Color Enhancement using "Digital Gels"

INTERMEDIATE

Adobe

Professional photographers often use "gels" (gelatin filters) for creative color enhancements. Here's how to add dramatic color effects using "digital gels" in Photoshop. With this technique, you can isolate each color effect on an independent layer and get more flexibility and control than you would with traditional gels set in front of the camera lens.
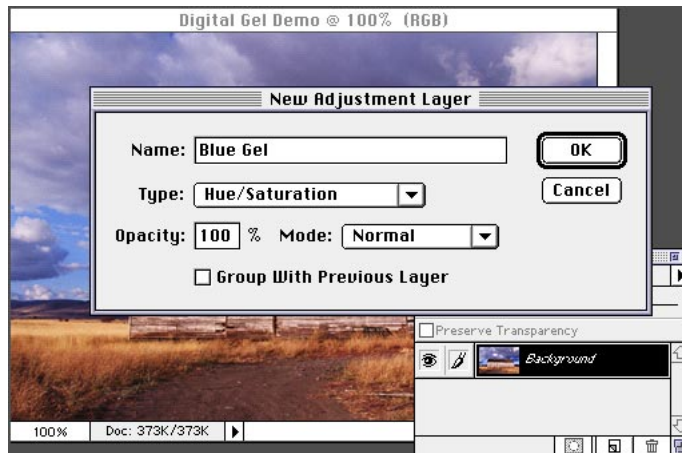
COLOR ENHANCEMENT USING "DIGITAL GELS"

1. Here's the image we'll start with in Photoshop. Our goal is to add dramatic color effects to this conventional photography. We'll add a blue-violet effect to the sky and gold to the field.
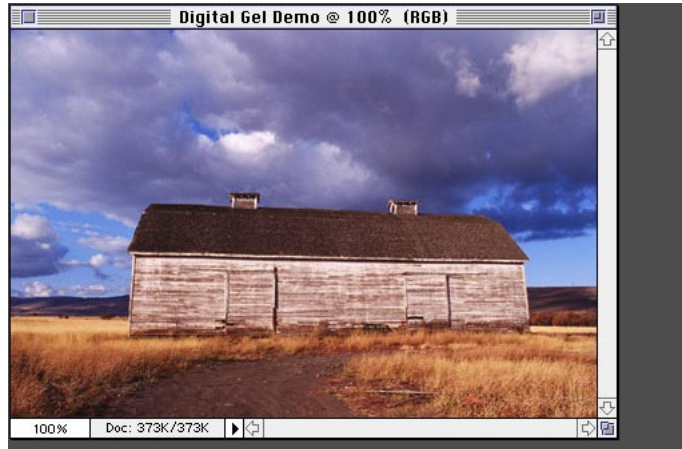
2. Select New Adjustment Layer from the Layers palette menu, and in the Type pop-up menu, choose Hue/Saturation. Name the new layer and click OK.


Adjustment Layer
With Photoshop 4.0's new Adjustment layers, you can easily make changes to underlying layers without affecting the actual layers.

3. The Hue/Saturation dialog box appears. Click the Colorize option. This transforms the layer you created in step 2 into a digital gel. Make sure the preview box is checked. Don't click OK yet.


2
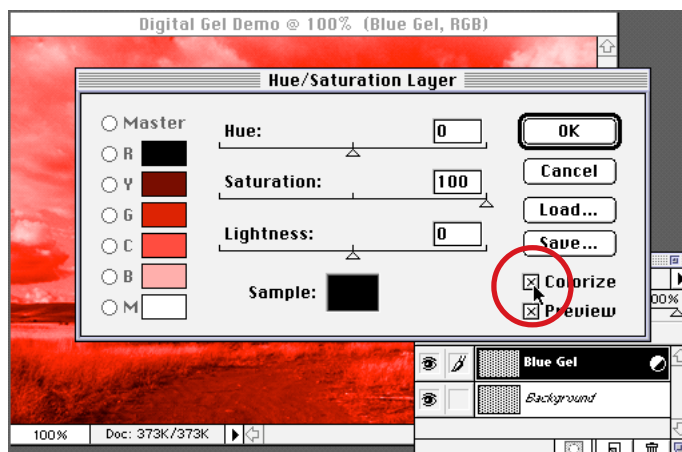
COLOR ENHANCEMENT USING "DIGITAL GELS"

4. Move the Hue slider to find the color you want. Use the Saturation and Lightness sliders to finetune the color. Click OK when you obtain a color you like.
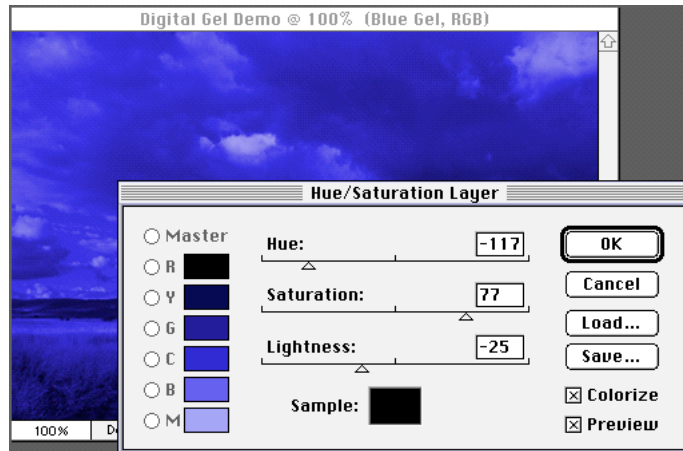

Lightness setting
The Lightness slider in the Hue/Saturation dialog box acts like a "gamma" control. Unlike traditional gels, highlights and shadows retain their original lightness values as if they are auto-exposed. In Soft Light blending mode, changing the lightness of a layer affects the midtones of the underlying image.

**5.** Set the mode in the Layers palette to Soft Light.
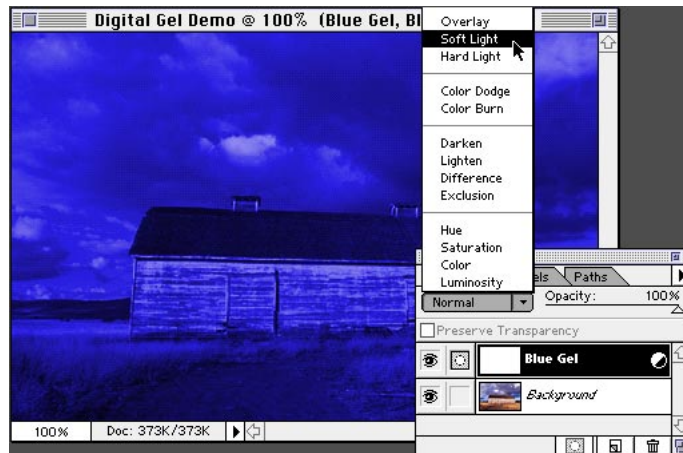
6. With the Adjustment layer still selected, choose the gradient tool. Pressing the D key, set the foreground and background colors to the default (black/white). Click and drag upward over the image from the horizon toward the sky. This will limit the gel effect to the sky portion of the image—the gradient mask you created.
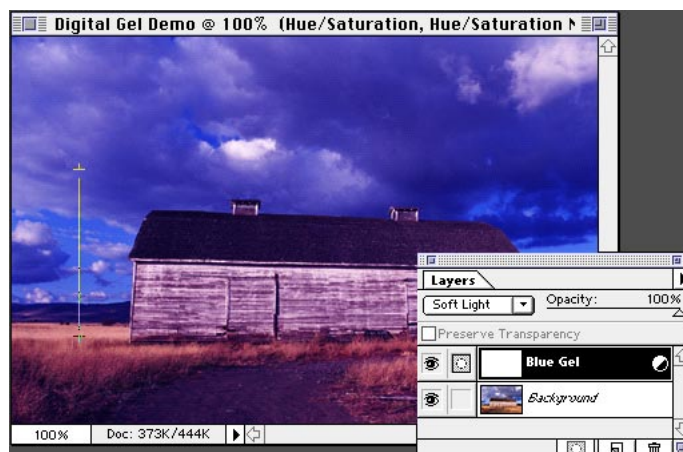
Tips
Press the D key to set foreground and background colors to the default black and white. You can also use the X key to exchange these colors. While you drag the gradient tool, press the Shift key to constrain the movement to a perfect vertical direction.

COLOR ENHANCEMENT USING "DIGITAL GELS"

7. To keep the barn uncolored by the gel, select the barn, and fill the selection with black in the layer mask. Deselect (Command/Ctrl+D).
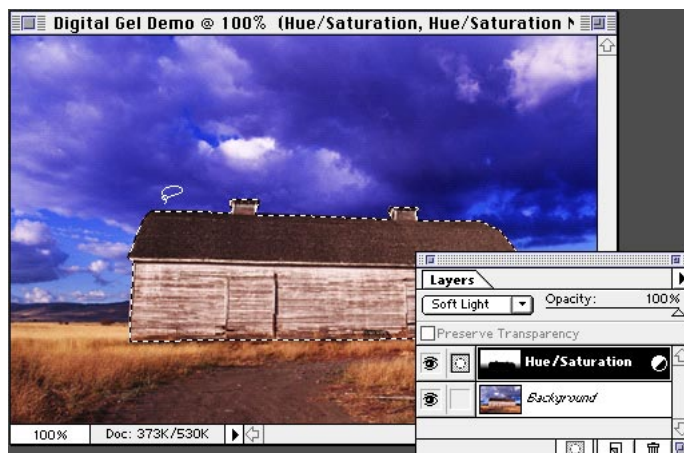
Fill shortcut
To fill a selection with foreground color, press Option/Alt+Delete/Backspace. If you do not make a selection, doing a fill will fill the entire layer with foreground color.
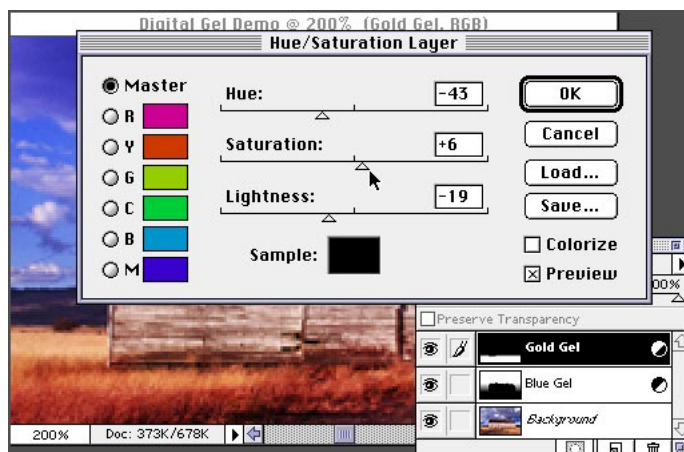
8. As we did for the blue gel layer, we next add a gold gel layer (repeat steps 2-7). By painting in the adjustment layer directly, using a soft-edged brush tool with black foreground color, you can fade the gel color. Try this with different brush opacity settings. Of course, with a white foreground color, you can add back the gel color.
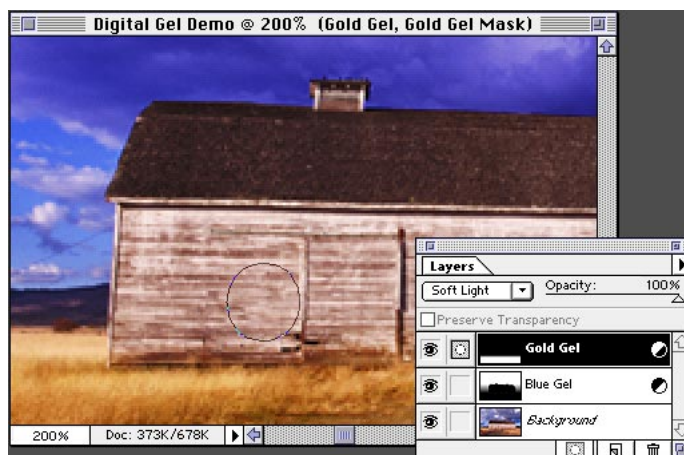
More shortcuts!
Press the bracket keys ([or]) to change your brush size without going to the Brushes palette. Press numeric keys (1,2,3...9 or 0) to change brush opacity. 1 is 10% opacity, 2 is 20% opacity, and so on. 0 (zero) is 100% opacity.

9. You can also adjust the gel color later at any time. Double-click the gel layer and the Hue/Saturation dialog box appears. You can then readjust the gel color easily.