

Mastering Photoshop Layers

Lesson 4: Compositing Images, Smart Objects, Watermarks

Now that you're an old hand at layers, let's have some fun with them to see what kind of tricks are possible. To start out with this week, I'm going to use elements from different images to make a final image that is much stronger than the original.

I shot this image on a gray and rainy day (surprise!) in Washington. In order to get a bit of detail on the inside of the garage I overexposed the shot – not a big deal since there's nothing of interest in the sky to begin with (Figure 1).



Figure 1

After opening it in Lightroom, I did some developing magic to add a bit more drama to the scene, which you can see in Figure 2. But, this didn't do a thing for me sky wise, and in fact made it a little worse due to the extreme processing I did.



Figure 2

What to do? Anytime I'm out shooting I grab interesting elements that might be useful on their own or as part of another image. I have a folder full of sky and cloud photos that would be ideal to use here. I selected the image shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3

With both images open in Photoshop, it's time to begin the masking process. Select the garage image and duplicate the background layer by dragging it onto the new layer button in the Layer palette (Figure 4).

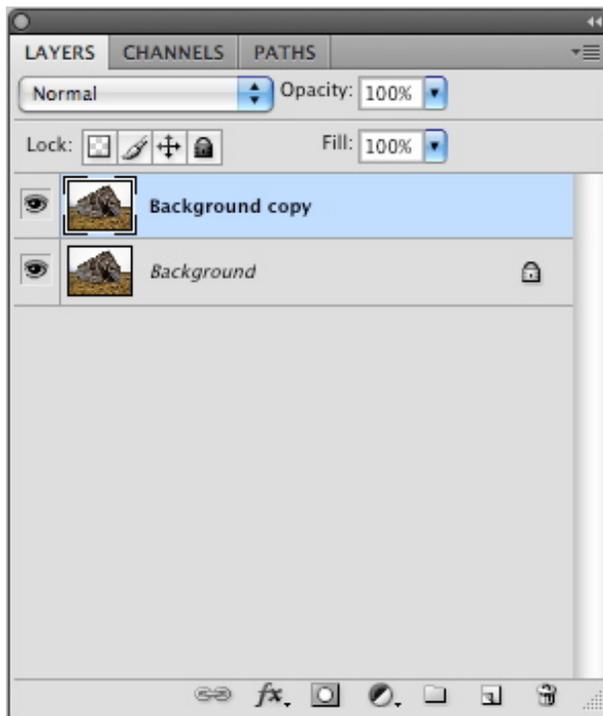


Figure 4

Next we need to mask out the sky area. There are a couple of ways to do this, and while the easiest might seem to be the Quick Select tool, this will leave some of the white areas in the roof slats behind. So for this selection, I'm going to use the Color Range option. Choose Select > Color Range. In the Color Range dialog box, move the Fuzziness slider down to about 7 to keep the selections smaller (larger number select a wider range of color values), and click on the center eye dropper with a + sign (Figure 5).

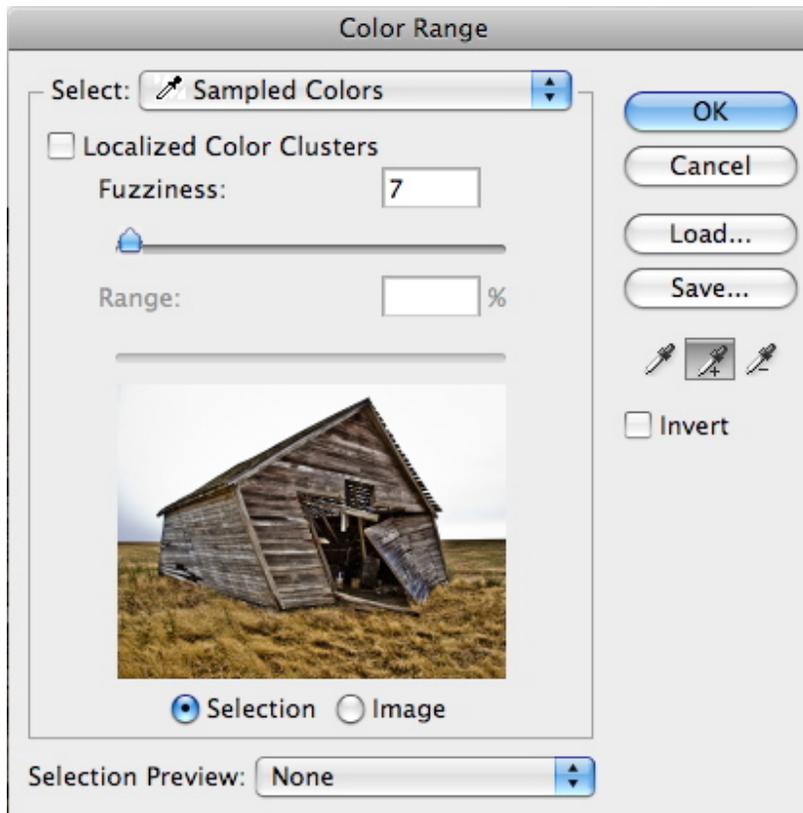


Figure 5

This eye dropper lets you select more than one area to expand the selection. You can click on the preview area in the Color Range dialog box, or you can click directly on the image to sample colors that will be selected. You'll need to select several locations to get all of the color area until you have a preview that looks like Figure 6.

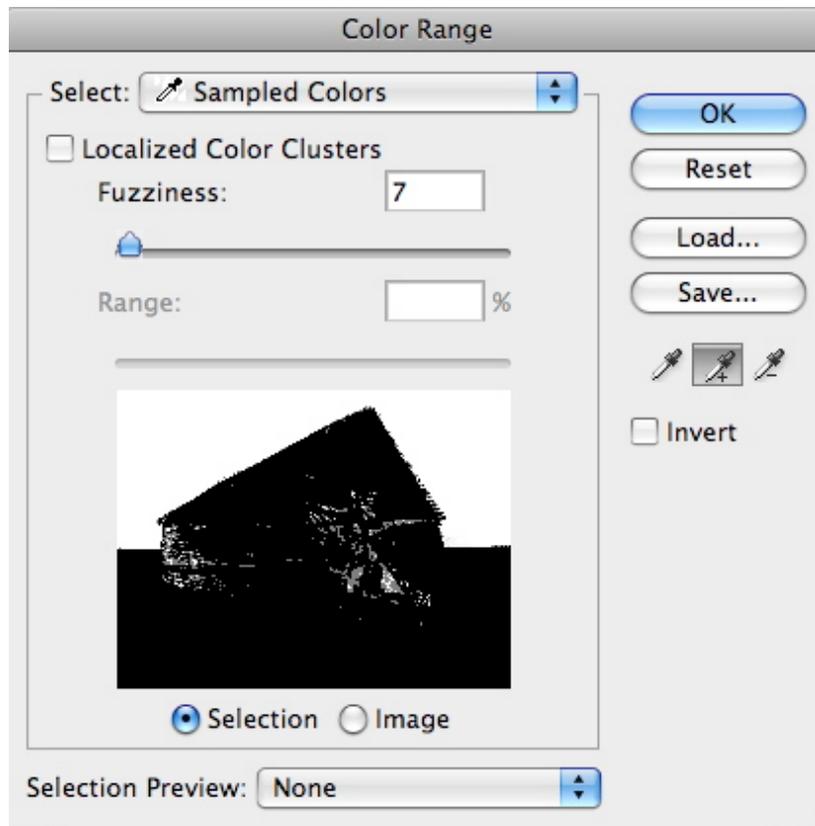


Figure 6

Click OK to close the dialog and make your selection (Figure 7). You can see that there are extra areas selected that we don't want to include in the mask, so use the Quick Select tool and while holding down the Alt/Option key, click on those areas to deselect them. My final selection looks like Figure 8. Don't worry too much if it isn't perfect – because we're using a mask, we can make adjustments if needed.



Figure 7



Figure 8

Now we need to invert the selection so that the garage and ground are selected. Choose **Select > Inverse**. (In case you're wondering why I didn't just select the ground and garage to begin with, I typically select the easiest to define areas and then invert if needed – it makes the selections faster and cleaner).

With this selection, click on the **Mask** button in the Layers palette (Figure 9) to create a mask of the garage.

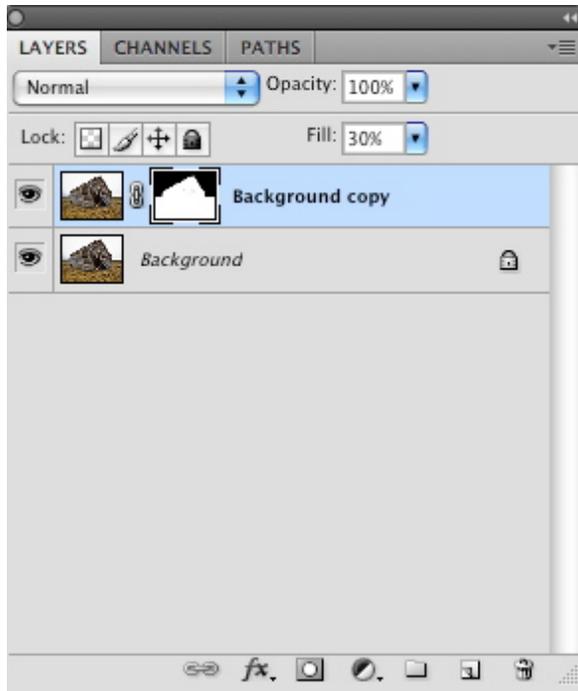


Figure 9

Now select the clouds file by choosing **Select > All** and copy it (Command/Control+C). Next, paste it onto the garage photo (Control/Command+V). Your image should now look like Figure 10.

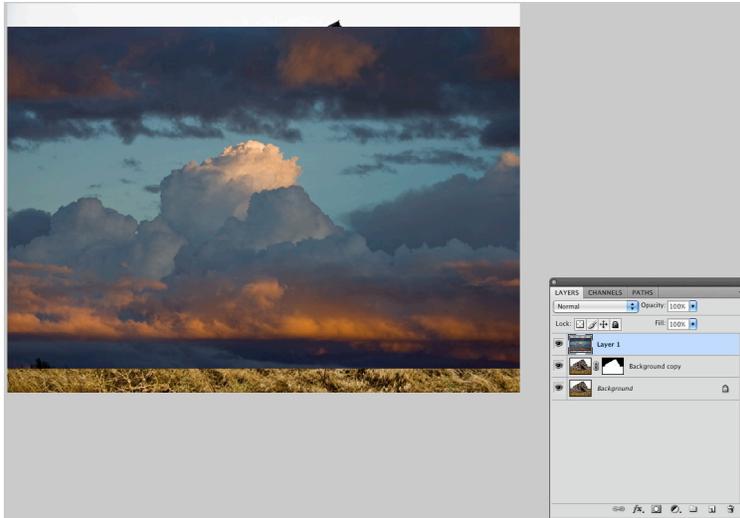


Figure 10

Next, drag the mask layer in the Layers palette to the top of the layers list to bring the garage forward (Figure 11).

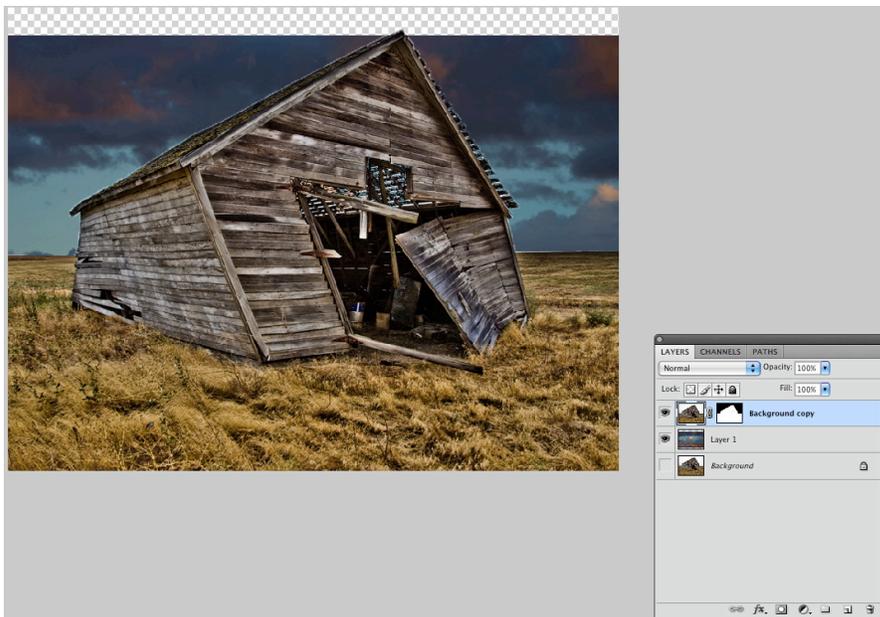


Figure 11

It might seem easier to just copy the garage layer onto the clouds layer, and in some ways it is. But, this fixes the cloud layer in place – you can't make adjustments to the positioning. By going the direction I used here, I can drag the clouds around on the image until I get the placement where I want it (figure 12).



Figure 12

Now that the sky is in position, it's time to do some cleanup work. If you look at the roof line and the horizon, you'll see that the two layers don't blend together well. This is easy to fix with the paint brush tool. With the garage layer selected, choose the paint brush tool and set the foreground color to black. Now paint the area that you want to be transparent in order to let the sky show through. If you paint too much, just change back to white and paint over it again. This is much more flexible than using the eraser tool.

The final result will look something like Figure 13. (The files used for this portion of the lesson are online for downloading).



Figure 13

Placing Multiple Images

One of the other examples used on the course description page is a four image composite of shots from Yellowstone (Figure 14).

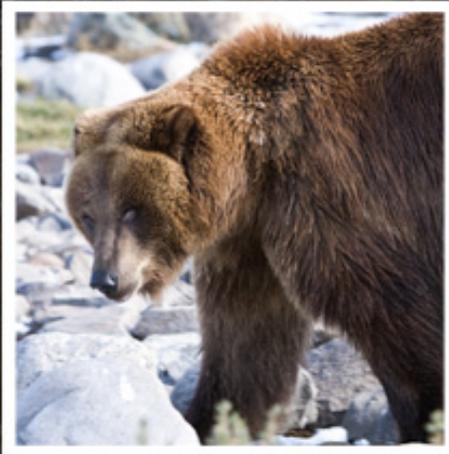
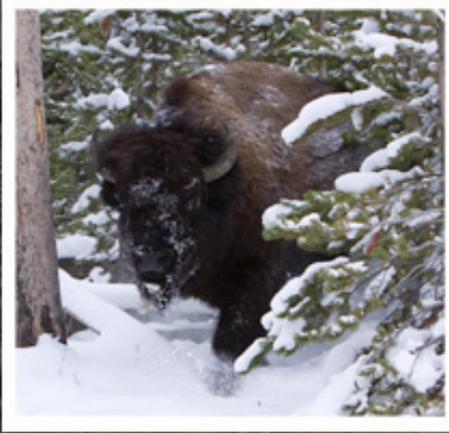


Figure 14

In order to create this image, I used a couple of techniques we've already covered, including layer styles to add a stroke around each image. Let's build on this to enhance it even further.

Start by opening all of the images you'll be working with. For the bison, wolf, and bear, I want to crop the images down to a square. Select each image and choose the Crop tool. In the control bar (Figure 15), enter 4 for width and height and then crop your image as you want it to look. Repeat this for each of the three images.



Figure 15

Next, copy (Select All, Copy) each image and paste it into the background image – in my case the waterfall (Figure 16).

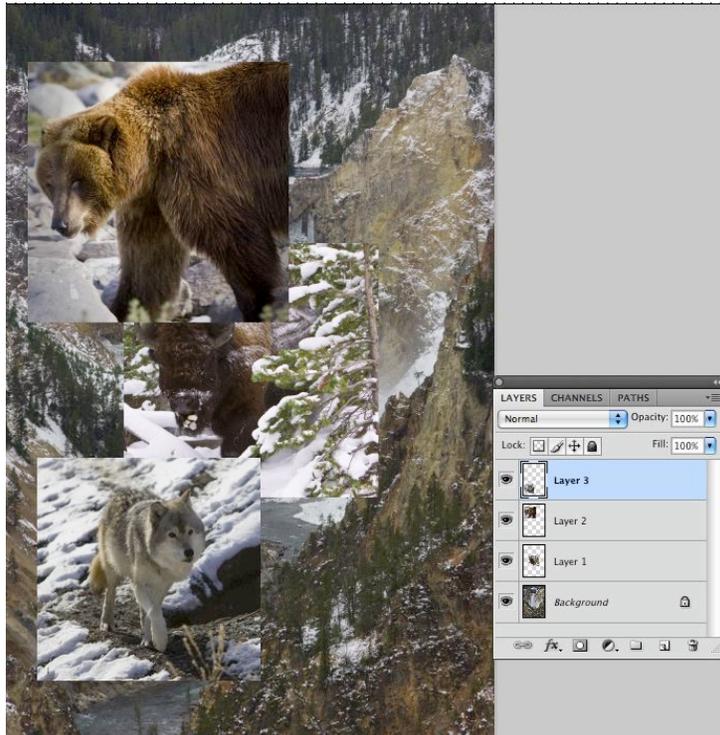


Figure 16

The images are actually larger than I want for this particular composition, but we can fix that easily. Select all three copied layers (Figure 17).

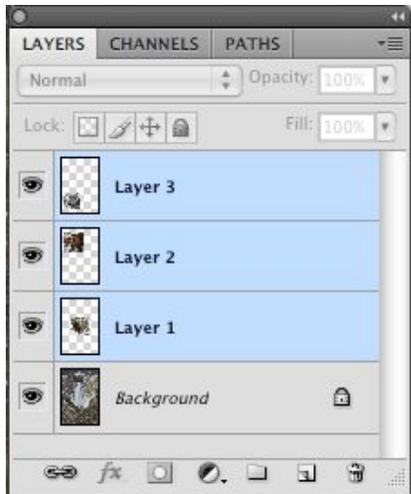


Figure 17

Choose Edit > Transform > Scale and drag one of the corner handles until you get the size you want (Hold the Shift key down to keep the aspect ratio the same). All three layers will be sized together, keeping them the same size – much easier than doing this a layer at a time!



Figure 18

Next I want to position the images on the pages, so I'll select each layer and move it into rough position like you see in Figure 19.

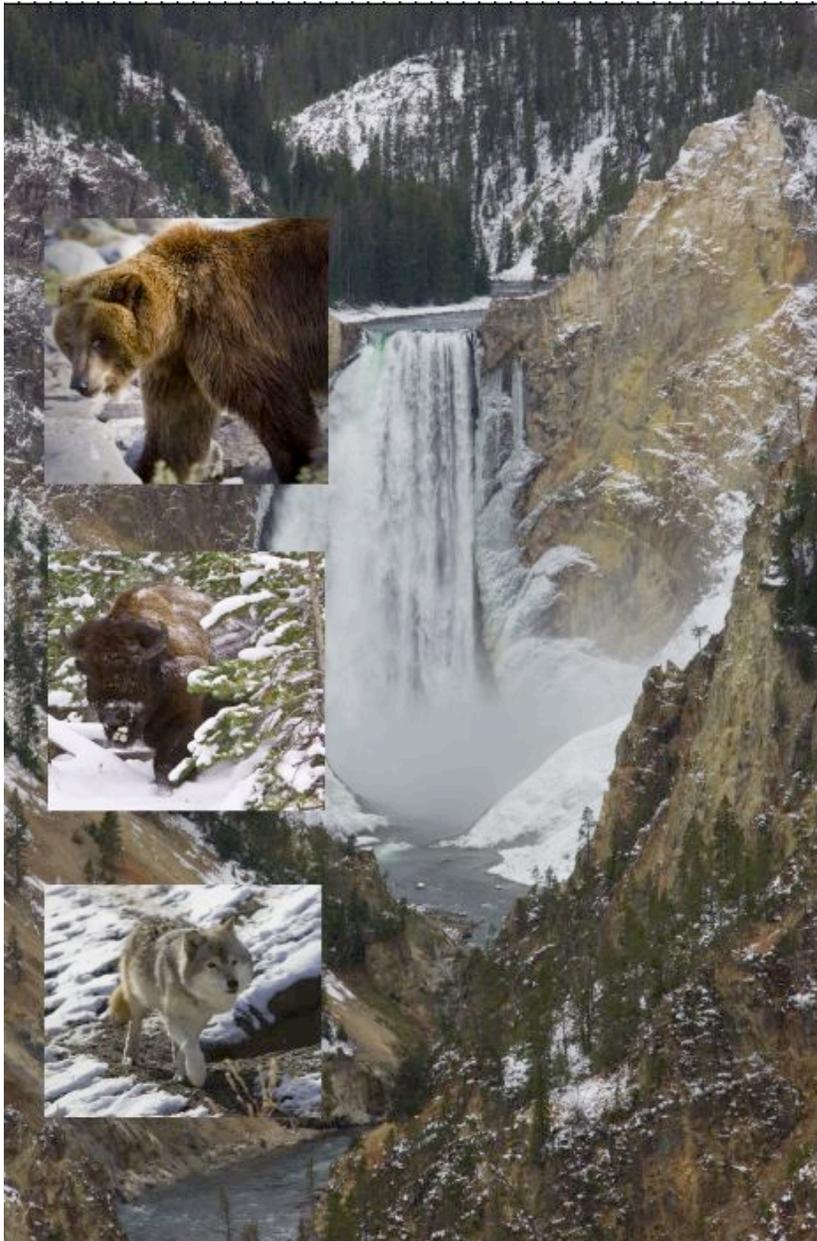


Figure 19

Select all three image layers. With the Move tool selected, you'll see alignment options in the control bar (Figure 20). I want to align the left edges and make the layers equally distant, so click on the Align Left Edges and then the Distribute Vertical Centers (see the highlighted buttons in Figure 20).



Figure 20

With the layers positioned, I use the Layer Styles to add a stroke (Figure 21) and inner shadow (Figure 22) to each image to help them stand out from the background.

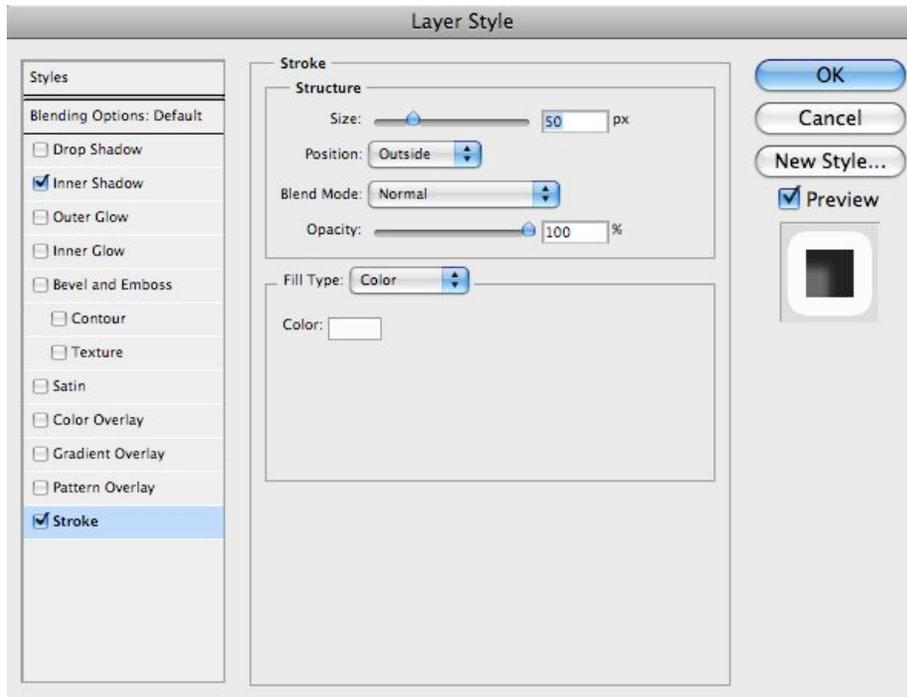


Figure 21

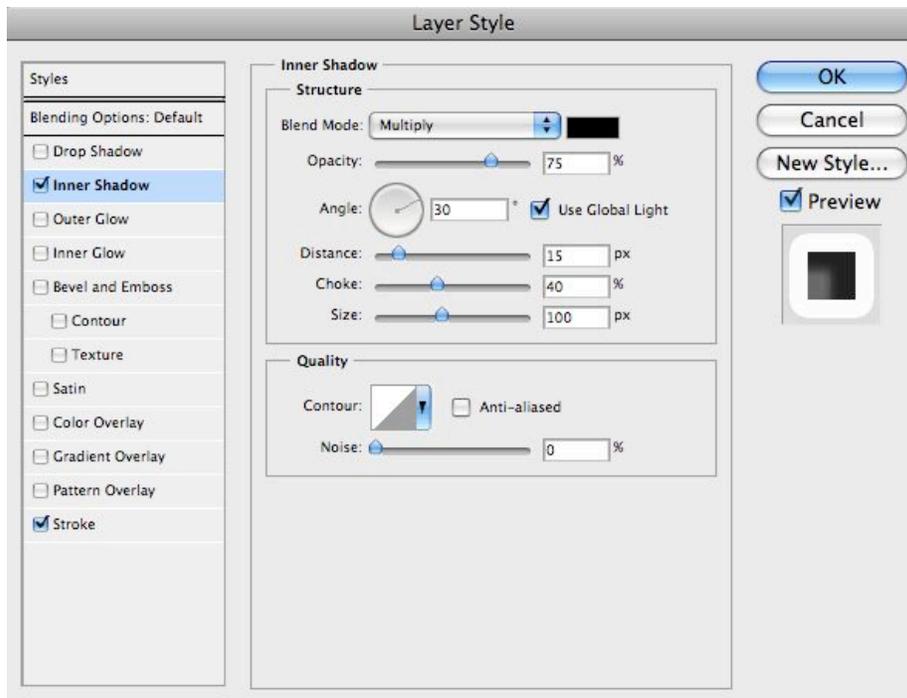


Figure 22

Repeat this for each of the other two layers and your image will look like the one shown in Figure 23. Hint – you can do this very easily by holding the Alt/Option key down and dragging the fx icon to the other layers.



Figure 23

To finish this up, I want to add some text to the right side of the frame. I'll select the Vertical Type tool by clicking on the T button in the toolbar until the pop-up list of options is displayed, and then select the Vertical Type option.

After selecting a font that works for my layout, I type in Yellowstone. I used the Scale command (Edit > Transform > Scale) to make some minor adjustments to the size and width of the text (Figure 24).



Figure 24

Set the blend mode of the text layer to Screen, causing the text to drop out of the image. We're going to fix that up next.

Next, click on Layer Style and choose Drop shadow. Change the angle and distance to work for your image (Figure 25). Select Inner Glow (Figure 26) with a blend mode of Screen, Bevel and Emboss (Figure 27), Satin (Figure 28), and Stroke (Figure 29).

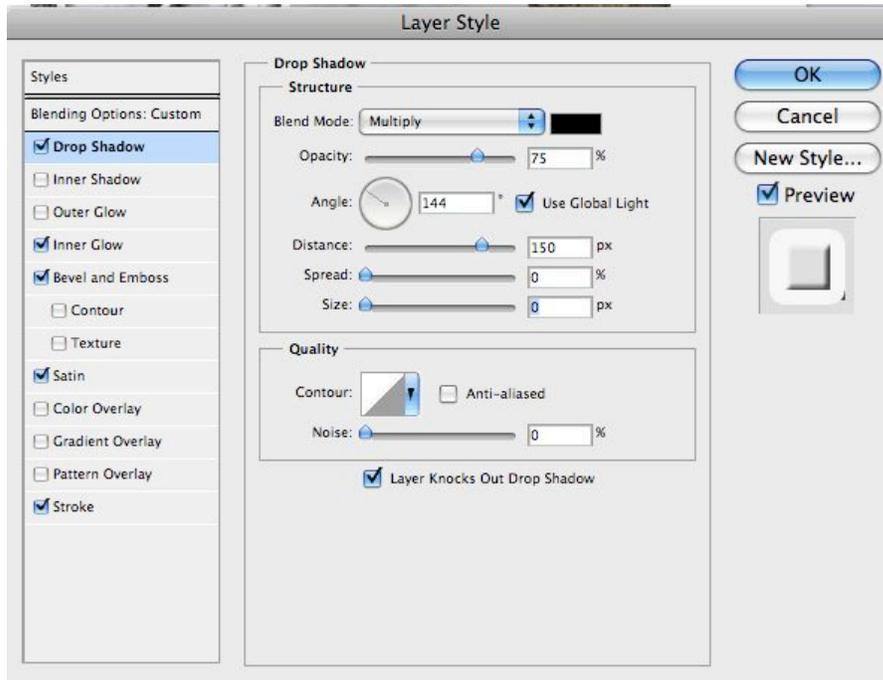


Figure 25

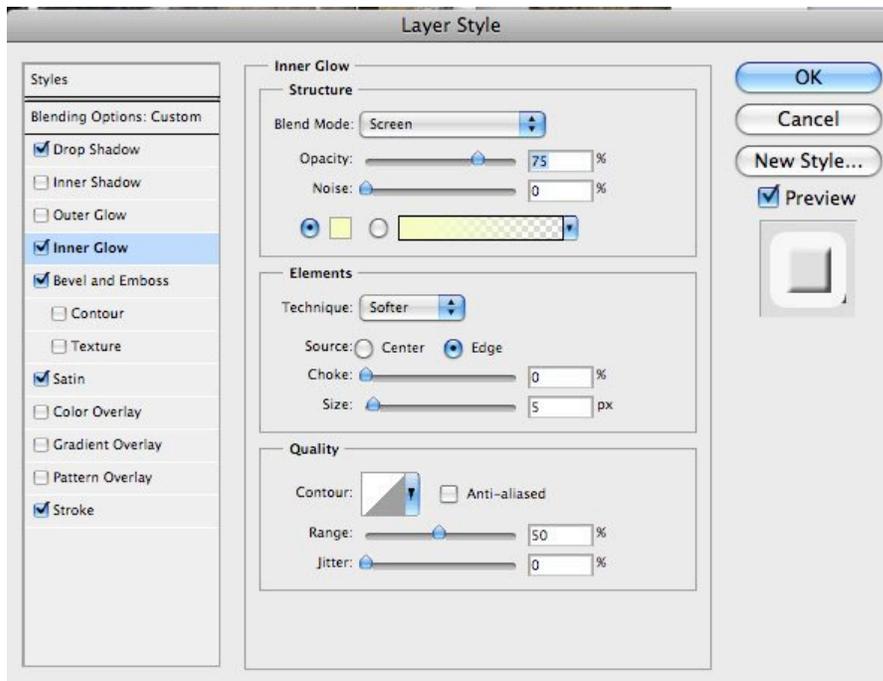


Figure 26

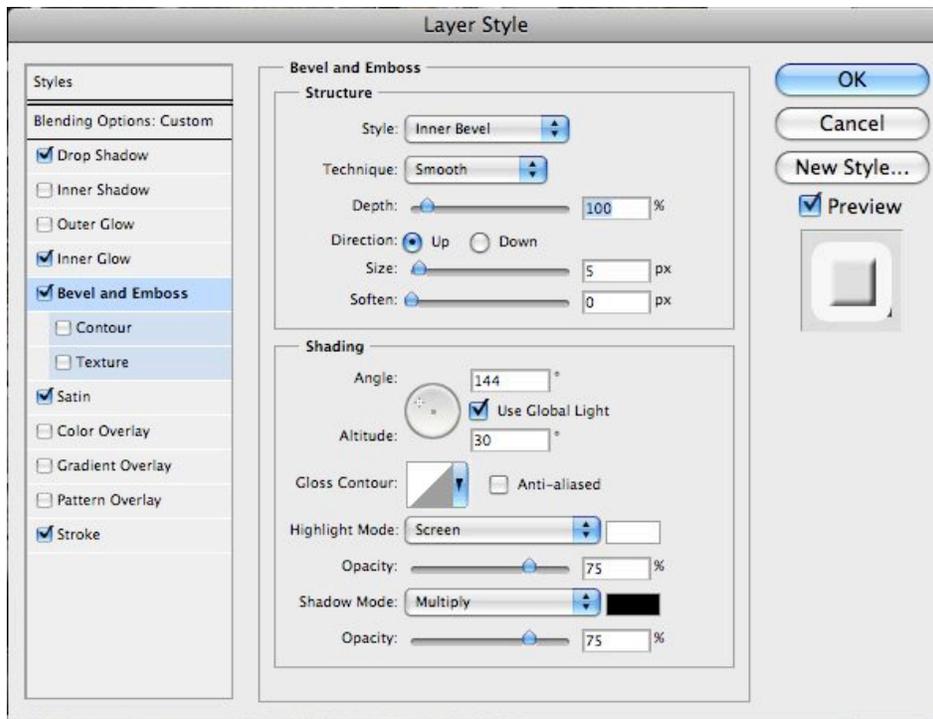


Figure 27

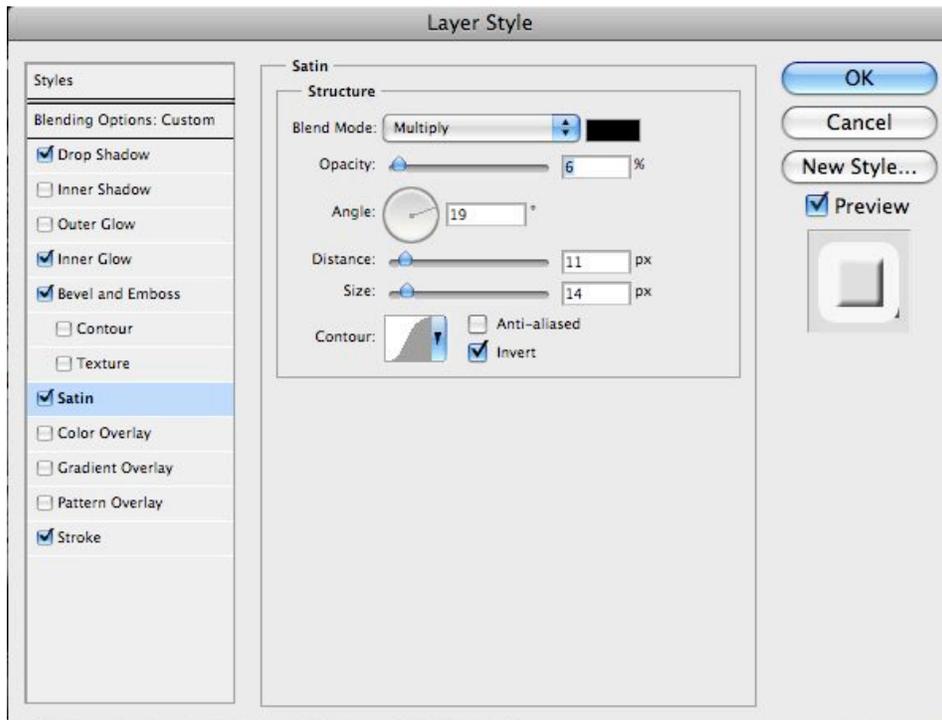


Figure 28

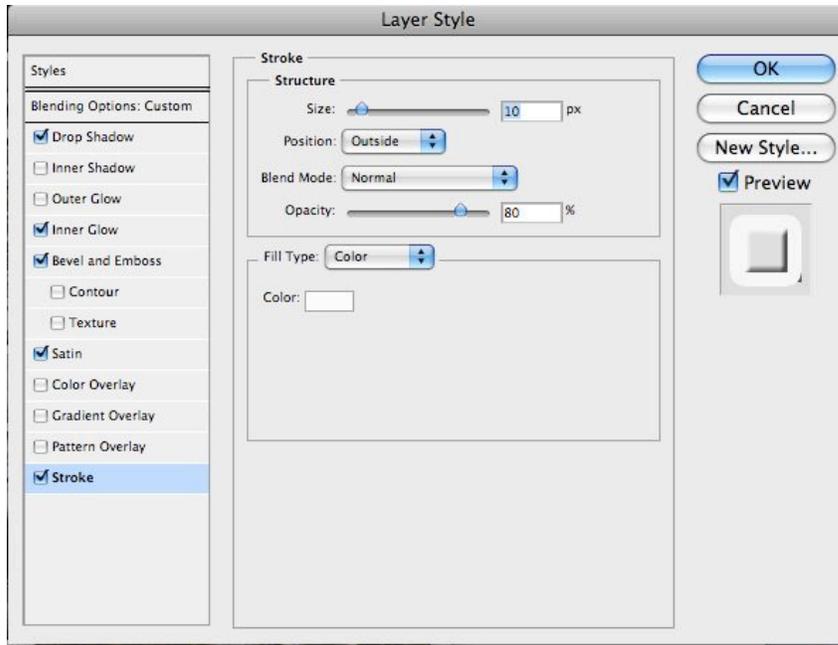


Figure 29

Here's the final image:



Figure 30

Smart Objects

Smart Objects are a way of applying adjustments that allows you to go back and make further adjustments later – similar to adjustment layers, but for filters. You can either start with your file as a smart object by selecting File > Open as Smart Object, or if your image is already open, right click on the layer in the Layer palette and choose Convert to Smart Object. The thumbnail in the Layers palette will show a new icon (Figure 31).



Figure 31

Where smart filters come into play is the ability to make an infinite number of changes with no image degradation at all – sort of like working with a RAW file!

The other advantage to smart objects is the ability to replace the contents in the object, making them great for template use. Let's see how this works with a card. I'm going to use the same images from the previous example. Follow the same steps, but on each layer, right click on the layer and choose Convert to Smart Object (Figure 32).

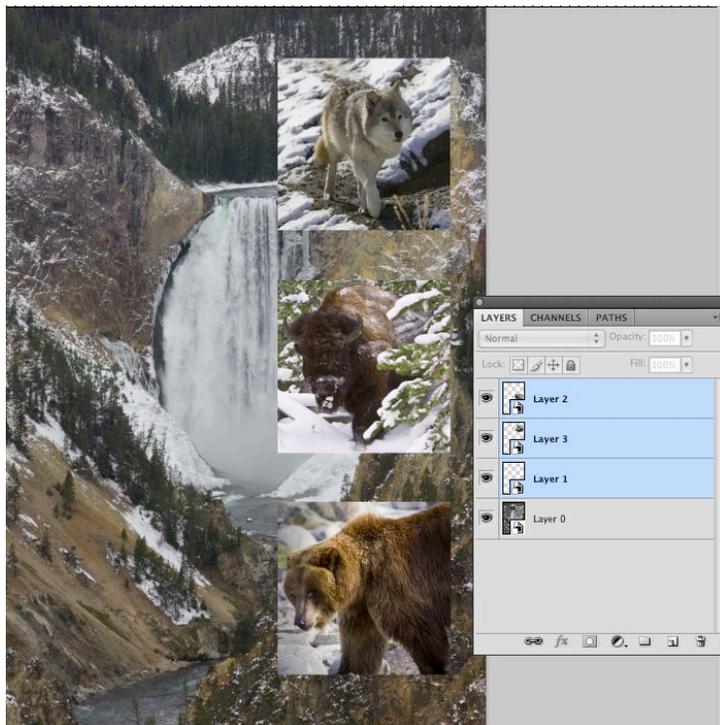


Figure 32

Select Layer 0 and add a levels adjustment layer. I want to lighten the background layer to soften the look for the next steps (Figure 33).

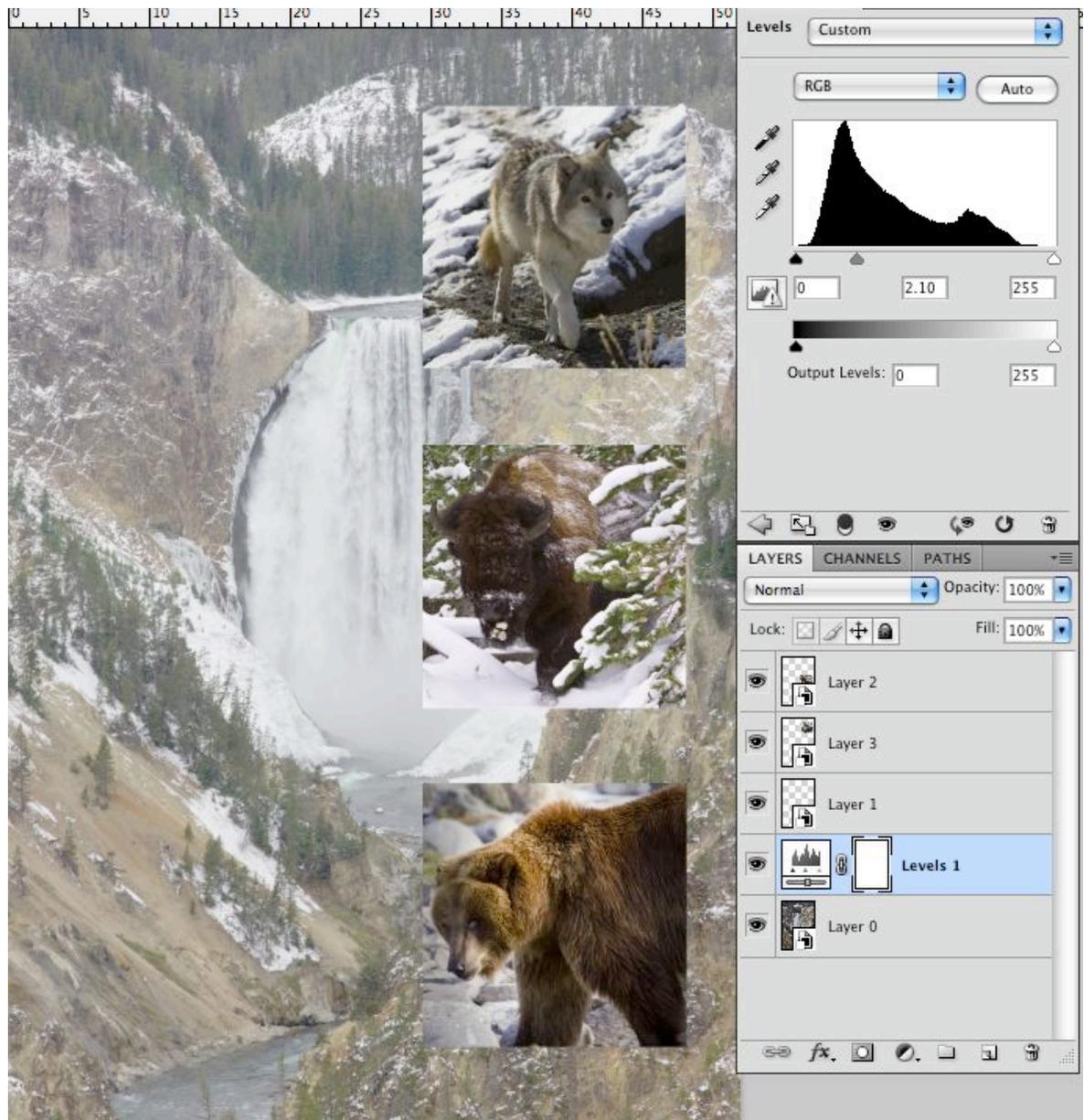


Figure 33

The next step is to add a shape layer with a white fill. On this layer I'll use a Layer Style to add a stroke to the shape. Finally, reduce the fill on the layer to about 40% to allow the background to show through (Figure 34).

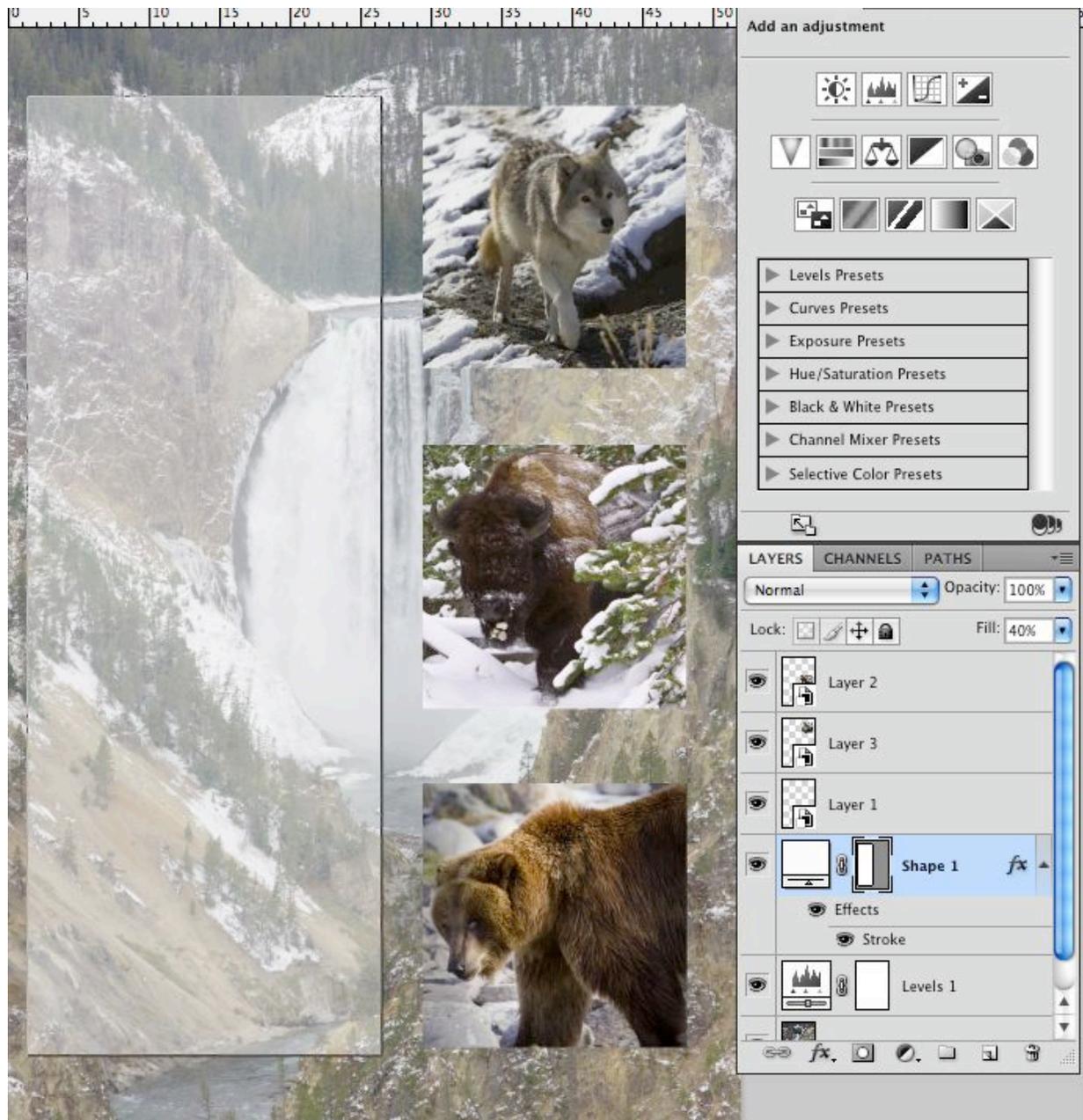


Figure 34

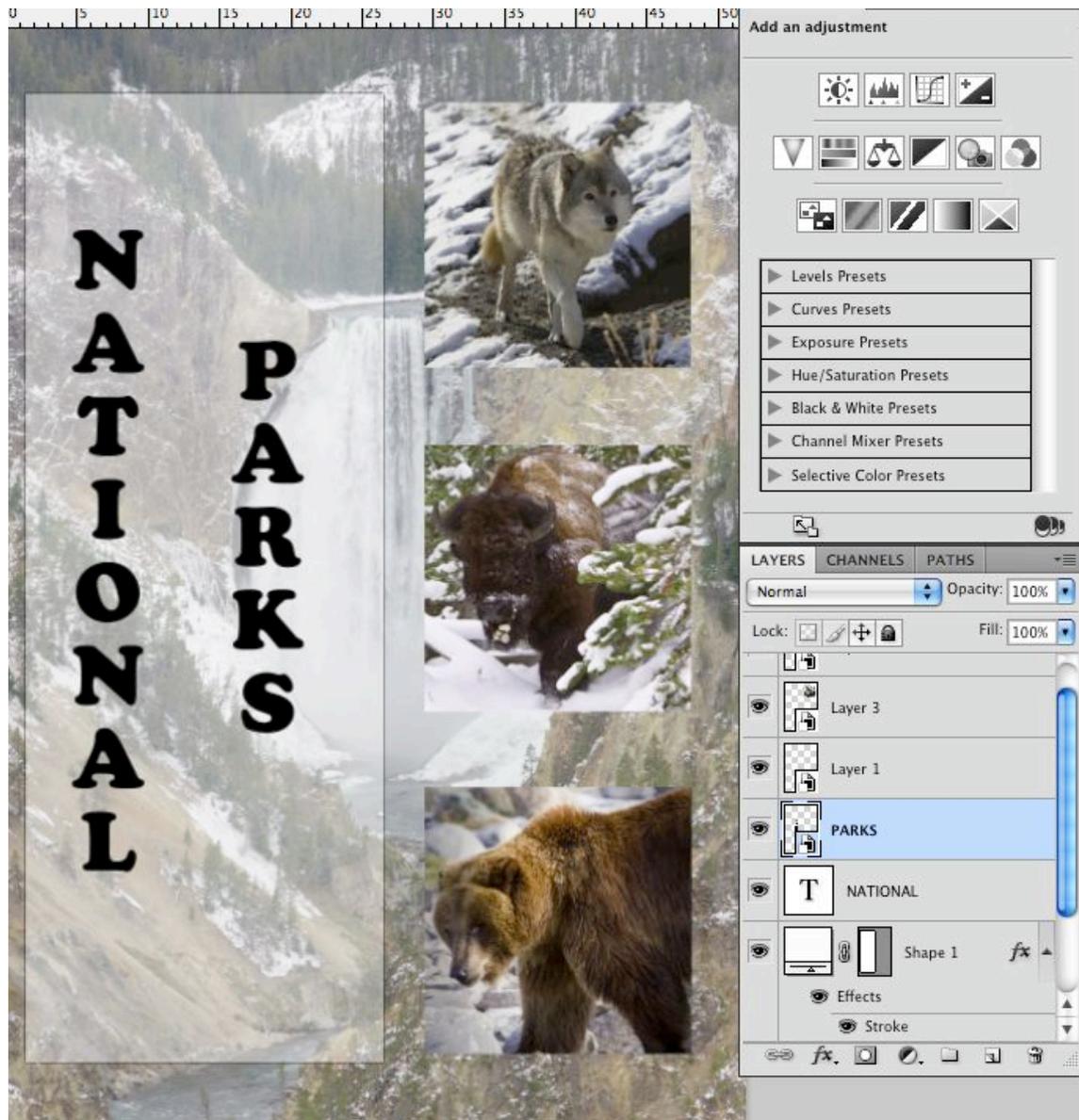


Figure 35

Because you've added these images as Smart Objects, you can replace them with any other image, scaling to suit your needs with no loss of quality. Pretty cool!

Creating Watermarks

This next technique will show you how to add a copyright or other watermark to your images in a way that protects your images from being easily copied, while letting your viewers see your work.

Begin with any image open. Choose the Shape tool, and select Custom Shape Tool from the pop-up list of shape styles (Figure 36).

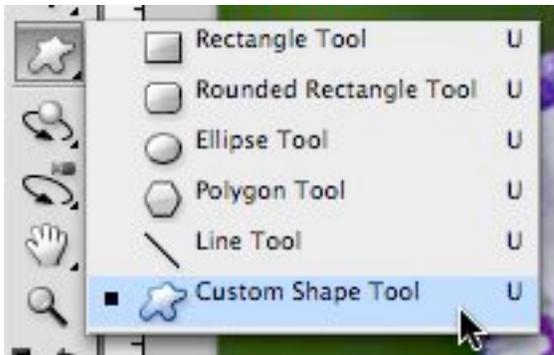


Figure 36

In the Control bar, click on the list of shapes and select the copyright symbol (©). The reason we're using a shape rather than text is that we can scale shapes easily.

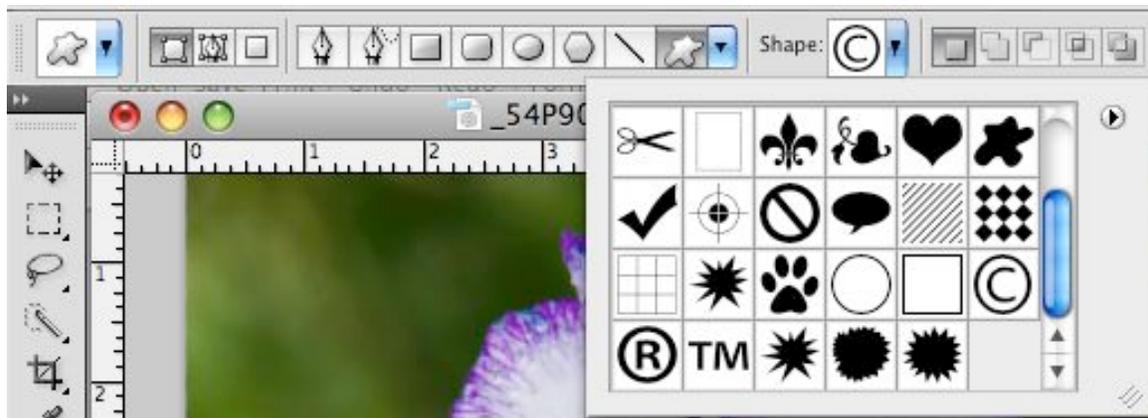


Figure 37

Drag out a copyright shape until you get a size you're happy with, like I have in Figure 38.



Figure 38

With the shape layer selected, choose the Layer Style command and select Bevel and Emboss. I used a setting of 300% for the shape. Close the Layer Style dialog and change the Fill of the layer to 0% so that only the bevel is showing (Figure 39).



Figure 39

Finally, here's an example using text with the same process of bevel & emboss with a 0% fill (Figure 40).



Figure 40

Assignment:

For this weeks assignments, I'd like to see a composite image where elements from at least two images are combined to make a single image. I'd also like to see a composite with multiple images similar in concept to the Yellowstone poster. For image 3, show me what you've got! Take any or all of the topics we've covered in the past four weeks and wow us!