

SCRAPPER'S GUIDE

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Sky Drama (Photoshop)

Tip of the Week by Jan Walker on November 29, 2011

I love photographing the sky. Some days, when conditions are just right, there's that beautiful blue expanse, punctuated with big, white, fluffy clouds.

Whenever I see a spectacular sky, I always try to stop and get a few shots of it... even if the scenery below isn't all that special. Why? I collect good skies to replace the bad ones in some of my photos.

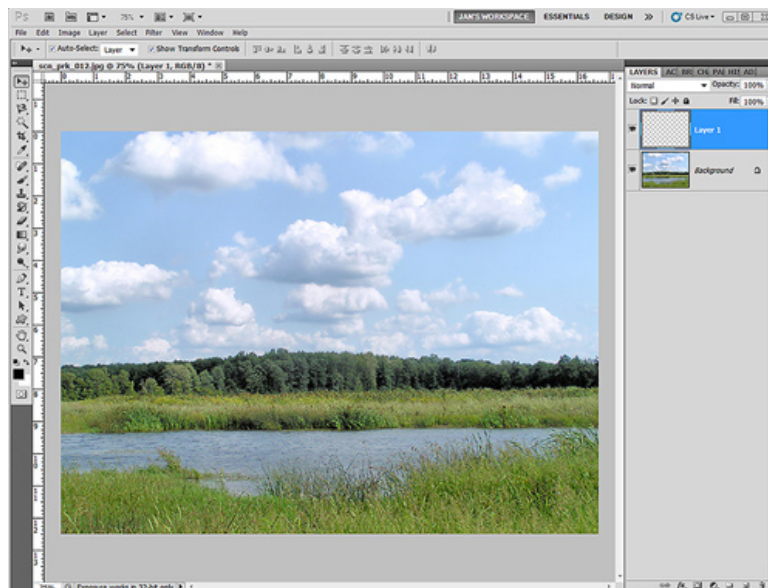


But sometimes it isn't practical, or even necessary, to totally replace the sky in an image. Maybe you've already got the clouds, and a bit of blue, but the sky just seems a little pale and washed out. And sometimes, even a pretty nice looking sky can benefit from just a little boost. You've heard the phrase, "high drama"... well, what about "sky drama?"

Here's a two-step trick to improve the look of so-so skies in your photos!

Step 1: Choose Your Photo

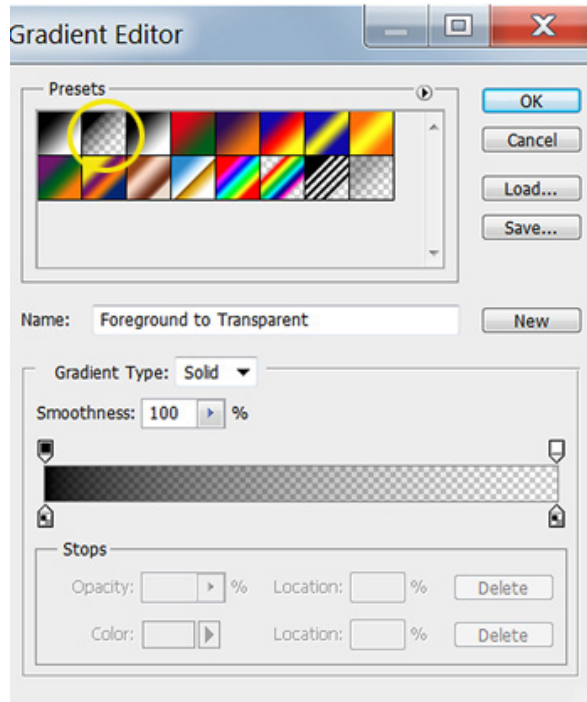
- Open the image you want to work with.
- At the bottom of the Layers panel, click on the Create A New Layer icon.



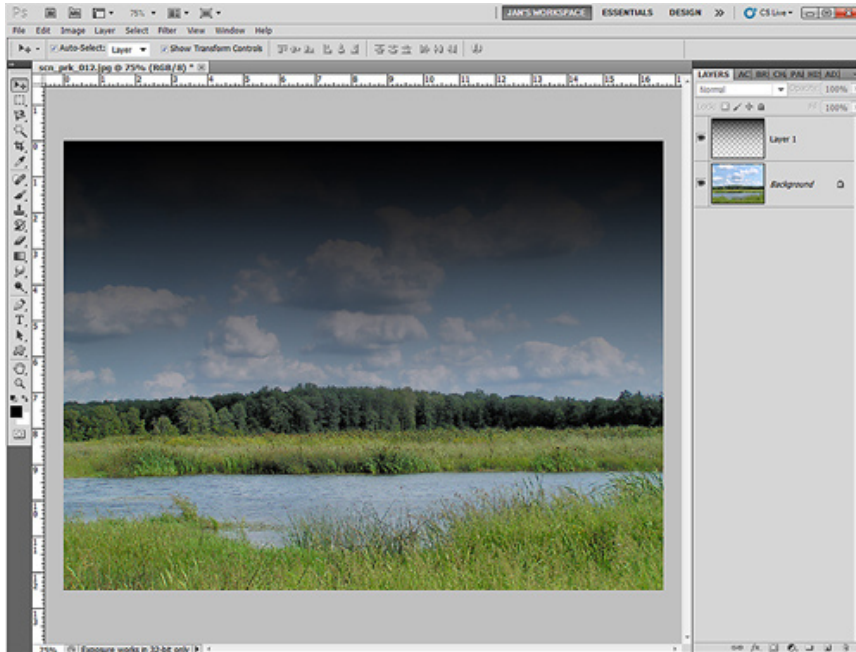
Step 2: Enhance The Sky

- With the new, blank layer selected, take a look at your Color Chips to make sure they're in their default position of black over white. If they're not, press the letter D on your keyboard.

- Get the Gradient tool (it's grouped with the Paint Bucket). In the Options Bar, open the Gradient Picker and choose Foreground to Transparent Gradient. Set the Style to Linear (it's the first style next to the Gradient picker in the Options Bar.)



- Hold down the Shift key and click and drag a straight line down the center of your image, extending from the top of your photo to about an inch to an inch-and-a-half below the point where your sky stops.



- In the Layers panel, set the blend mode to Soft Light. Take a look and see if that makes a significant change in the look of your sky. It usually will.
- If you like what you see, you're done! If you think the sky could use a bit more color and drama, use the Overlay blend mode, as I did here, and then adjust the opacity down until the sky looks natural. I set my opacity at 75%.



- When you're satisfied with your sky, press Ctrl E (Mac: Cmd E) to merge the gradient layer down.

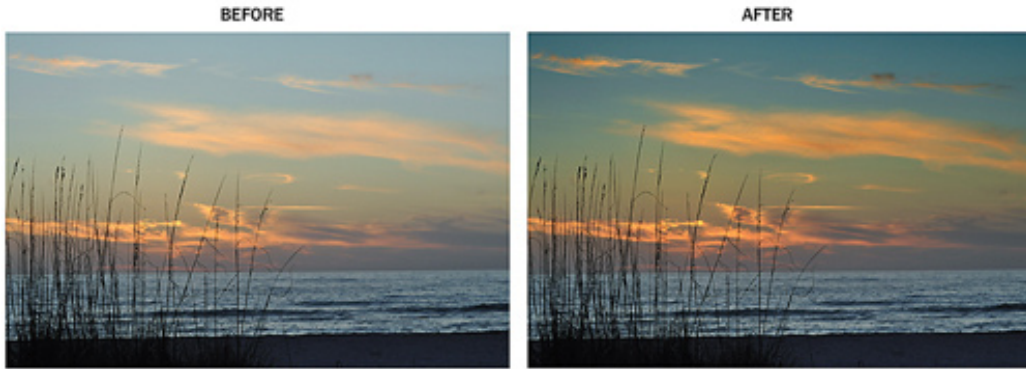
Reality Check: The key word here is “natural.” Resist the urge to over-saturate the sky. If you go with too much color, you'll steal attention away from the actual focal point of your image, so blend wisely and adjust the opacity as needed.



This technique works well on landscapes, seascapes, or any other image with a fairly dominant sky. It works very nicely to enhance rainbows and sunsets, too! Take a look...



and



As you can see, this is a handy little technique that can make the difference between a good photo and a great one. Add it to your photo editing repertoire and use it often! And don't forget to share your creations in our [Tip of the Week Gallery](#).

Credits:

Tip of the Week: Sky Drama by Jan Walker

Photos: Morguefile.com, Jan Walker

Software used: Photoshop Elements CS5



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