

## High-Contrast Portrait Look

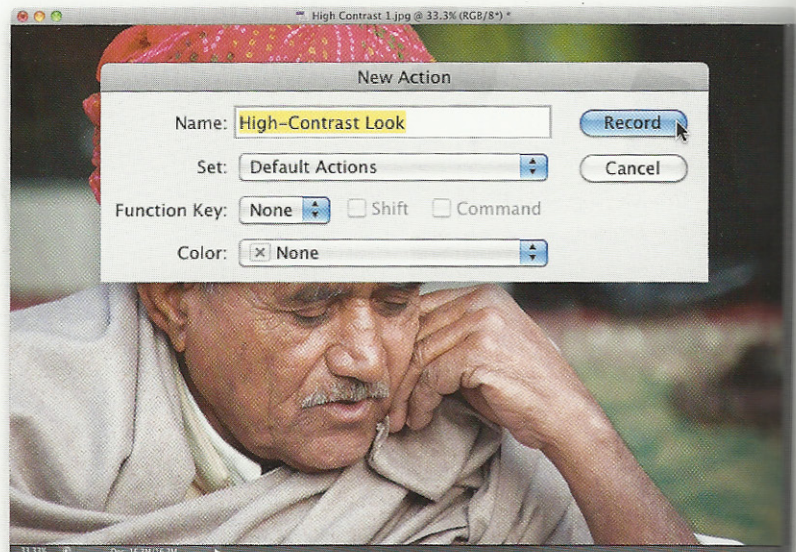
### Step One:

Open the image you want to apply a high-contrast look to. Let's start, right off the bat, by creating an action to record our steps, so when you're done, you can reapply this same look to other photos with just one click. Go to the Actions panel, and click on the Create New Action icon at the bottom of the panel. When the New Action dialog appears, name this "High-Contrast Look" and click the Record button. Now it's recording every move you make... every step you take, it'll be watching you (sorry, I just couldn't resist).

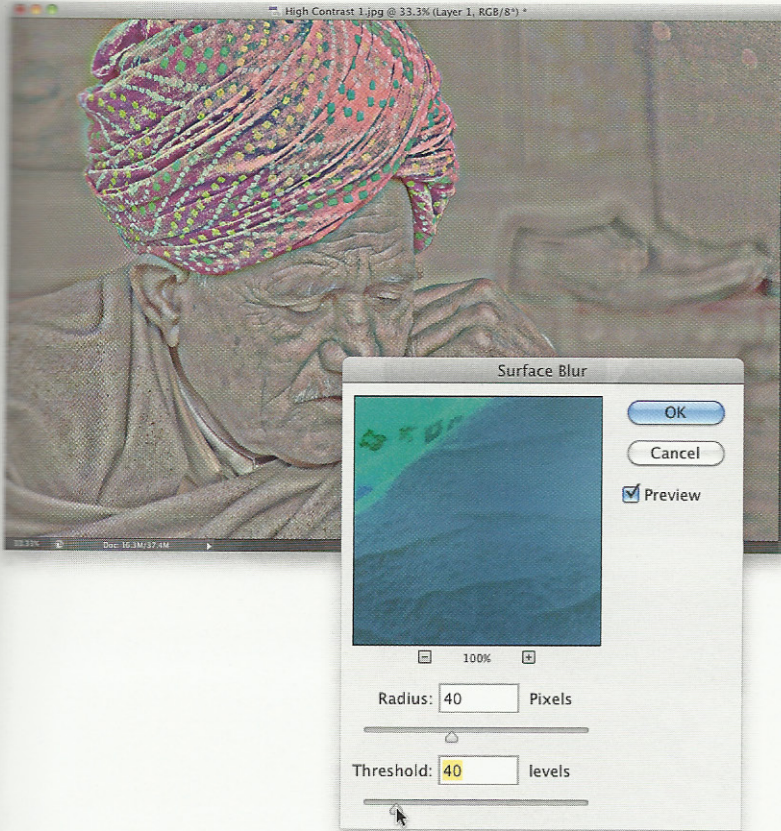
### Step Two:

Make a copy of your Background layer by pressing **Command-J (PC: Ctrl-J)**. Now, change the blend mode of this duplicate layer to **Vivid Light** (I know it doesn't look pretty now, but it'll get better in a few more moves).

The super-high-contrast, desaturated look is incredibly popular right now, and while there are a number of plug-ins that can give you this look, along with a Camera Raw technique I'll show you next, I also wanted to include this version, which I learned from German retoucher Calvin Hollywood, who shared this technique during a stint as my special guest blogger at my daily blog ([www.scottkelby.com](http://www.scottkelby.com)). The great thing about his version is: (1) you can write an action for it and apply it with one click, and (2) you don't need to buy a third-party plug-in to get this look. My thanks to Calvin for sharing this technique with me, and now you.

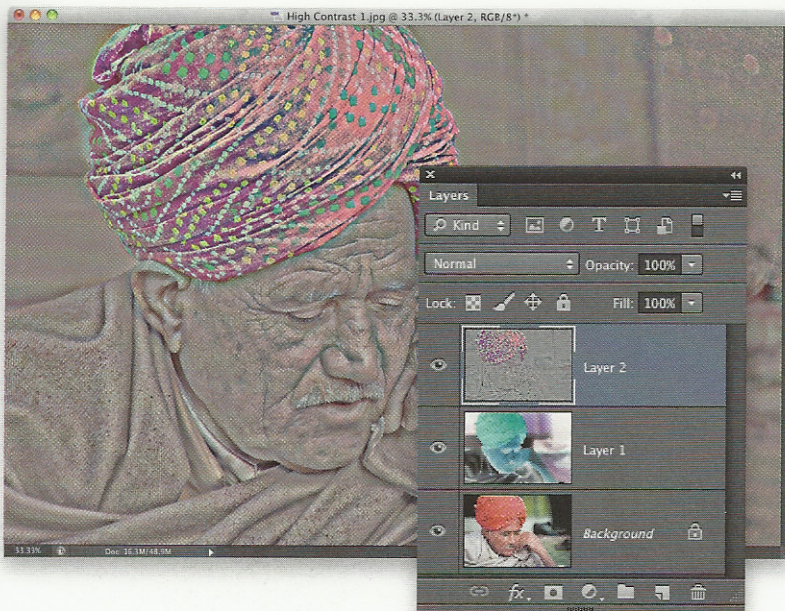






### Step Three:

Now press **Command-I (PC: Ctrl-I)** to Invert the layer (it should look pretty gray at this point). Next, go under the Filter menu, under Blur, and choose **Surface Blur**. When the dialog appears, enter 40 for the Radius and 40 for the Threshold, and click OK (it takes a while for this particular filter to do its thing, so be patient. If you're running this on a 16-bit version of your photo, this wouldn't be a bad time to grab a cup of coffee. Maybe a sandwich, too).



### Step Four:

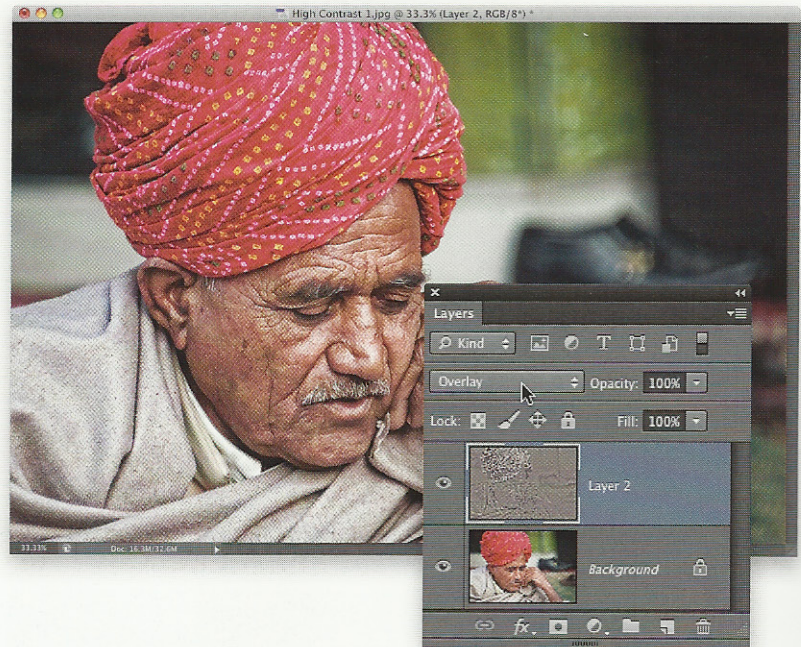
We need to change the layer's blend mode again, but we can't change this one from Vivid Light or it will mess up the effect, so instead we're going to create a new layer, on top of the stack, that looks like a flattened version of the image. That way, we can change its blend mode to get a different look. This is called "creating a merged layer," and you get this layer by pressing **Command-Option-Shift-E (PC: Ctrl-Alt-Shift-E)**.

(Continued)



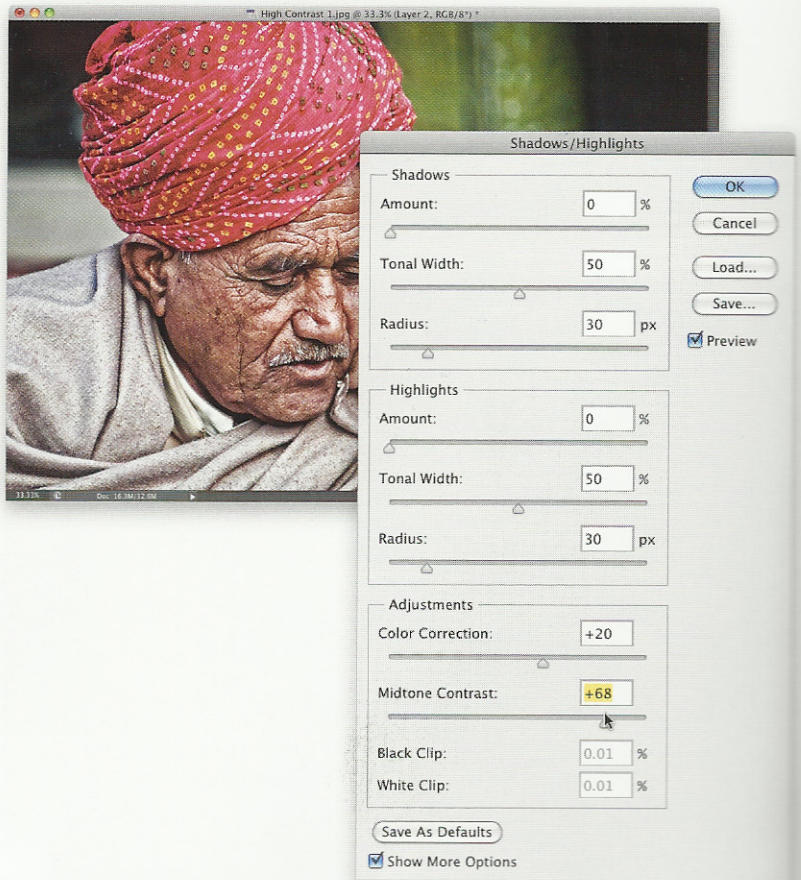
**Step Five:**

Now that you have this new merged layer, you need to delete the middle layer (the one you ran the Surface Blur upon), so drag it onto the Trash icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. Next, we have to deal with all the funky neon colors on this layer, and we do that by simply removing all the color. Go under the Image menu, under Adjustments, and choose **Desaturate**, so the layer only looks gray. Then, change the blend mode of your merged layer (Layer 2) to **Overlay**, and now you can start to see the effect taking shape. You can stop right there (I usually do), but if you think you need an even stronger high-contrast effect (hey, it's possible. It just depends on the image, and how much texture and contrast you want it to have), you can continue on and crank your amp up to 11 (sorry for the lame *This Is Spinal Tap* movie reference).

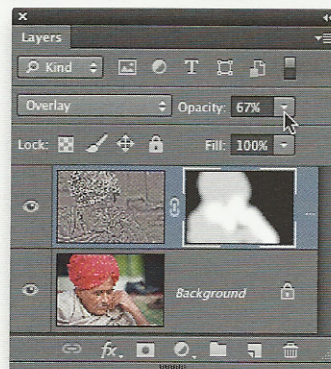
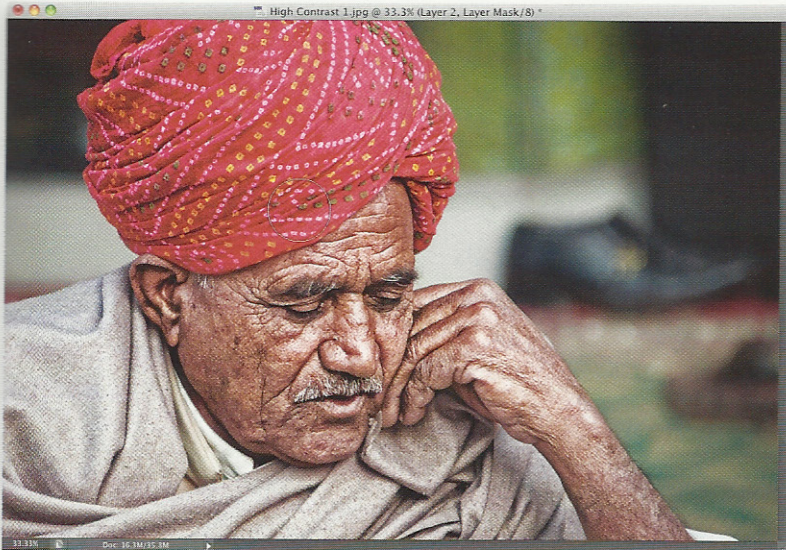


**Step Six:**

Go under the Image menu, under Adjustments, and choose **Shadows/Highlights**. In the dialog, drag the Shadows Amount down to 0. Turn on the Show More Options checkbox to reveal more editing options. Then, you're going to add what amounts to Camera Raw's Clarity by increasing the amount of Midtone Contrast on this Overlay layer. Go down near the bottom of the dialog and drag the Midtone Contrast slider to the right, and watch how your image starts to get that crispy look (crispy, in a good way). Of course, the farther to the right you drag, the crispier it gets, so don't go too far, because you're still going to sharpen this image. Click OK. The next step is optional, so if you don't need it, go to the Layers panel's flyout menu and choose **Flatten Image**. Don't forget to stop your action here.

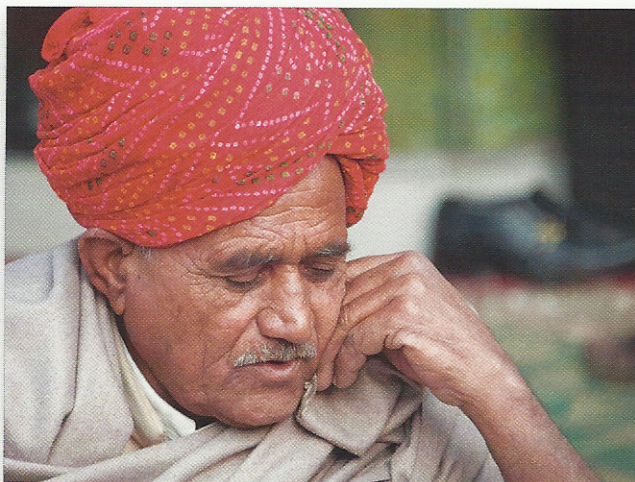




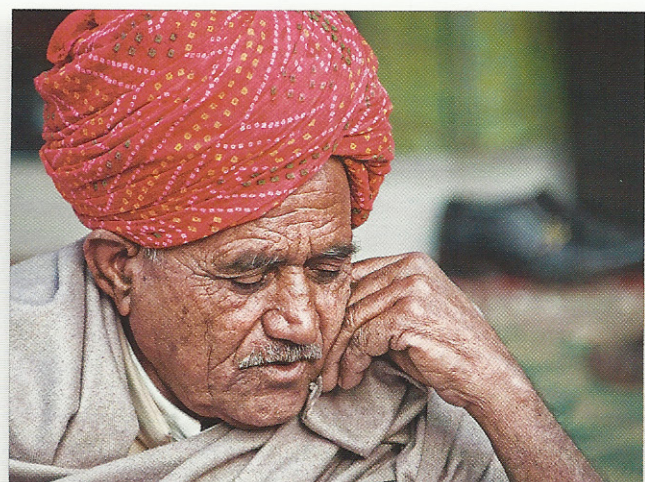


### Step Seven:

Okay, this high-contrast look looks great on a lot of stuff, but one area where it doesn't look that good (and makes your image look obviously post-processed) is when you apply this to blurry, out-of-focus backgrounds, like the one you see here. So, I would only apply it to our subject and not the background. Here's how: Option-click (PC: Alt-click) on the Add Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the Layers panel to hide the contrast layer behind a black mask (so the effect is hidden from view). With your Foreground color set to white, get the Brush tool (**B**), choose a medium-sized, soft-edged brush, and paint over his face to add the high-contrast effect there. Now, in the Options Bar, lower the brush's Opacity to 70% (so the effect isn't as intense), then paint over his turban and clothes. This way, you avoid adding the contrast to the blurry background altogether. Lastly, go to the Layers panel and lower the Opacity of this layer until it looks more natural, as shown here at 67%. Now, you can flatten the layers and sharpen it using Unsharp Mask (see Chapter 10). Here, I used Amount: 120, Radius: 1, Threshold: 3) to finish off the effect.



Before



After