

An Advanced Color and Luminosity Technique Worth Learning (and it is actually pretty easy, too!)

Try this on for size - in any version of Photoshop or Elements you have access to layer modes and the default, of course, is normal. If we make a color or density correction to an image using Levels or Curves, by default the normal mode of the layer means we influence the luminosity and the color of the image, both at the same time. That is a default we can defeat, and those two elements are the key to the solution. By changing the mode of the layers to either luminosity or color we can effectively restrict the corrections to where we want them to be. That allows us to make color corrections to an image without changing the density of a particular area, or the brighten or darken an area without influencing the color.

A minor point in some regards, but density changes of anything but neutral tones will always strengthen the predominant color of that area and introduce a color shift, which is usually ignored by most Photoshop users. But, you, of course, are better than that, and being interested in the most accurate files possible, or most accurate interpretation of your vision of that file, this technique affords you greater control over your images in many ways you can only discover with experimentation.

Using individual channels in the Levels or Curves dialog while in Luminosity mode gives you the kind of control over the density of colors in the image that you had with filters in B&W film and with tones in B&W conversions with the Black and White adjustment layer or with channel mixer. Without making difficult selections you can crank down the brightness of a red brick building in relation to the rest of an image very easily. Once you try this, you will be hooked. An "advanced" control technique that is available to all users, and more than slightly worth investigating.

To try the technique, if you are not familiar with layer modes, add a Levels adjustment layer in Elements or a Curve adjustment layer in any version of CS and click OK without making any corrections. At the top of the layer dialog there is a drop down box that now says "Normal". Click on the arrow to the right and choose Luminosity to make changes to density or Color to adjust color without affecting the other. Double click on the Levels or Curves icon on the layer you just created to return to the dialog. Now select individual color channels and play around to see what you can do.

Depending on the content of your image you will see some areas change more than others. The Luminosity mode is where you can be the most creative. Elements users do not have quite as much control as Levels restricts you to center point control, but even so, there are the ends and the output sliders as well to play with. Some changes will bring dramatic changes and others will be more subtle. This will be on an image by image basis as the amount of a particular color channel controlling various parts of the image will vary depending on how far from neutral the color is.