Varis PhotoMedia Tutorials

Welcome

This tutorial has been prepared for the photographer who is striving to learn digital imaging. I make an effort to supply current information about digital imaging techniques and general information about computer technology that is pertinent for today's professional photographer. This information is based on my personal experience down in the trenches at the front lines of the digital revolution that is sweeping the photographic industry.

One thing is certain: all of the information contained herein will be obsolete in a fairly short time - how short, I can't say. Be forewarned that things are changing very rapidly and the only way to stay competitive is to keep learning. I devote a good percentage of my time learning new things and I am attempting to share what I learn with you but this information will go out of date so you should be flexible and not take this tutorial to be the ultimate statement on the subject.

I consider the knowledge contained in any of my tutorials to be public domain but the form in which this knowledge is presented is copyrighted as are all the photographic images used as examples. Unless otherwise noted all imagery is copyrighted by Lee Varis and any use of these images without permission is forbidden. You are permitted to use this tutorial for your personal education - you are not permitted to sell or otherwise distribute this material. Please contact me for any other use.

I maintain a web site where I post additional information, examples and tutorials. You are invited to browse various portfolios as well as download free material and purchase additional tutorials at:

http://www.varis.com

I hope you find the information contained in this tutorial helpful. Please let me know if you find any errors or omissions - I'm always trying to improve these materials! You may contact me via E-mail at:

varis@varis.com

best regards, Lee Varis 2003

Product Illustration-
White on White

This project was part of a larger assignment for a speaker manufacturer. We had to do product shots on two different sets of speakers and this one little shot of the Kleenex box (don't ask) that was going to be used as a little illustrative element. The shot called for a white plastic tissue dispenser that the client was supposed to supply. At the day of the shoot the client shows up with a cheap cardboard tissue box with a floral print. Since this wasn't the main shot I tried to make do with what the client supplied – we spray painted it white and went ahead and shot it (the art director was in New York at the time and the shoot was being managed via E-mail). The art director had a fit - he was convinced that we needed to do a re-shoot to get the kind of box he was looking for. Instead I offered to re-build the box digitally, faster and cheaper!

Occasionally, products are not as pristine as they should be and these days most clients don't want to pay for "hero" product because they believe that retouching can solve any little cosmetic problem. This wasn't a little cosmetic problem but the solution here can be applied to a wide range of similar situations. In essence we will paint over bad areas of the image to smooth out tones and create an idealized product.

To do this project you should be familiar with the pen tool and the construction of paths. We will use paths to create selections for the different planes of the cube that is the tissue box. These selected regions are then filled with a gradient that gives a sense of volume and lighting that follows what is happening in the "real" photography. We then "white out" the background, add a drop/cast shadow and end up with a very serviceable product shot.

For product shots on white it is almost always better to simply shoot on a light gray background and then force the background to white later in Photoshop. That way you are assured of better contrast in the image and an easier time lighting, especially with white objects. If this product was photographed on a white background it would be more difficult to maintain the shape and tones in the soft crumpled tissue at the top!
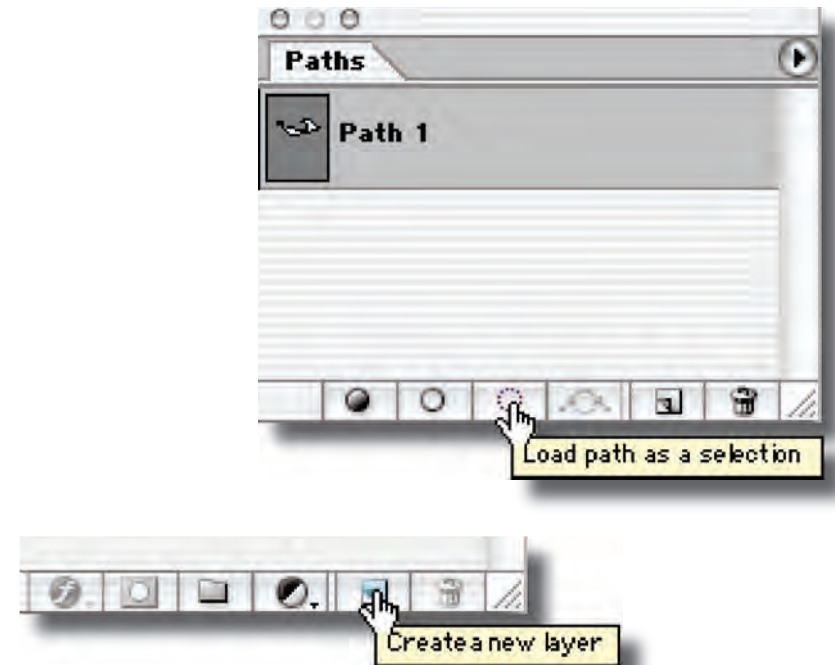

Lets take a look at the step-by-step on the following pages...

The image above was what the art director was thinking and the shot at the left is what we had to work with.

To begin out transformation we start with some carefully drawn paths that outline the various "faces" of the tissue box. Here I've got a path for the top of the box...

Load path as a selection

Create a new layer

When you have the path the way you like it, click on the selection icon at the bottom of the Paths palette to turn the path into a selection. Then create a new empty layer by clicking on the new layer icon at the bottom of the Layers palette. This will be the procedure to use for all the different "faces" of the tissue box – with the selection active choose a light gray for the foreground color and select: Edit-> Fill.. to fill the selection in the empty layer with the foreground color. Now take a large airbrush and, with the selection still active, paint a slightly darker gray to be the shadow for the tissue pulled out of the top of the box.
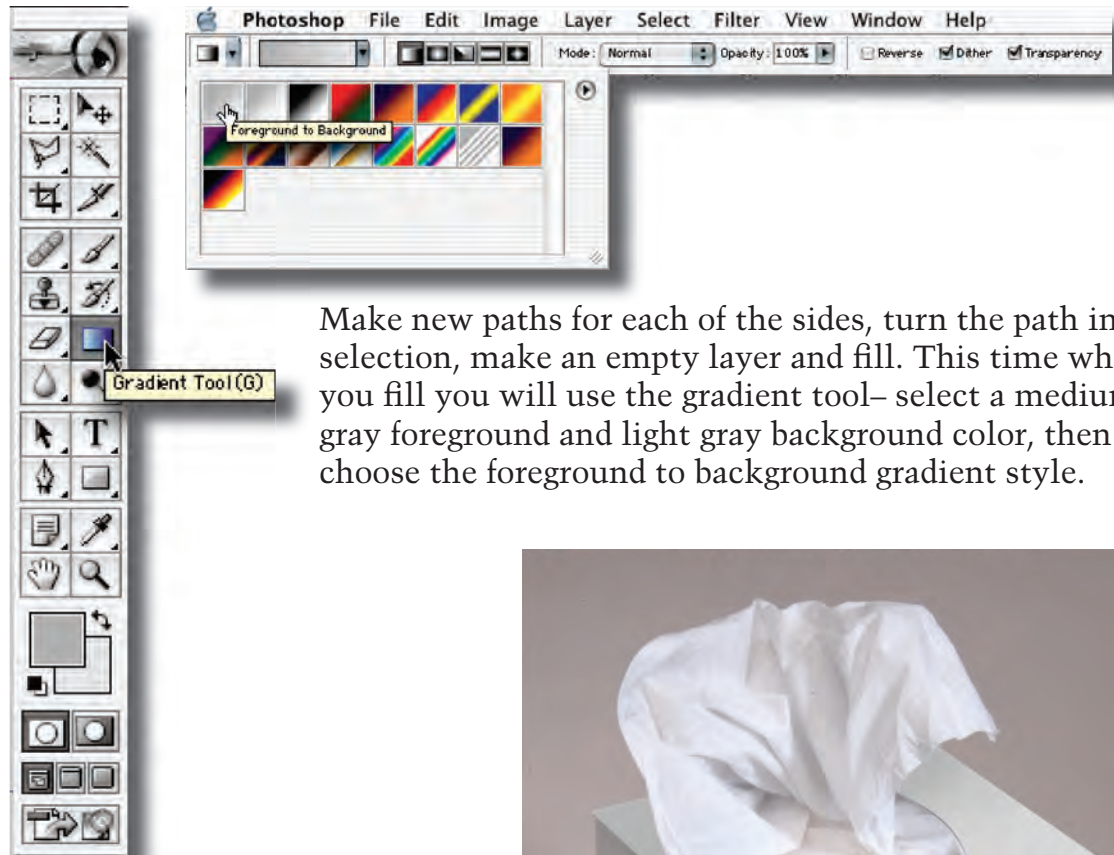
Make new paths for each of the sides, turn the path into a selection, make an empty layer and fill. This time when you fill you will use the gradient tool– select a medium gray foreground and light gray background color, then choose the foreground to background gradient style.

With the side selection still active, drag the gradient from the lower left corner to the upper right corner. By using a gradient instead of a flat tone you create more of a sense of volume and a direction for the light that makes the object appear more dimensional. We will use the same idea for the other side.

This can work well with round objects as well. You might try a circular gradient or use a gradient that transitions from light to dark to light to create a sense of reflection in chrome objects.

Once we have the sides covered we will create the rounded edges that will make the box look more real and plastic.

Make a new layer and draw a path along the front edge. Select white as the foreground color and then choose a 65 pixel soft brush– we will use this to stroke the path for that edge. Click on the stroke icon at the bottom of the Paths palette.

Path 5

Stroke path with brush
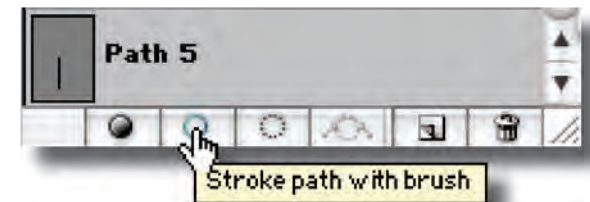
The path is "stroked" with the selected brush. Next we will "fill" this stroke with a gradient – in order to do that we must lock the transparency of the "stroked" layer. Click on the transparency icon next to "lock" at the top of the Layers palette.

Layers

Normal   Opacity: 100%

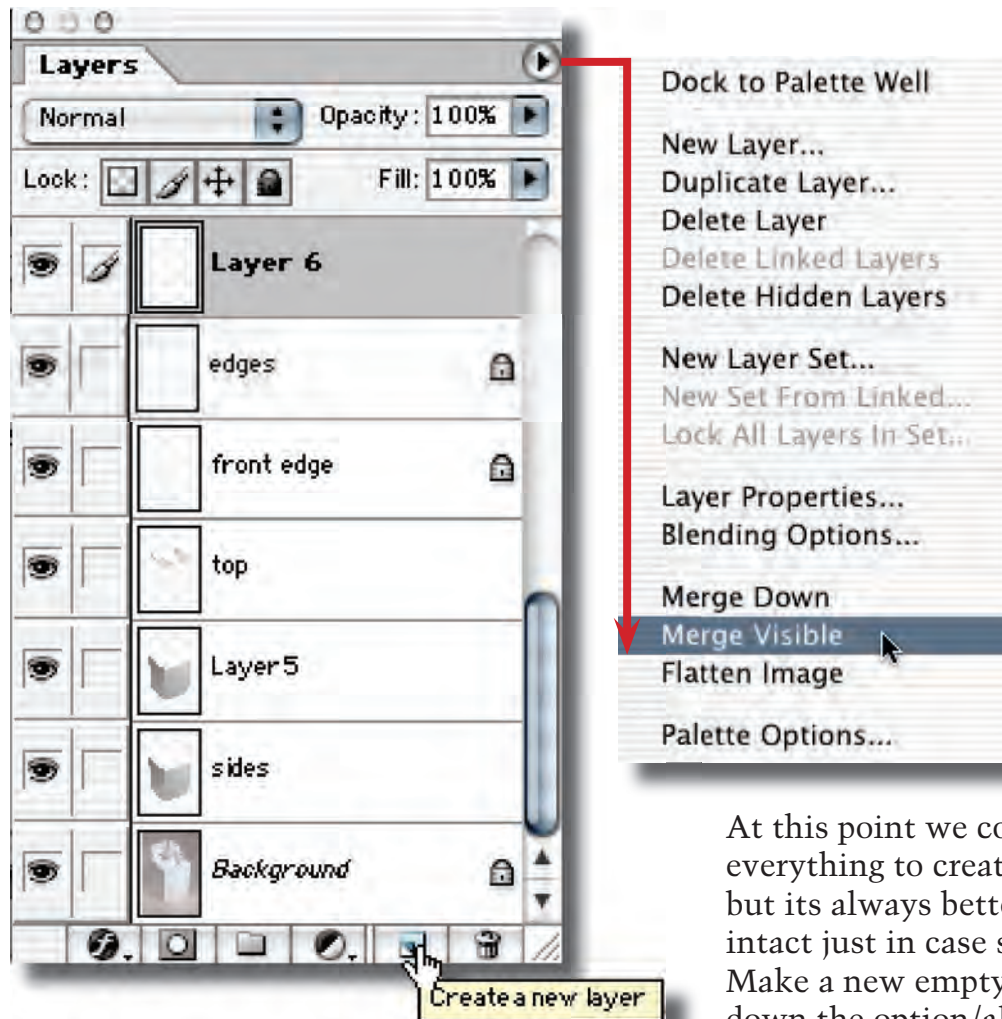Lock: Fill: 100%

Lock transparent pixels
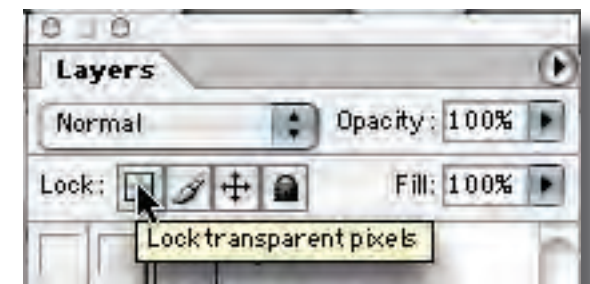
Now we can only "paint" into the areas that have already been "stroked" with the soft brush. We will fill this with a gradient that transitions from a medium to light gray by dragging over it with the gradient tool...

After doing this it should look like the shot above. We can continue with the top edges. Build a path for the top edges, stroke with a 45 pixel brush and fill with a gradient or manually paint in some shading with a soft brush. You want to end up with something that looks like the shot to the right here.

Left Layers Panel

Layers

Normal | Opacity: 100%

Lock: ☐ ✎ ✛ 🔒 | Fill: 100%

- 👁 ✎ **Layer 6**
- 👁 edges 🔒
- 👁 front edge 🔒
- 👁 top
- 👁 Layer 5
- 👁 sides
- 👁 *Background* 🔒

Create a new layer

Palette Menu

Dock to Palette Well

New Layer...
Duplicate Layer...
Delete Layer
Delete Linked Layers
Delete Hidden Layers

New Layer Set...
New Set From Linked...
Lock All Layers In Set...

Layer Properties...
Blending Options...

Merge Down
Merge Visible
Flatten Image

Palette Options...

Right Layers Panel

Layers

Normal | Opacity: 100%

Lock: ☐ ✎ ✛ 🔒 | Fill: 100%

- 👁 ✎ **Layer 1**
- 👁 edges 🔒
- 👁 front edge 🔒
- 👁 top
- 👁 Layer 5
- 👁 sides
- 👁 *Background* 🔒

Body Text

At this point we could just flatten everything to create the finished object but its always better to keep our layers intact just in case so do this instead. Make a new empty layer then, hold down the option/alt key and select "Merge Visible" from the layer options drop down. This will put a composite of all the layers into the top empty layer.

Next we will build a layer mask to isolate the tissue box from its background.
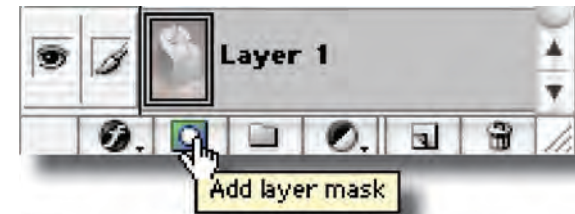
Build a path that outlines the whole tissue box. Then convert the path to a selection by clicking on the selection icon at the bottom of the Paths palette. Once you have the "marching ants" of an active selection you can create the layer mask on the top selected layer by clicking on the layer mask icon at the bottom of the Layers palette.

The next step is to "white out" the background. We will use a "Solid Color" adjustment layer to do that. First select the "edges" layer just below the top layer...
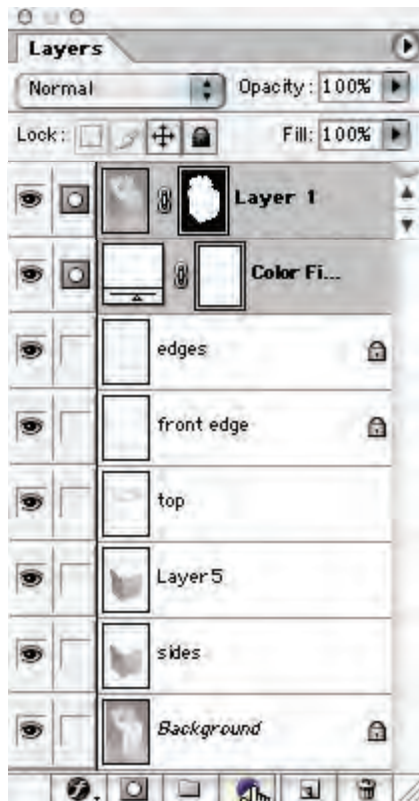
Now click on the adjustment layer icon at the bottom of the Layers palette and select "Solid Color" from the drop down. Pick "white" from the resulting color picker. The background behind the tissue box will now be white.

To finish the effect we have to create a drop shadow and the all-important contact shadow where the bottom of the tissue box touches the surface of the "white" tabletop.
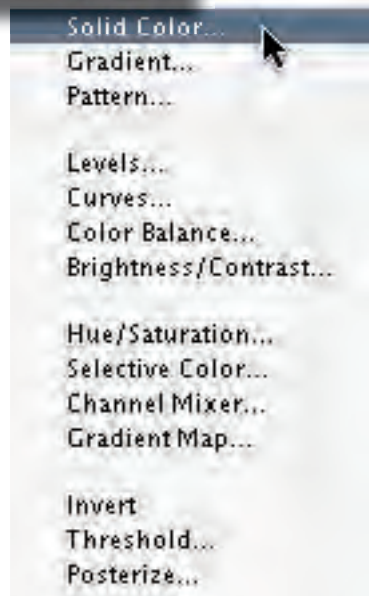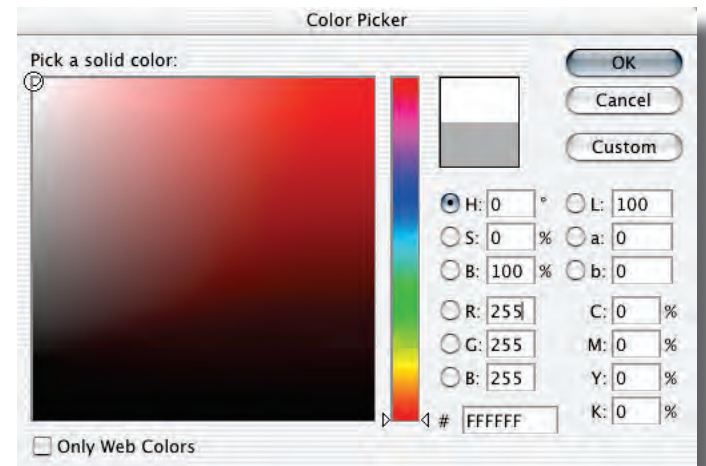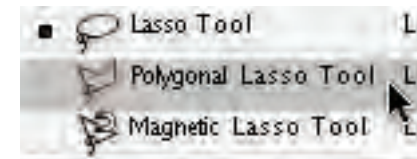
To prepare the "contact shadow" first hold down the Cmd/option key and click on the layer mask in the top layer...

Cmd/option clicking the layer mask loads a select from the mask. We only need the bottom portion for the "contact shadow" so we will "subtract" the upper part of the selection. Select the polygon lasso tool...

Click and hold on the lasso until you get the drop down then select "Polygon Lasso Tool". Now hold down option/alt and make a subtracting selection around the upper part of the selected tissue box. This will leave the bottom of the box selected.

Now select the "Solid Color" layer right below the box layer in the Layer palette. Make a new empty layer and fill the selection with black: Edit-> Fill...
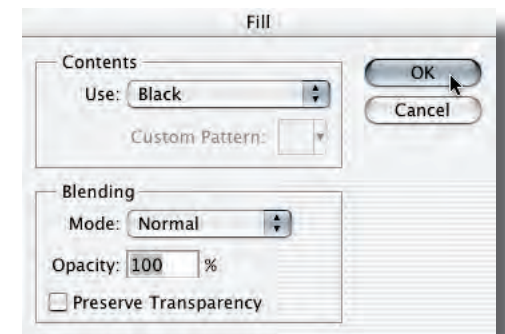
Now de-select and run a light Gaussian blur: Filter-> Blur-> Gaussian Blur.. set the radius to 4-5 pixels...

Select the Move Tool, then use the arrow keys to nudge the shadow 2 steps down – we are looking for a thin dark line just below the edge of the box. Look back on page 3 at the real box, you will see the same shadow there. Turn this shadow layer on and off and you'll see that this little thing has a huge impact on the feeling of solidity in the image.

Now we need to create a cast shadow...

Create another empty layer beneath the tissue box layer. We can simply draw a selection with the Polygon Lasso for the shape of the shadow. We can make it fall in front of the box to the left. Go to: Select-> Feather... and set a radius of 40 pixels.

Fill the selection in the empty layer with 50% gray, change the apply mode to multiply (the layer apply modes are in the drop down in the Layers palette just beneath the Layers Tab at the top of the palette) and adjust the opacity until it looks right...

I felt that the tissue box was too gray and it didn't look white enough so I added a curves adjustment above the tissue box layer to brighten it a bit. The final image is on the next page along with the complete layer stack.

This approach can be modified to create perfect white drop out backgrounds for any number of different products with or without the extensive product reconstruction.

If you managed to follow along with this tutorial you've learned to apply: paths, load selection from path, make empty layers, fill selections with color, fill selections with gradient, lock transparency in a layer, apply gradient to locked transparency, merge layers into an empty layer, turn a selection into a layer mask, add a solid color adjustment layer, load a selection from a layer mask, subtract from a selection, create a "contact shadow" and create a cast shadow.
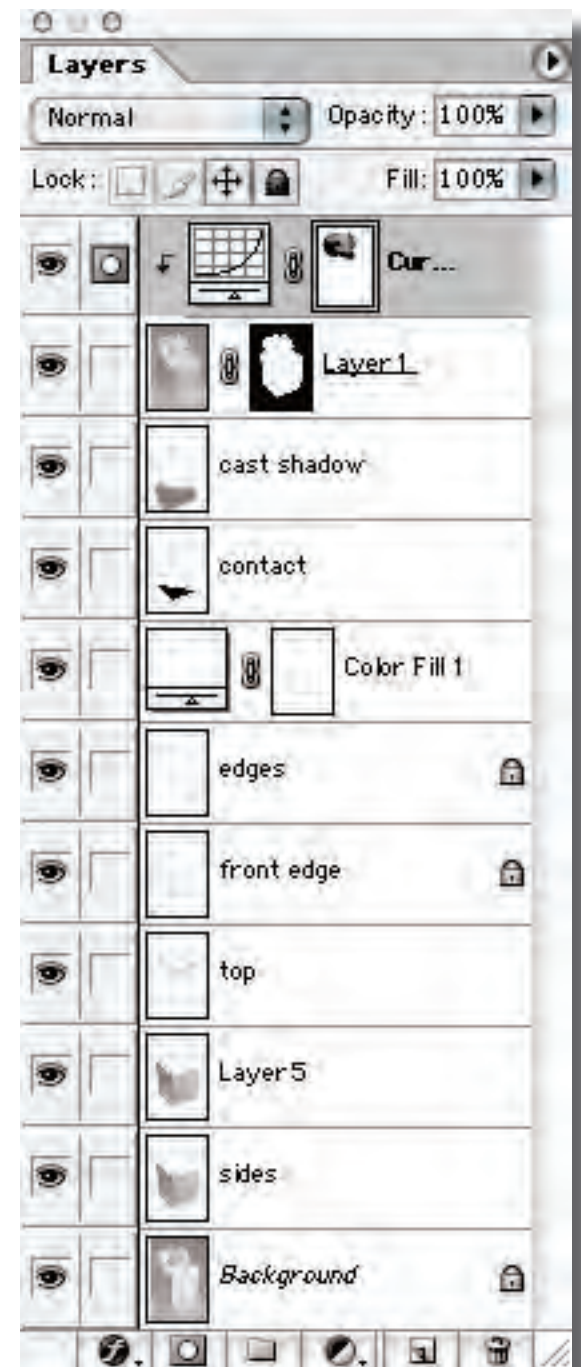
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Thank you

I hope you enjoyed this tutorial. The techniques outlined here represent just the tip of the iceberg. Photoshop is a very deep application - a person could spend years studying it and there will always be more to learn. If all this seems a little overwhelming, take a break, do what you feel comfortable doing in Photoshop and return to this tutorial again later on. Often, it takes several weeks for a particular technique to sink in so give it time.

I have other tutorials available online (navigate to the methods section), some are free and some are available for a modest charge. See tutorials and some examples of my work at:

http://www.varis.com

There are many learning resourses available on the web - here are a few other sites with good information:

http://www.russellbrown.com	http://www.creativepro.com
http://luminous-landscape.com/	http://www.imaging-resource.com/HOWTO.HTM
http://www.photoworkshop.com/	http://www.adobe.com/misc/training.html
http://studio.adobe.com/expertcenter/photoshop/main.html	http://www.ledet.com/margulis/articles.html
http://www.steves-digicams.com/	http://www.photoshopuser.com/
http://www.handson.nu/	http://photoshopgurus.info/

These last two links are typical of the majority of Photoshop tutorial sites - they are focused on cool graphics effects not photography. You might want to look over this material anyway - sometimes you can learn a lot about basic functions in Photoshop.

I'm always trying to improve these materials and I'm always open to your feedback. You may contatct me via email at:

varis@varis.com

best regards, Lee Varis 2003