



Power of the Pen

The secret to making almost any photo look better using a Wacom Tablet and Photoshop

BY BILL LINDSAY

Making a Better Photo

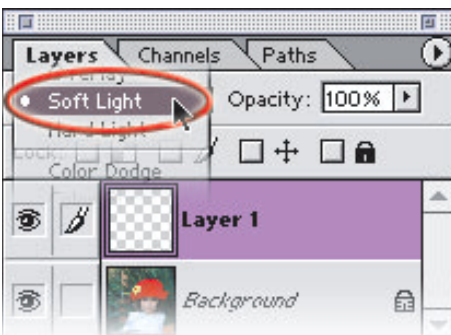
One of the ways to make most pictures look better is to use a trick that was first made famous by Ansel Adams. One of the current day proponents of this effect is photographer Rick Sammon. If you don't know Rick, that's alright, most likely you would recognize his work from his tabletop books of photographs of nature and people, or from his weekly column in the Associated Press.

The trick is accomplished in two simple stages: Darken the background, and if the subject is a person, lighten the whites of their eyes. By using a Wacom tablet, you can simplify this even further with much more control. Here are the simple steps in Photoshop to achieve this effect with a Wacom tablet.


STEP ONE: Open up a photo, in my example, we'll open up this picture of this little girl.



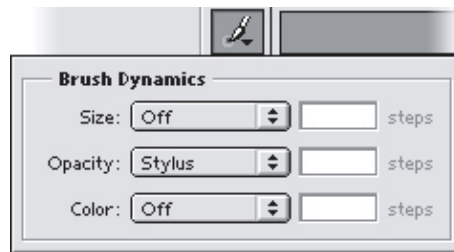
STEP TWO: Make a new layer and change the Layer's mode from "Normal" to "Soft Light".



STEP THREE: Reset your Photoshop colors to black & white by pressing the "d" key on your keyboard.

STEP FOUR: Select the Paintbrush tool  and a large brush (I usually start with about 65 pixels.)

STEP FIVE: On Photoshop's Brush Dynamics (Options bar), make sure Opacity is set to Stylus (refers to the Pen) and Size and Color are set to off.



STEP SIX: Start painting on the Soft Light layer.

You can apply more pressure to the lighter areas of the photo, and less pressure to the darker areas to quickly balance out the background.

As an example in the photo I am using, I would press harder while painting on the upper left hand corner of the photo, (on the light brown post), and on some of the leaves on the top portion of the photo. I would press lighter on the rest of the background, making sure I draw around the subject.

Because I am using a pen and tablet, not only can I draw quickly, varying my pressure as I draw, but I can also draw with accuracy around the outline of this pretty little girl. (Okay, yes... this is my daughter!)

If you've made an area too dark, just flip over your pen and use the eraser to light areas back up.

STEP SIX: To lighten the eyes, select a small brush (hard round 3 pixels), reverse your

colors by pressing the "x" key (so that you will now be painting with white instead of black).

Zoom in over the eyes and lighten the whites of her eyes by painting with white.



STEP SEVEN: Zoom back out and save your photo! (If you want to edit this again later, please remember to save a copy as a ".PSD" file with all the Soft Light layer intact.) All done!



Compare the photo in the first column with this one above. See how in the first picture there are lots of areas of distraction? Yet in this last photo you are drawn directly to this beautiful little girl's face.

If you find a Soft Light layer isn't darkening enough, you can either add a second Soft Light layer, or switch the Layer Mode to Overlay, but paint lightly in Overlay mode! It does darken quickly. ■