

This rather unique layering method allows for controllable 'soft' focus and skin-tone rendering. It is not a purpose made face rendering tool therefore twiggig in colour and exposure need to be done throughout excersize, I find it a lot more pleasing than third party professional portrait rendering plug-ins and programs.



Flaming city. Photo: Hein Waschefort



This method does not allow for structural reshaping of the face, which is a practice I try to avoid, unless it is done in an extreme manner to create an altered reality image. This 'selective soft focus' method can be used with a great variety of genres, and not only with portraits, as seen with **Flaming City** before on left and after above.

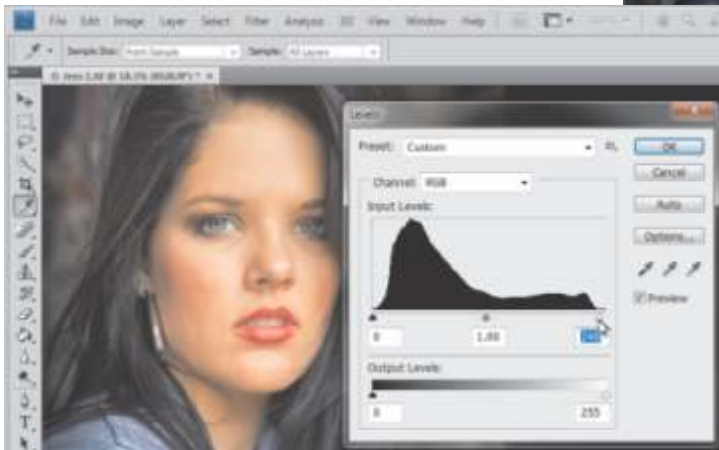
## step 1

**Basic editing of RAW photo is done in Lightroom, exported as TIFF and opened in Photoshop.**

I always go to **Image - Adjustments - Levels** and adjust graph to check that no clippinaccures and to adjust the light and dark slider to have a true dark to light output level. I do this with all photos I open in Photoshop before I attempt any other editing.



Source photo: *Jessica Scott*  
Canon 6D - EF24-70 f/4L: 1/50sec  
- f5.6 - 70 - ISO 200 - no flash (on location)  
Photo: Hein Waschefort



step 2

Tick **Window - Layers** to open Layers menu box.

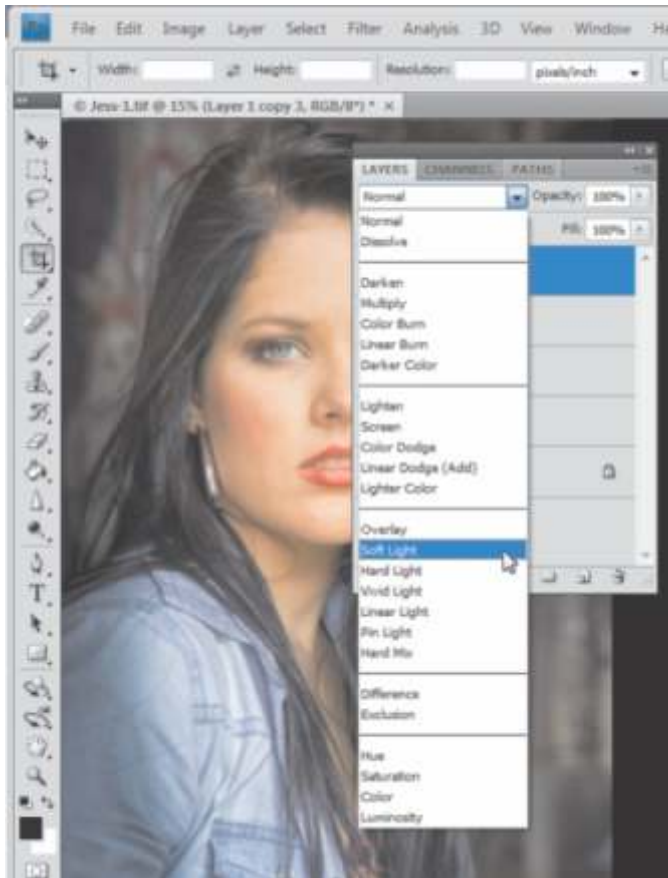
With Background highlighter (in blue) Hit **ctrl + j** four times to create 4 new layers.

With top layer (Layer 1 copy 3) selected click on the arrow next to **Normal** on the drop-down menu and select **Soft Light**.

The portrait will now appear more contrasty with a little reddish colour shift.



**TIP: I do not remove skin blemishes before 'soft focus' editing, some blemishes will disappear during editing and others hardly noticeable which makes the portrait more natural. Bad blemishes can be removed as a final step.**



step 3

In Layers box select **Layer 1 copy 2** (second from top).  
Go to **Filter - Blur - Gaussian Blur...** and click.  
In the Gaussian Blur box make sure the Preview option is ticked.

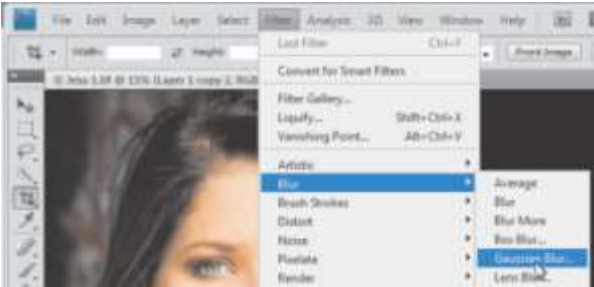


For the next action do not look at the image in the blur box but rather the original image on the Photoshop desktop.

Move the radius slider to the right: as you move the slider the portrait will start to appear out of focus and then slowly become milky with focus reappearing.



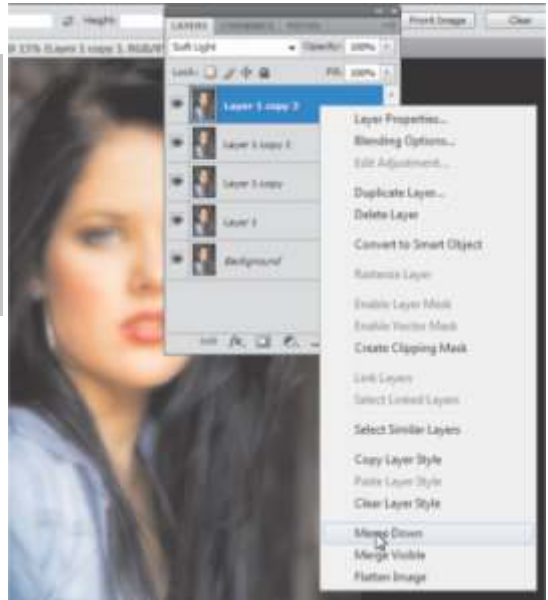
In my case working with a 38mb file in RGB the slider set at 40 (pixels) looked good. This position will differ depending on file size, mode and personal choice, experimentation is the key.



step 4

Right click on **Layer 1 copy 3** (top layer) and click on **Merge down**.  
Alternatively you can select the top two layers by holding shift in and then right click to choose **Merge Layers**.

Now double click on wording '**Layer 1 Copy 3**' (this layer must be highlighted in blue) and rewrite as '**Soft Focus**'.



## step 5

**Now the fun begins...**

With Soft focus layer selected Enlarge image.

Click on **Eraser tool** on toolbox on left or press **E** on key-board.

Menu bar above image should be set to **Mode: Brush - Opacity: 100% - Flow:100%**.

Set size of brush to a size slightly smaller than the eye, size changes by pressing - [ - for smaller brush and - ] - for bigger brush.

Make sure **caps lock** is not on or you will not get a circle eraser icon.

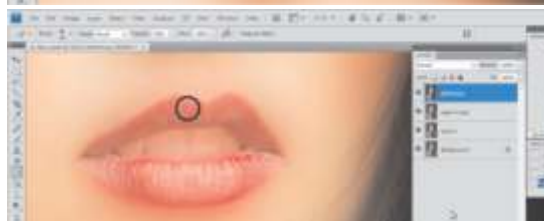
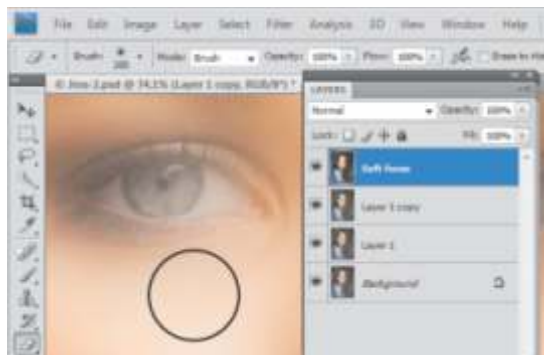
Slowly erase pupil, iris and eyeball also touching eye-lashes of both eyes.

When there are strong red veins the best option is to desaturate them with the **Sponge Tool** in left hand toolbox.

Set Opacity: 50% at top and with a smallish eraser erase the lips and avoid touching skin around lips.

Right click on **Soft focus** layer and **Merge Down**.

Again double click on writing Layer 1 copy and name it **Soft focus new**.



## step 6

Should you be happy with eye and lip colours of previous step this step can be ignored.

Click on eye icon next to **Soft focus new** layer to hide the layer.

Click on **Layer 1** below **Soft focus new** layer to highlight it in blue.

Go to **Image - Adjustments - Hue/Saturation...** (shortcut is **ctrl U**).

Now really push saturation up with **Saturation**: slider, I pushed it to +50 click **OK**.

Click on **Soft focus new** layer and icon on left to make Eye appear (unhide layer).

Choose eraser tool and set to **Opacity: 100%**. With small circle only erase colour of eye (iris), do not touch skin. Set **Opacity: 20%** and do lips (the % may vary with images and personal choice).

Right click on layer and merge down.



## step 7

Now you can really have fun and be creative with what you would like to have soft or sharp.

Notice the nice ambient colour reflections on the ear ring which is almost impossible to get when shooting in a studio, I used a 50% opacity to erase in the hear, erasing repeatedly of course decreases the opacity logarithmically. Below the source (detail) and on right the result.



You can go to [www.vsscreative.com](http://www.vsscreative.com) click on **free tutorials** and download the sample images used in the Photoshop tutorials this year if you wish to practice the tutorials with samples as printed in Image.

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