

MELBOURN & DISTRICT PHOTOGRAPHIC CLUB

REPLACING SKIES

(There are several ways to replace the sky from one image into another image). This Guidance shows just one way to do it although depending on the circumstances, other approaches may be used).

Background

Occasionally a good shot will be captured except that the sky on the day was a little boring (e.g., flat gray or maybe a cloudless blue) and so you may want to copy the sky from a more interesting image onto your new image.

To accomplish this technique, software such as Photoshop or Elements must be used. This cannot be achieved using Lightroom. The Guidance below shows how to do this using Photoshop and Elements.

Considerations

The success (or otherwise) of replacing a sky will depend on paying attention to the small details and the following points are worthy of consideration:

- If you choose a sky with an obvious light source (e.g. the sun) you would expect to see shadows with the appropriate directionality and contrast in the foreground scene. Either avoid or be prepared for extra work.
- If you choose a foreground with reflective surfaces (e.g. water) you would expect to see the new sky reflected in them with a degree of detail proportional to the stillness of the surface. Either avoid or be prepared for extra work.
- Any clouds in the sky will pick up the general direction of the sun even if the sun is not in the frame. This directionality should be evident in the foreground too by subtle use of the dodge and burn tools.
- After selecting and deleting the old sky the new edge may be fringed and / or too well defined and look unnatural. This can be remedied by zooming in and deleting the fringing with the eraser tool (set to 8-10% softness) and / or running over the edge with a small diameter blur tool (50% softness).
- A foreground will always subtly adopt the overall hue of the sky and it is worth experimenting with the colour balance of the foreground after replacing the sky so that it matches well. This is best done by eye – it's obvious when it's right
- Likewise, the brightness and contrast of the foreground will probably need to be adjusted to take on the light characteristics of the new sky.
- When sizing the new sky it does not have to be sized to scale. A sky is very forgiving of being stretched, especially horizontally, and may even give a more interesting / dramatic shape to any clouds present. A sky containing the sun must be sized to scale however to preserve the circular shape of the sun although a small amount of 'squashing' looks OK if the sun is low.

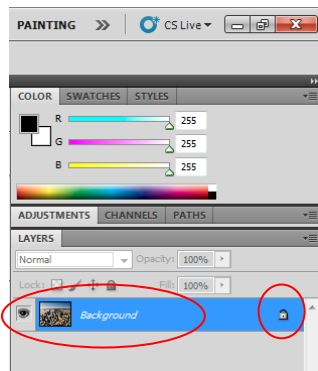
Photoshop and Elements

Open both the image you want to copy the sky from (Source Image) and also the image you want to copy the sky to (Target Image) in Photoshop or Elements. Generally, it's best if both images are in the same format (both landscape or both portrait) and that the size of the sky in both images is similar.

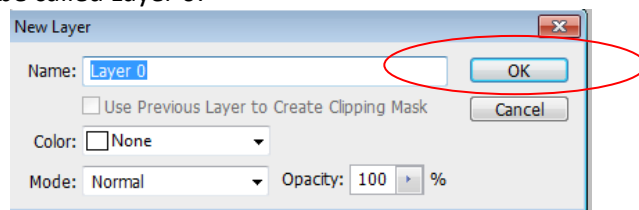
Goal: To delete the sky on this image (target image)



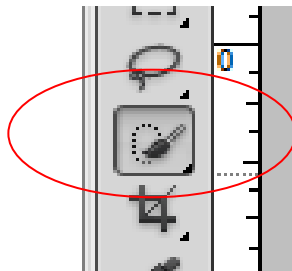
And replace with the sky in this image (source image)



First of all, the sky in the Target Image needs to be deleted. This can only be achieved after unlocking the Background Layer. In Layers Palette, double click the background layer. This dialogue box will open. Press OK. Note, the Padlock will then have gone and the single layer will be called Layer 0:

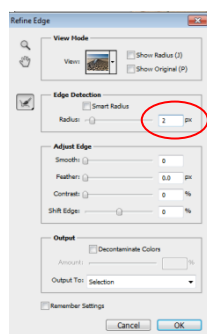


Note, in Elements you may need to hit "OK" if a convert depth dialogue box opens



Now delete the sky in your Target Image.

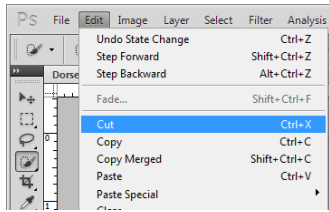
Select the sky using an appropriate Selection Tool such as the Quick Selection Tool.



Click "Refine Edge" and select a radius of about 2 pixels

In Elements use settings of:

- Smooth 4
- Feather 1
- Expand 0%

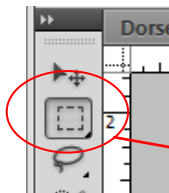


Delete the sky in the Target Image having selected it by clicking Edit>Cut

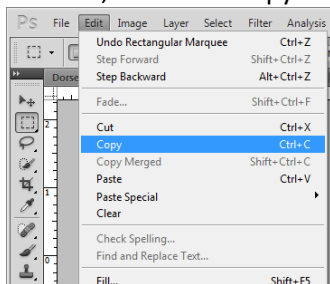


The Target Image will look like this with the previous sky now having been deleted and being transparent

In the Source Image, use the Rectangular Marquee tool to select the area of sky you want to copy to the Target Image



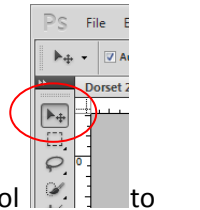
Then, click Edit>Copy



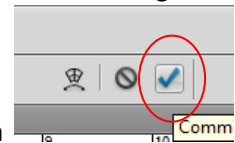


Returning to view the Target Image, Click Edit>Paste and sky from the Source Image will be pasted over the Target Image

The new sky for the Target Image will almost certainly be in the wrong place and will be the wrong size and also will be in front of the Target Image selection instead of behind it.

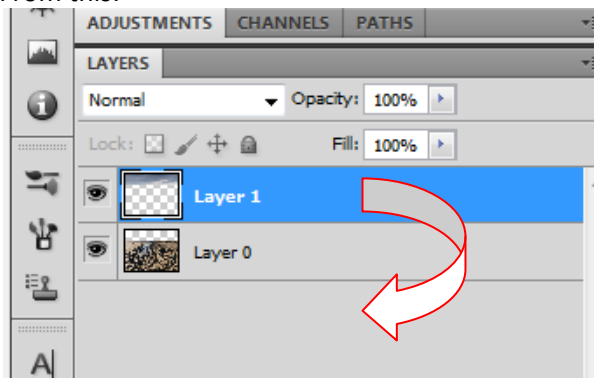


Use the Move Tool to position your sky in the correct place and size the sky from the source to be larger than the area of transparency you have created in the Target Image



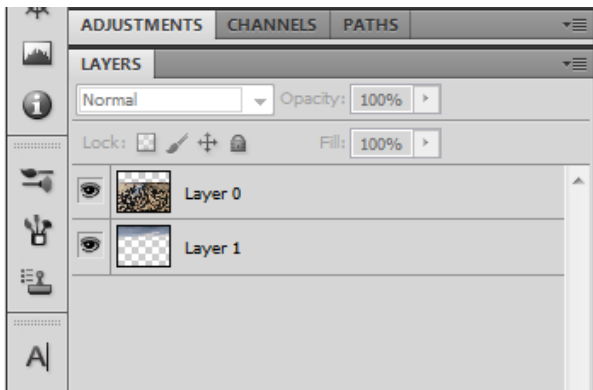
(Press Confirm

From this:



Finally, change the order of the 2 layers by dragging the sky layer to be below the original background layer

To



Final Image

Note -check where the sky now joins the land and tidy up perhaps using a little cloning, to ensure there are no halos



And finally...

If you still have questions after having read this document, please feel free to contact me directly. Telephone number 01763 230680 or e-mail: keith.truman@ntlworld.com.