Rendering for Impact – The Coffee Shop Conversation

These notes list the steps for rendering the image of the two women engaged in conversation over coffee from Jim's talk:

1. Load the image into Photoshop (PS) or Photoshop Elements (PSE), and crop it (Fig 1) so the women are the major elements of the composition. Make sure "Delete Cropped Pixels" is un-checked (Fig 1 top) for a non-destructive crop (can be changed later). The background layer should be renamed Layer 0 now.
2. De-noise Layer 0. You can use Adobe Camera Raw (Fig 2) in PS via menu Filter / Camera Raw Filter…, or use the NIK Dfine plug-in, or the Topaz DeNoise plug-in.
3. Duplicate the Layer 0: right click on Layer 0 in the Layers window, then pick "Duplicate Layer…" from the pop-up menu (Fig 3). Name the new layer "FG" (for foreground) in the Duplicate Layer dialog (Fig.3, top)
4. Create a layer mask for the new FG layer. Use the Quick Selection Tool (Fig 4, left), and the "Select and Mask" task-space (Fig 4, top). Once you have a good selection, click on the "Add Layer Mask" icon (Fig 4, bottom) to save the selection as a layer mask for the FG layer (Fig 4, center). It will take some time to do this well.
5. Highlight Layer 0, and then create a new (empty) layer (Fig 5, bot). Use the Clone Stamp tool (Fig 5, left) to copy some of the green leaves on the right over the bright spot just below (Fig 5, right).
6. Blur the background. First turn off visibility (the eyeball) on the FG Layer (Fig 6a), then highlight Layer 1, then do "the Claw" (Cmd-Opt-Shift-E on the Mac, and Ctrl-Alt-Shift-E on Windows). That creates a new layer (Layer 2 in Fig 6a) by merging all the visible layers, but leaves the existing layers "as is". PS records the claw as "Stamp Visible" in the
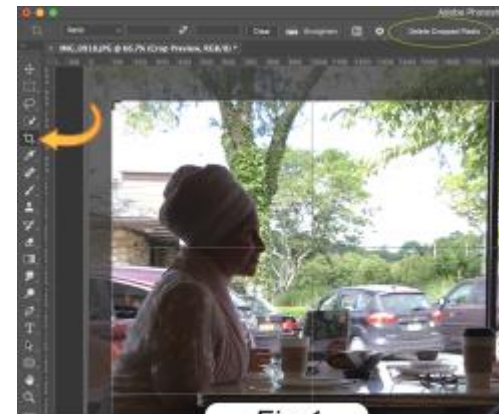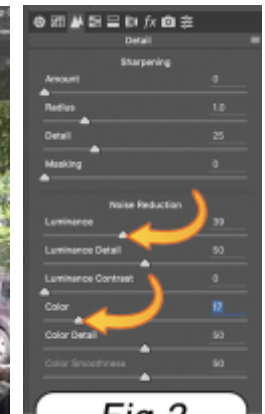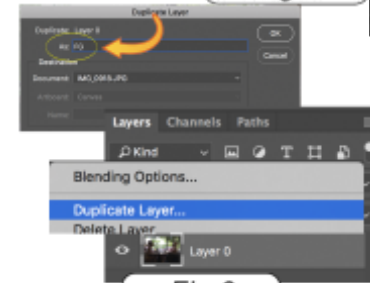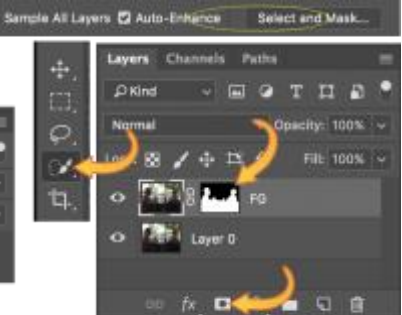

Fig.1

Fig.2

Fig.3

Fig.4

Fig.5

Fig.6a

history stack. Right-click on Layer 2, and pick "Convert to Smart Object" from the pop-up menu. The use PS menu "Filter / Blur / Gausian Blur…". Adjust the Radius slider to taste, something between 4 and 5 may be good (Fig 6b). Now turn the visibility of the FG Layer back on (Fig 6c)

7. Darken the backgropund. Highlight the blurred background layer we just made (Layer 2), then create a new curves adjustment layer just above it (called "Curves 1" in Fig 7). In the Properties window for the curve (Fig 7 top), pull the curve down to darken the blurred backgrpound layer below, and lessen contrast. Add a gradient to this layer's mask to suggest a natural sky-to-ground darkening.

8. Lighten the foreground. Highlight the FG Layer, then create another curves adjustment layer just above it (called "Curves 2" in Fig 8), then right-click on it and pick "Set Clipping Mask" (Fig 8 center). In the Properties window for the curve (Fig 8 top), pull the curve up near the bottom left at two points to lighten the fireground. To keep ther highlights from blowing-out, paint (flow 5%) with gray/black on the mask (Fig 8 center) in the area of the highlights.

9. Lighten faces. Add another curves adjustment layer at the top of the layer stack (called Curves 3 in Fig 9a), and make it a clipping mask layer (as in step 8).   In the Properties window for the curve (Fig 9 top), slide the top of the curce to the left, brightening the entire FG Layer and adding contrast. Now fill the Curves 3 layer mask with black (click on the mask, then menu Edit / Fill…, and pick black as the fill color.) Finally set the foregropund color to white (press the D key), and use the Paint Bush tool with a soft-edge, and gently (flow about 8%) paint white onto the layer mask to
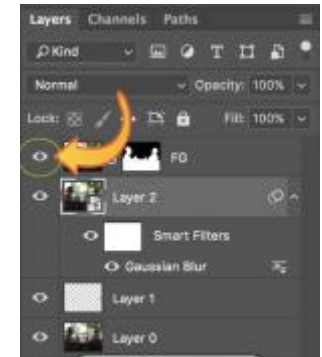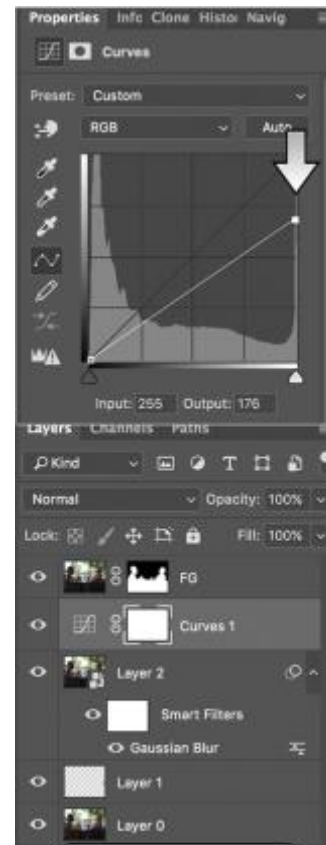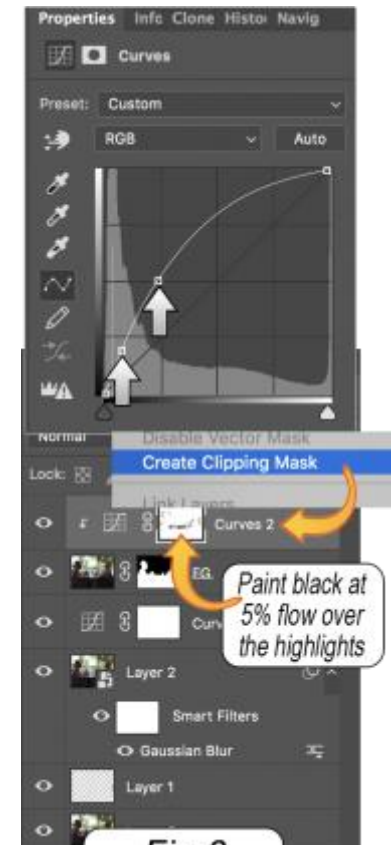

Fig.6b

Fig.6c

Fig.7

Fig.8

Paint black at 5% flow over the highlights

reveal the adjustment on the part of the women's face you want to lighten. Repeat this procedure for the other woman (Fig 9b).

10. Make B/W. We'll user the NIK Silver Effects filter to make the image B/W. Highlight topmost layer, and do "the Claw" (as in step 6) to make a new merged layer (called Layer 3 in Fig 10a). Make it a "Smart Object" layer (as in step 6). Run ACR via menu "Filter / Camera Raw Filter…" and dim the highlights (pull that slider left), and lighten the shadow (pull that slider right) as in Fig 10b. End the Camera Raw filter, and start the NIK filter via the PS menu "Filter / NIK / Silver Effects Pro 2". Bump-up the Contrast and Structure (as in Fig 10c), and set the B/W paper toning to medium sepia (Fig 10d). Save the filter results to return to Photoshop and you're done!

11. Please send questions to me using the "Contact Jim" link at the bottom right corner of my website: JimChristensenPhotography.com

If you want a more thorough explanation of the tools and techniques used here, please refer to my self-paced, pre-recorded video workshop on my website: JimChristensenPhotography.com
Go to the "About" tab, and select "Workshop: How to Use PS/PSE".

To download the NIK filters (for free) go to the DxO website at this link: nikcollection.dxo.com
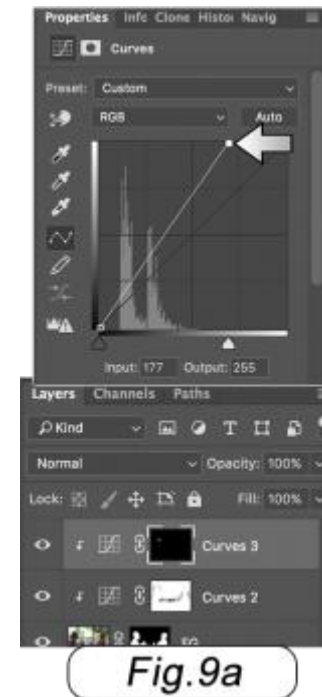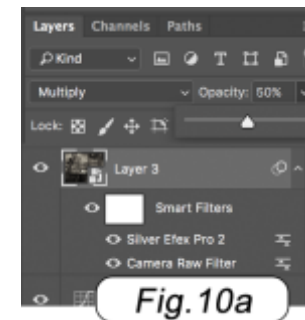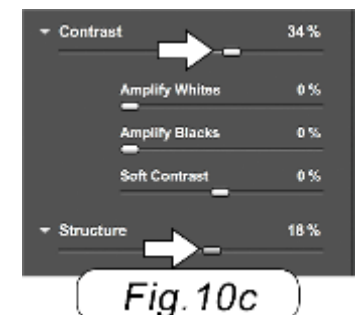

Fig.9a

Fig.9b

Fig.10a

Fig.10b

Fig.10d

Fig.10c