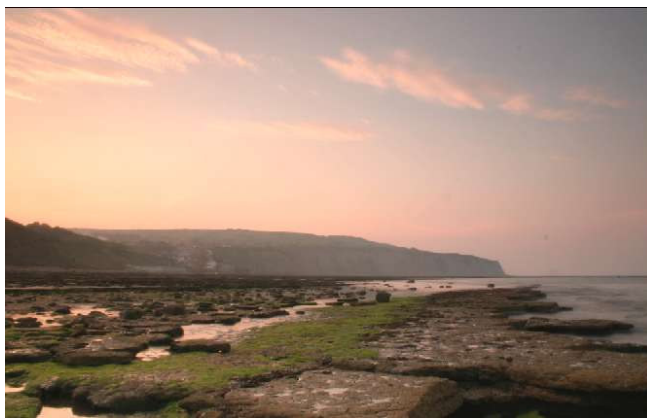


SHADOW & HIGHLIGHT

Introduction

Following a recent photographic trip with a friend we were comparing shots taken on the day. The scenes were similar but the impact of my friends' images was lessened as the colours were not as intense. The sky in my scene was an intense red whilst in his image there was only a hint of colour and the foreground was lost in shadow. The difference was not wholly accounted for in the equipment or technique but the post capture workflow. This article illustrates how a lifeless sunset was revitalised using a new Photoshop tool that is easy to overlook.

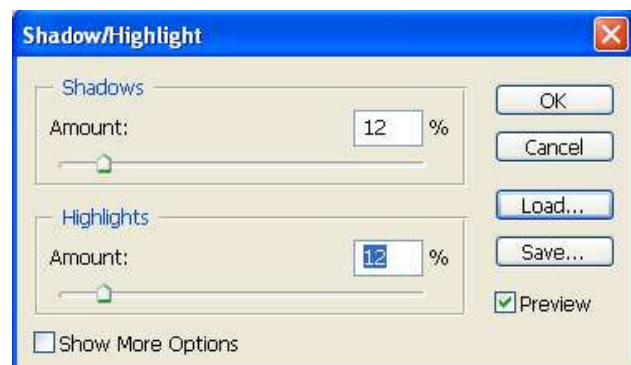
Starting Point



The starting image shown to the left has some colour but the lighting does not carry the impact that a published shot might. The steps that follow will convert this into an image that commands attention because of the lighting. This will be achieved primarily using the Shadow & Highlight tool introduced in Photoshop CS.

The steps

Having opened your image to be adjusted in Photoshop call up the "Shadow/Highlight" tool. This can be found under the "Image" drop-down menu in the "Adjustments" sub-menu. If this is the first time you have used the tool it is likely to look similar to the dialog shown on the right. Don't use the dialog in this form as it has little real impact and is difficult to control. To access the real power you need to check the "Show More Options" checkbox at the bottom left of the dialog. This causes the dialog to expand as shown below.





The dialog can be broken down into three distinct areas: Shadow, Highlights and Adjustments. You should modify each of these in turn but could well find you having to return to earlier adjustments in order to fine tune the impact. It is important not to apply the changes until you have all three sections adjusted correctly.

The Shadows section allows you to control the shadow areas of the picture (the dark tones). Detail is often lost from dark areas of images and it's easy to think that shadows are all black. Using this option you can bring out a surprising amount of hidden detail in such areas.

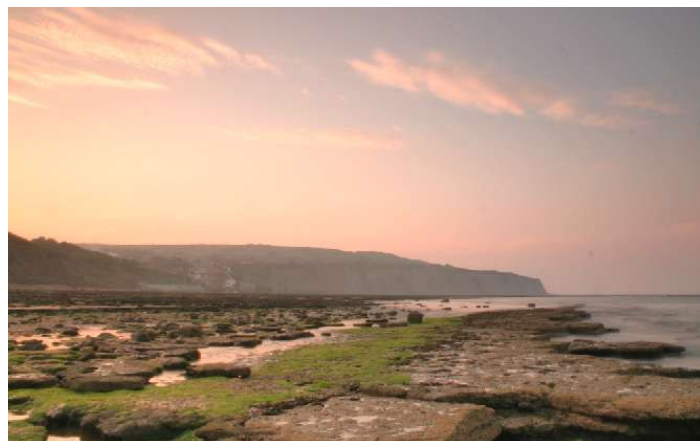
First set the tonal width with a value from 0% to 100%. This dictates what % of tones in the shadow areas are affected from 0% (none) to 100% (all tones). As you increase the tonal width you should notice more detail from the shadows is revealed. I find between 20% and 50% is a good starting point.

The next setting is Amount where you control how strong the effect is. The higher the % value then the greater the effect on the selected pixels.

The Radius setting determines the size of the area around each pixel that is affected by the changes. This can be difficult to visualise but I find it helps to think of it as controlling the contrast in the shadows. When you are lightening the shadow areas of a picture it can often lower the contrast and make the image appear flat. This setting helps you correct that. The higher the value (further right) then the greater the contrast in the shadows.

It's worth stating that there is no correct setting for these sliders as different images will be respond differently. It's best to experiment. The effects of the Shadow section can be seen on the image on the right, the shadows detail becoming more visible.

Having adjusted the Shadows it's time to adjust the highlights. The three



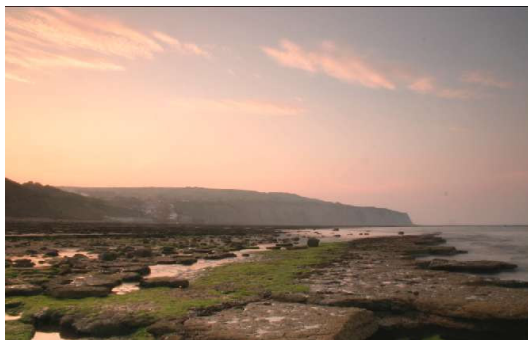
sliders work just the same under the “Highlights” section but this time adjusting the highlights in the image. Dragging the Tonal Width and Amount sliders over to the right will cause the image highlights to darken. Moving the Radius slider to the right will effectively increase the contrast in the highlight areas whilst moving it to the left will reduce it. An example of the effect is shown below.



Having adjusted the image Shadow and Highlights you can move on to modify the “Color Correction” and “Midtone Contrast”. The “Midtone Contrast” can be used to increase or decrease the amount of contrast in the image mid-tones. This can be useful as it helps even the contrast across the entire tonal range. The “Color Correction” setting is not quite as obvious. You will find

that dragging this over to the right increases the saturation in the image. The example image is shown to above right with both the contrast and correction having been adjusted.

The final step may be to balance the colours in the image using colour balance and then to add sharpening. A comparison between the starting and finishing images is shown below. As you can see there is a substantial difference in the impact, although the final shot may not be to all tastes.



Final Tips

- There are no exact settings to achieve the best results. Each image should be adjusted individually. This is more art than science.
- Where possible perform the adjustment using a 16bit colour depth. When you adjust 8bit images there is a tendency for banding to occur in large areas of solid colour e.g. the sky.
- This technique works well with black and white images but you will find the “Color Correction” slider has no effect and the Midtone Contrast slider changes to Lightness.
- If you want to work on the Shadows and Highlights only in the least destructive way for your image, first convert to Lab mode and then apply the change to just the lightness channel.