

TWPC Resource Tutorial 2

HDR Toning

Neil Kingsbury

Photoshop HDR Toning:

This tutorial has been written using Photoshop CS6, and screen shots will be as per that version. Screen shots are against one of my images. Follow this tutorial using one of your own image files.

HDR, or High Dynamic Range is a technique used to merge multiple images together that bracket the full exposure range for an image, and can be used to create stunning effects. Whilst Photoshop provides a facility to import bracketed images to create full HDR pictures, it also provides a function called HDR Toning. HDR Toning allows you to apply HDR-style effects to a single image instead of having to shoot and merge a set of images together. Whole books have been written on the subject of HDR, but this tutorial just aims to introduce the topic for anyone who hasn't used it before, and shows how it can be used to subtly boost an image.

Consider the following two images for a final work I have called 'Introspective'.



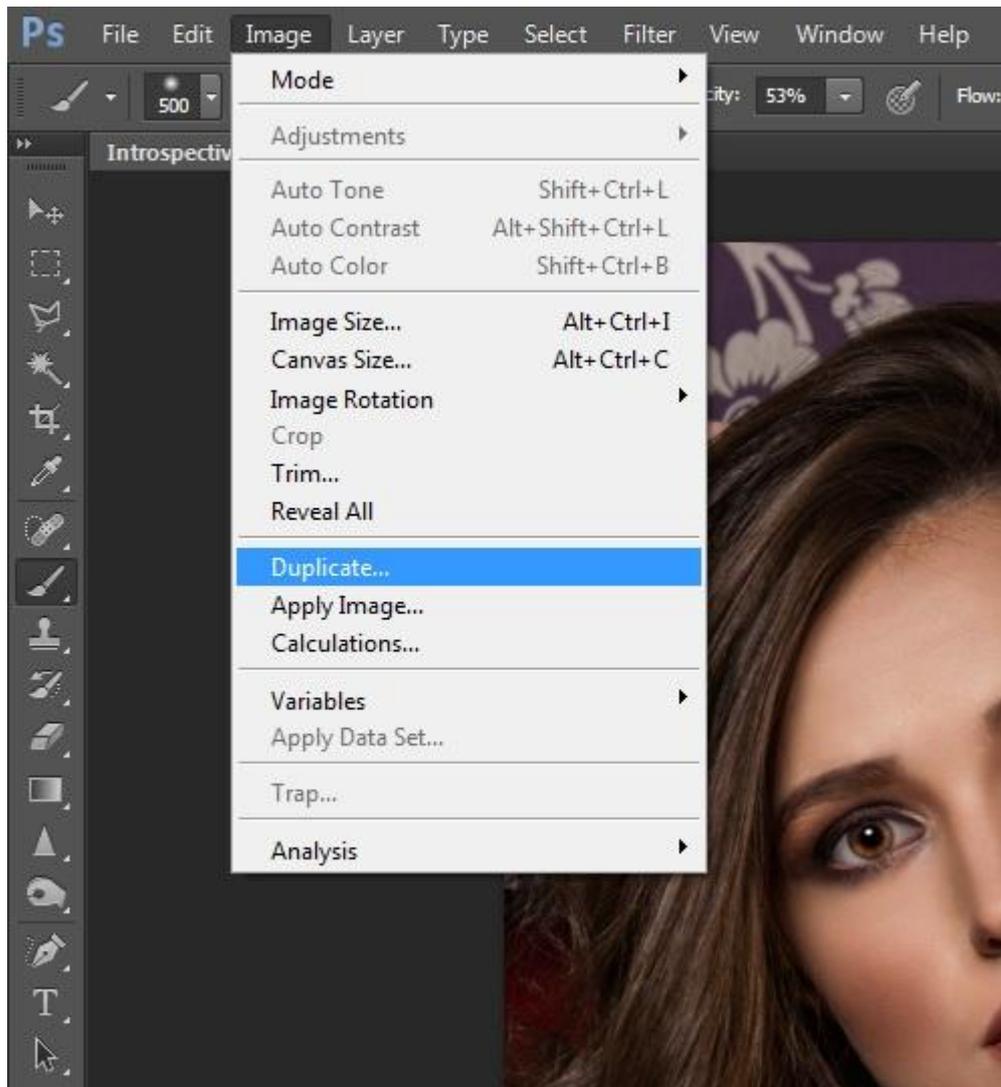
The image on the left has been worked up so that skin tones and blemishes have been sorted out and obvious 'wrong bits' have been cloned out, etc, etc, etc. The image on the right has had HDR Toning applied to it. As can be seen, the hair is now more defined and has greater detail, the skin tones and clothes have also been 'lifted' to enhance the image.

Applying HDR Toning:

Firstly, **DO NOT** apply HDR Toning to your master .psd file for the image that you are working on. HDR Toning completely flattens any layers that you have in the .psd file and will radically alter the look of the image itself. Always work on a copy of the .psd file.

I find that the following technique for duplicating the .psd file works well as it is less disruptive to my work flow.

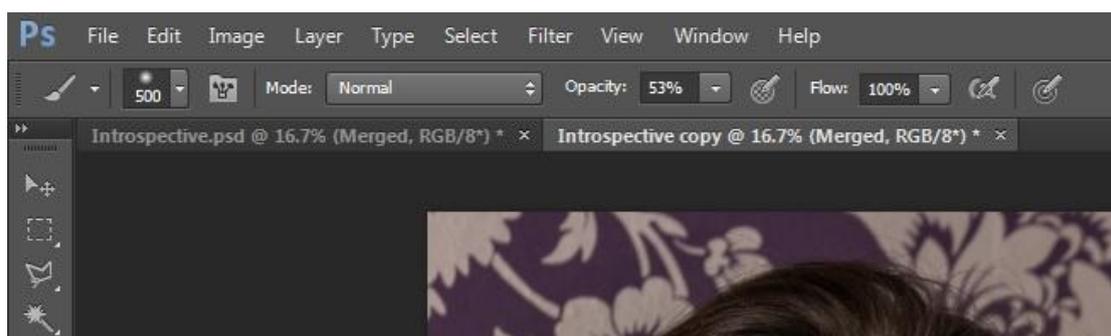
The first thing to do is open the .psd file that contains the image that HDR Toning is to be applied to. Then go to the <Image> menu and then select <Duplicate>.



<Duplicate> creates an exact copy of the .psd file that exists in computer memory only. You can save this file to your hard drive just as you would any other document type, but as it will only be used to generate the HDR Toning overlay, I normally don't bother saving it.

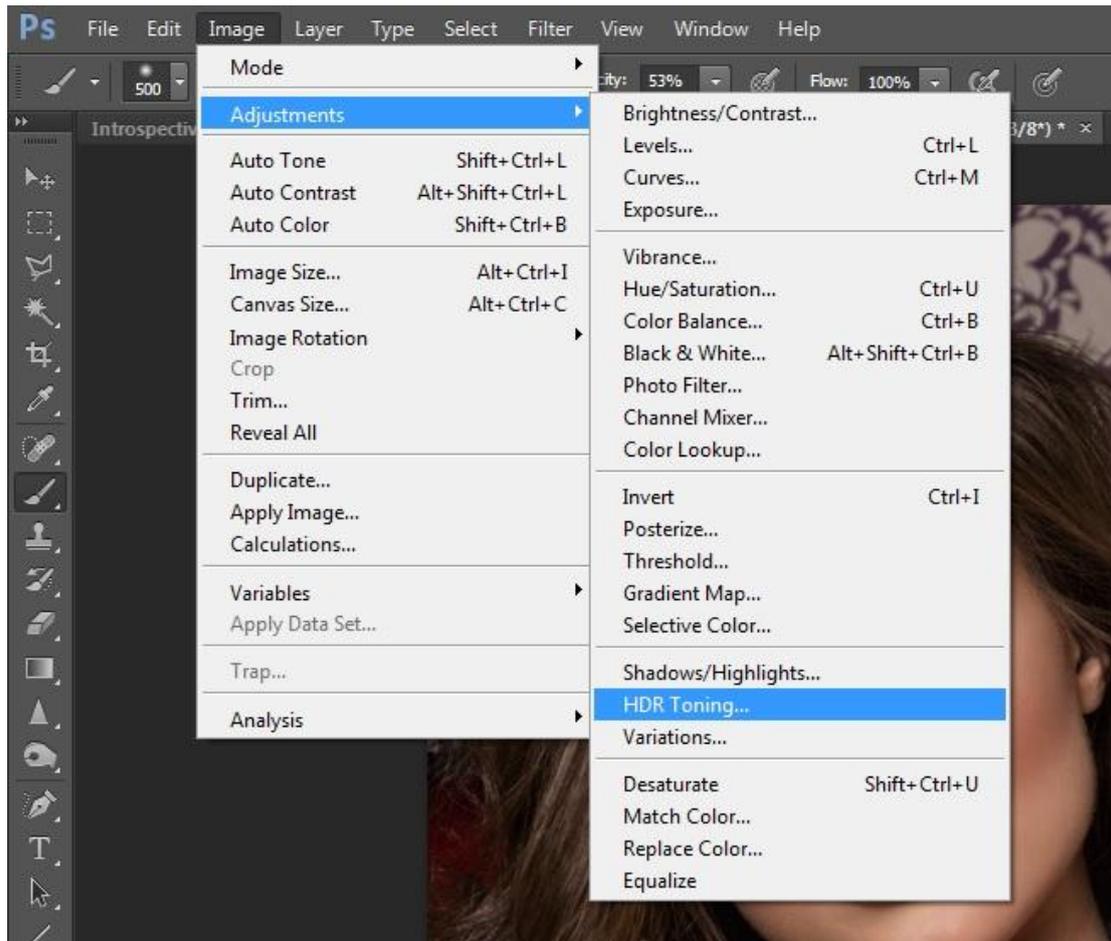
Once you have selected the <Duplicate> option a dialog box will be displayed giving a suggested name for the new .psd file. The normal convention is to use the same name as the original file but with the word 'Copy' appended to it. As I don't intend to save the file, I normally just click <OK>.

To all extents and purposes, nothing appears to have happened, however, as the following screen shot shows, there are now two image files open in Photoshop...

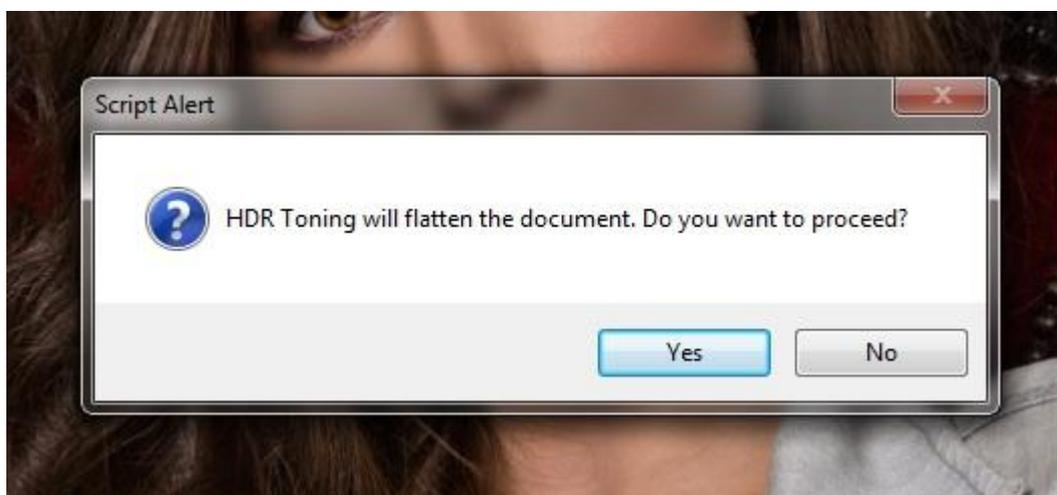


'Introspective' on the left is the original file, and 'Introspective copy' on the right is the duplicated file.

The 'copy' file is the 'actively' displayed file, and it is this one that we will work on. Click on <Image>, <Adjustments>, <HDR Toning>.

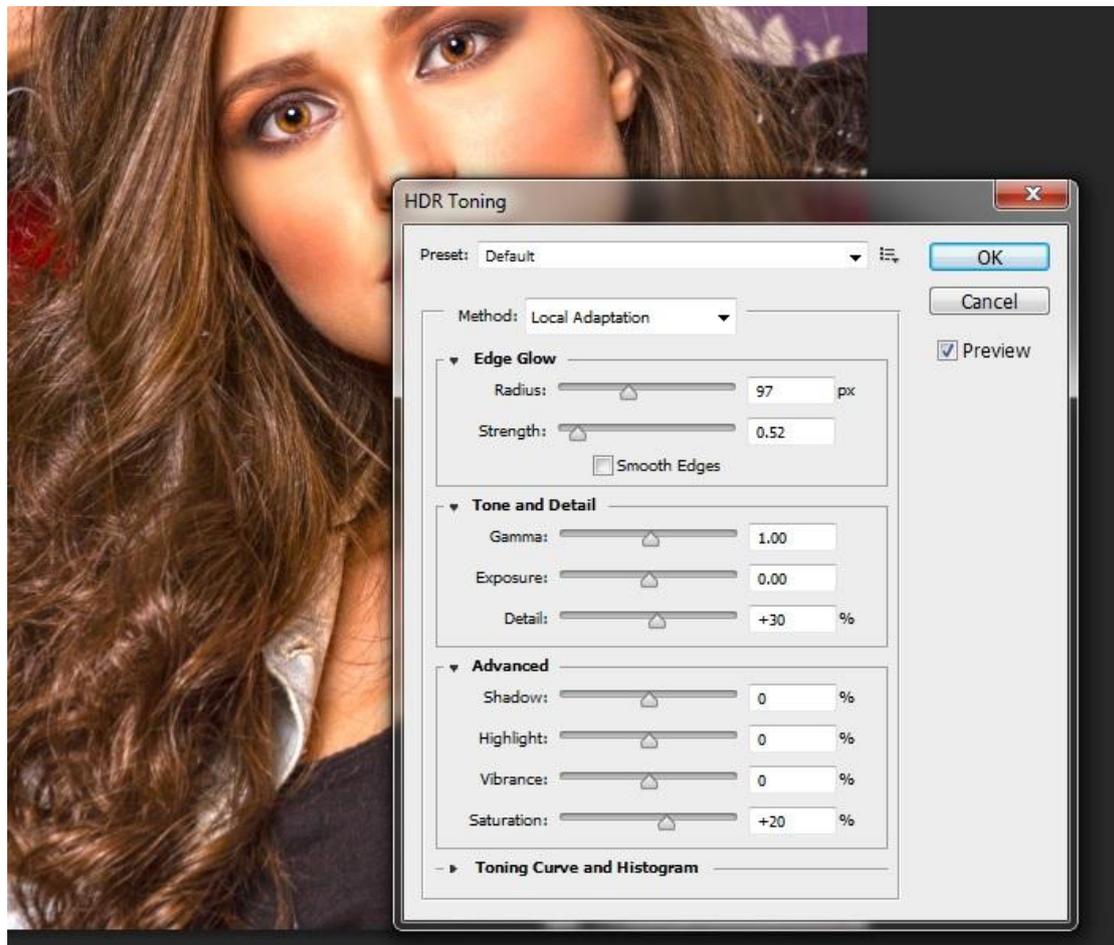


A 'Warning' message will be displayed indicating that the .psd file will be flattened as part of the HDR Toning process - this is why you should work with a duplicate.



Click on <Yes> to proceed.

Two things happen. Firstly the image will brighten and detail will pop out. The second is that the HDR Toning dialog box will be displayed. Its already has a number of settings defaulted - which is what brightened the image.

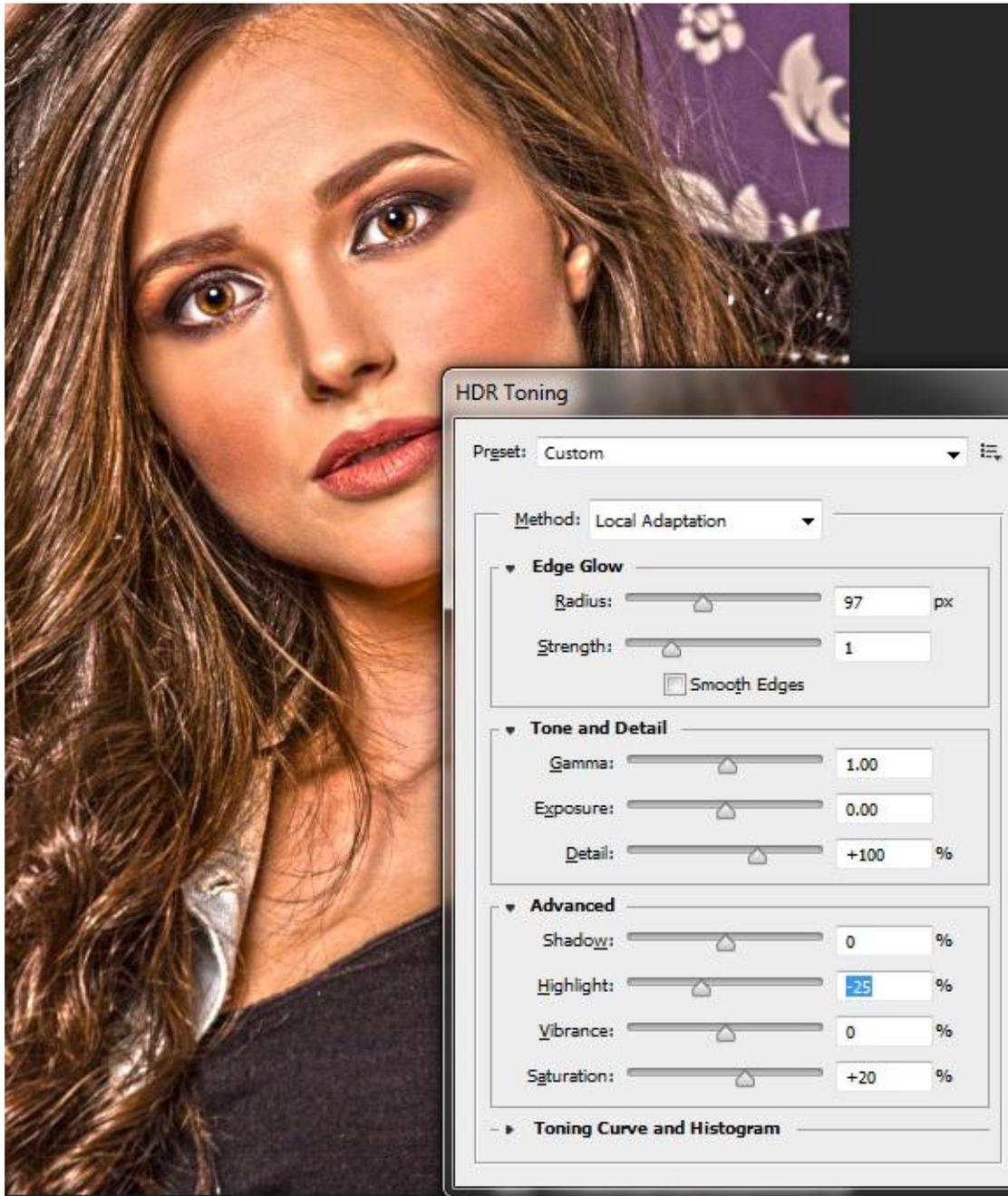


These setting changes are for 'Strength', 'Detail' and 'Saturation'. This document just covers the changes that I will be making for this image only, there are lots of variations and options to choose from, so feel free to experiment. Remember, it doesn't matter if you make a complete mess of the final HDR Toning result as you are just working on a copy that can be easily thrown away.

For this image I am just going to make the following changes to the settings that are shown.....

- Change 'Detail' to +100
- Change 'Strength' to 1.00
- Change 'Highlights' to -25

This results in the following adjustments being applied to the image as a whole.



As can be seen, the results are a bit garish, and (in my opinion) wouldn't be much use as a final image. However, this is only going to be used as an overlay to the original, so click on the <OK> button to apply the changes.

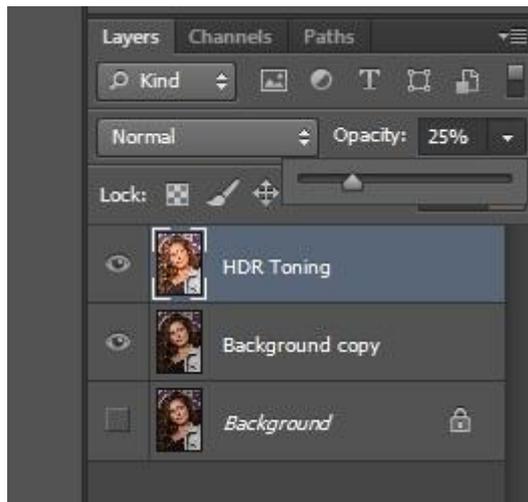
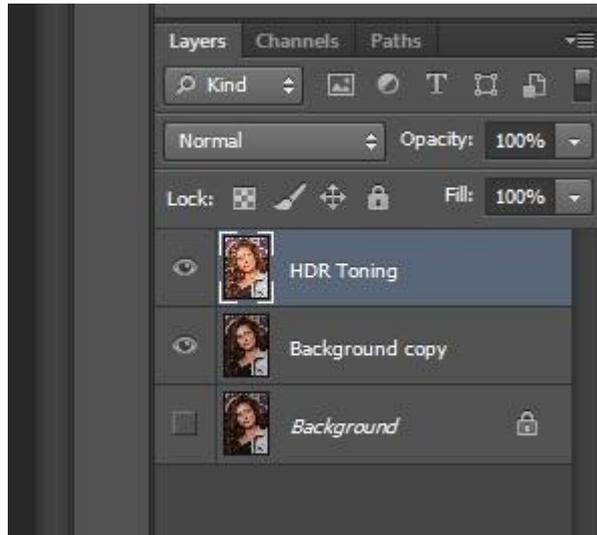
End result, the .psd file has been flattened to one layer with the HDR Toning changes applied to it. The next thing is to click on the <Select> menu, and then select <All>. This will put 'marching ants' around the whole image. Now click on the <Edit> menu and then on <Copy>.

At the top of the screen click on the 'Introspective' tab to return to the original .psd file. You will immediately see that the 'marching ants' around the image disappear and the image itself will revert to its pre-HDR version (thus showing that you are in the original file).

Go to the <Edit> menu and then click on 'Paste'. The HDR Toning layer will now be pasted in to the original .psd file as a new layer called 'Layer 1'. I normally rename this layer to something like 'HDR Toning' so I know what it is. If necessary move this layer up the layer stack so that it is at the top - IE, its the upper most layer in the .psd file.

With the layers looking something as shown to the right, make sure that the 'HDR Toning' layer is selected, and then click on the down arrow next to the 'Opacity' entry.

This will display the 'Opacity' slide bar. Drag it to the left to about 25% .



As the opacity of the HDR Toning layer decreases, more of the underlying layer will start to show through. I normally find that 25% is a good place to **start** when applying the HDR Toning overlay.

Increase or decrease this value to suit. Remember that as its just an 'Adjustment' layer any bits of toning that you don't want can be erased to let more of the original image show through.

Once you are happy with the HDR Toning, save the .psd file and move on to 'the next bit', whatever that might be.

Don't forget to throw away the 'Copy' .psd file once you have finished with it.