to the left of the thumbnail. Now you can paint with white on the mask for the new, clipped adjustment layer to reveal the adjustment where you want it to be applied. As you paint, your paint strokes will be limit-ed by the underlying mask so that they can not affect the sunny area.


The two top layers are clipped to the bottom layer.

Know that you can clip multiple adjustment layers to that first adjustment layer. When you clip more than one layer, they will all clip to the next layer down that is NOT indented, or clipped to another layer.

## Compensate for Loss of Color (20:10)

When you brighten up a shady area, you might find that the result is nowhere near as colorful as the areas that are in the sun. You can use a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer to compen-sate for this. After masking the layer to reveal only the area you want to adjust, use the Satu-ration slider in the Properties Panel to make the area more colorful. The Hue/Saturation adjust-ment includes a color menu, which allows you to have much more control over what colors become affected. In the video example, I felt that the yellows needed to be more saturated, so I set the color menu to affect the yellows and then I moved up the Saturation slider.
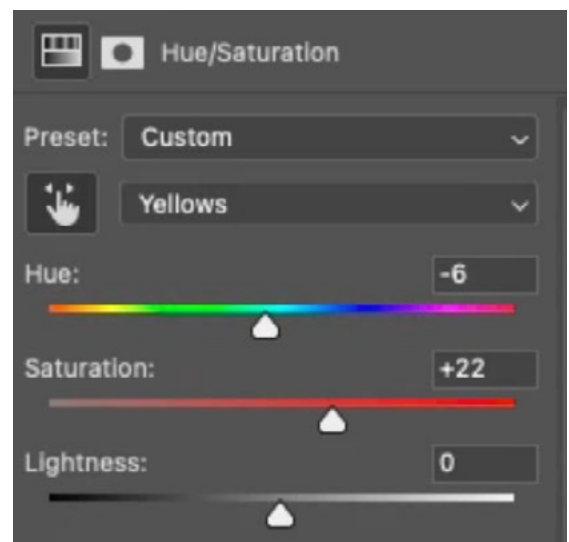
In the Hue/Saturation Properties Panel, the color menu was set to Yellows and the Saturation slider is being moved up in order to make the yellows more colorful.

## Place Multiple Adjustment Layers Inside a Masked Group (24:20)

This tip is similar to the concept of clip-ping masks in order to use one mask for mul-tiple layers. If you have more than one adjust-ment layer that should use the same mask, you can place those adjustment layers in a layer group (or folder) and then add a mask to the group. When you paint on a mask that is at-tached to a group, it will affect all of the layers inside.
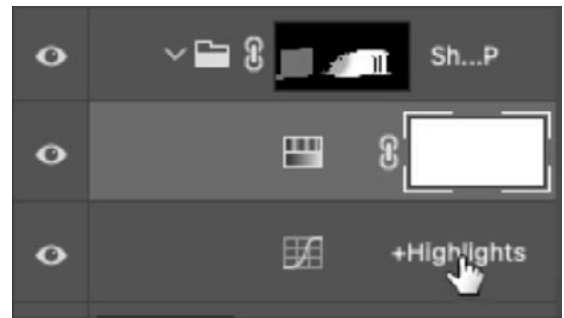
The layer mask for the group is being applied to all of the layers inside.

Get Preview of Where Detail is Being Lost (27:38)

Earlier in the lesson, we learned about moving the white slider under the Curves chart to the left until it aligned with the histogram bars. This adds a white point to the area targeted by the adjustment layer. If you ever move the dot beyond the edge of the histogram bars, it means that you are going to be losing detail in an area of your image. If you'd like to see where you might be losing detail, hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) and move the white slider. This will place an overlay on your image, where any white areas are losing detail and any colored areas are close to losing detail. This can serve as a good guide when adjusting the slider.
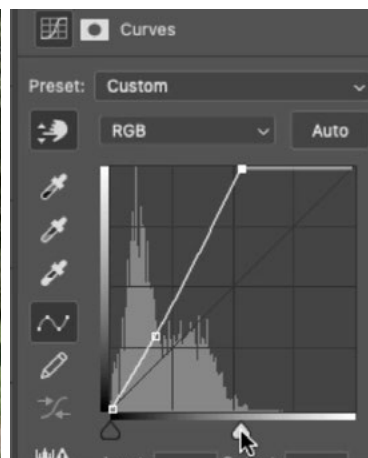
The Option key (Alt on Win) is being held down while moving the white slider. This causes an overlay to appear on the image, showing what areas are losing detail.

Create a Transitional Shadow (33:10)

In the video example, there are two sides to a service station image that don't flow well together because of the shadow adjustment that was made. The shadow on the left, sunlit side of the building looks darker than the front side of the building that was lightened. To make this look more natural, I created a soft shadow that spanned across the front of the building, connecting with the shadow on the left side. Let's look at how to accomplish something like this.


LEFT: The front side of the building looks unnaturally lit. RIGHT: A shadow was added, which connects with the shadow on the left side of the building, making the lighting look natural

We'll create a new Curves Adjustment Layer and we'll mask it to reveal only the area where the light shadow should appear. Then we'll do the opposite of what we did when pulling an area out of the shade. We'll click on the top right dot of the curve line and we'll drag it down. This takes areas that used to be white and darkens them to match the brightness range shown in the gradient on the left side of the Curves chart. We'll drag is down, just until the shadow looks natural.
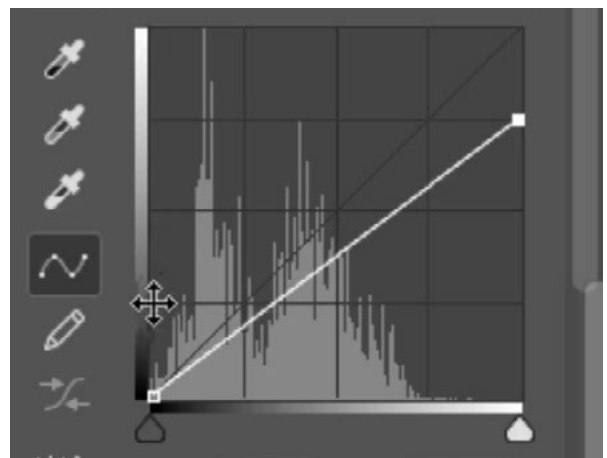
The top right curve dot is being moved down, darkening the light areas.

We could additionally adjust the color of this shadowed area. We'll hold down Shift+Command (Shift+Ctrl on Win) and then use the Targeted Adjustment Tool to click on the color we want to shift. By holding down those keys, we are placing a point on each of the three color curves. Then we can use the color menu (above the Curves chart) to switch between the three curves and adjust the individual dots.
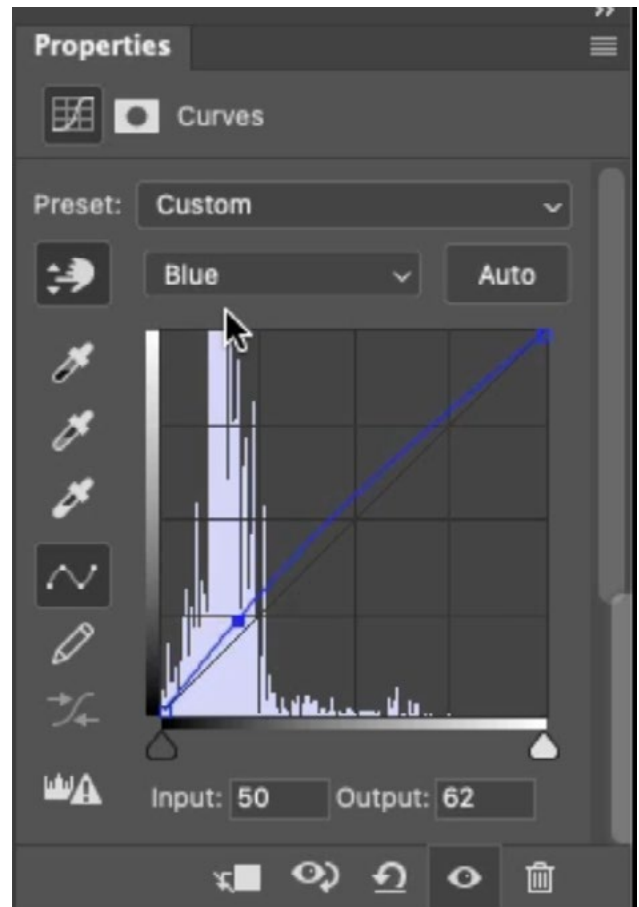
After placing a point on each of the three color curves, each of the points can be adjusted separately in order to fine tune the color of the targeted areas.