Day 27: Enhance Your Colors

Today we are going to enhance our colors. The trick is to enhance the colors (which usually means making them more saturated) without making them look toxic or psychedelic.

About RGB Color Spaces

Before we get started manipulating color, let's make sure you are set up properly. That starts with picking your color space.

Picking a Color Space in Your Camera

You already did this on your camera on Day 1. At that time, you made two settings regarding your color space. The first setting was to have your camera create RAW files. The interesting thing about creating RAW files is that no color space is actually assigned. Think of a RAW file as your camera simply gathering up all the data, tying a bow around it, and handing it to you. The decision on color space is deferred until later.

The other setting I had you make is to set the color space at sRGB. As I just mentioned, no color space is assigned to a RAW file, so this setting will only apply to the JPEG you created (if you created one by shooting RAW + JPEG). Your options here are sRGB and Adobe RGB. Here is a chart explaining quickly the pros and cons of each:

sRGB	Adobe RGB
Colors display correctly on web	It is the larger color space
Simplest workflow	Usually better for printing
Prints look fine	Can convert to sRGB for web display
but	*but*
It is the smaller color space	Won't display correctly on web without conversion

Frankly, I recommend sRGB because it is an overall simpler workflow that will never result in problems for you. In addition, even though the Adobe RGB color space is technically larger, the sRGB color space is broad enough. Keep in mind that every single image you see online or in an email is an sRGB image. My guess is that you've seen plenty of such images with stunning color, so that shows us that sRGB is just fine.

Picking a Color Space on Your Computer

Once you get to your computer, it will be time to assign an RGB color space to your RAW file. This works differently in Lightroom and Photoshop.

Lightroom actually assigns an RGB color space to your image immediately - and you cannot change it (at least not until you export). When you work in Lightroom, you are using Pro Photo RGB, which is a larger color space than either sRGB or Adobe RGB. You need not worry about color space as your work on your picture. It will always be the same. When you export your photo or send it off to be edited in another program (like Photoshop), you will have the option of picking a color space.

In Photoshop, you select which color space you want to use. To do so, just click on the Edit drop-down menu and choose Color Settings (or press Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+K). When you do so, a dialog box will pop up. Ignore all the settings except the RGB setting under Working Spaces in the top left. Just change it to the RGB color space you want to use.

This is what can happen if you use one of the larger color spaces and then post the image on the web. On the right is an image created using the Pro Photo RGB color space. On the left is what it looks like when it was posted to the web.

A lot of people have devoted a lot of time and effort to comparing color spaces. Without getting into the complexities, it sort of breaks down like this:

- **Pro Photo RGB:** This is the largest color space, so it has its proponents for that reason. It will work well for printing. The only real downside is that if you post an image to the web, it will be automatically converted to sRGB and that conversion process can compress your

colors and make them look terrible. You have to remember to convert the pictures to sRGB on your own.

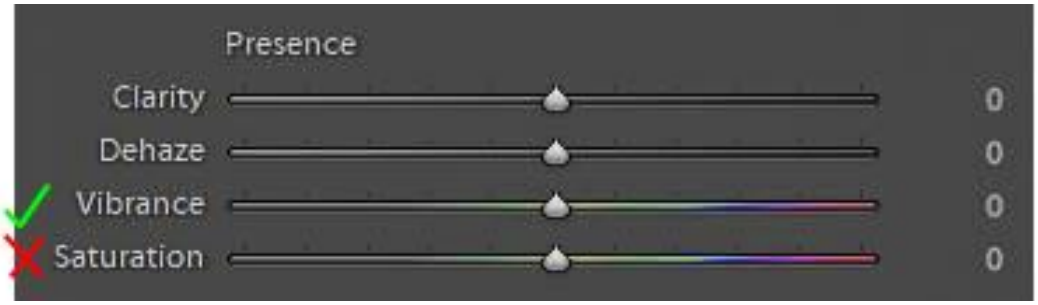
- **Adobe RGB:** This is designed for printing, and many people use it for that. It is larger than sRGB, but it has the same drawback when posting to the web that was just mentioned for Pro Photo RGB.

- **sRGB:** This is the color space of every single image on the web, whether that be a picture in an online gallery, a blog post, or in an email attachment. Even if you created it in another color space, it will automatically be converted to sRGB when you post it. For that reason, often the simplest workflow is to pick sRGB from the start.

If you want more information about that decision, I have written an article about it for Digital Photography School, which you can see here.

Simple Color Enhancement in Lightroom

Remember that we are starting with RAW files. That means your colors will appear dull and muted. Therefore, it will be quite common for you to want to punch them up a little bit after the fact. Often that is as simple as a global saturation increase.



Before you reach for the Saturation slider, let me explain something. You have two choices here: the Vibrance slider and the Saturation slider. Here's the difference:

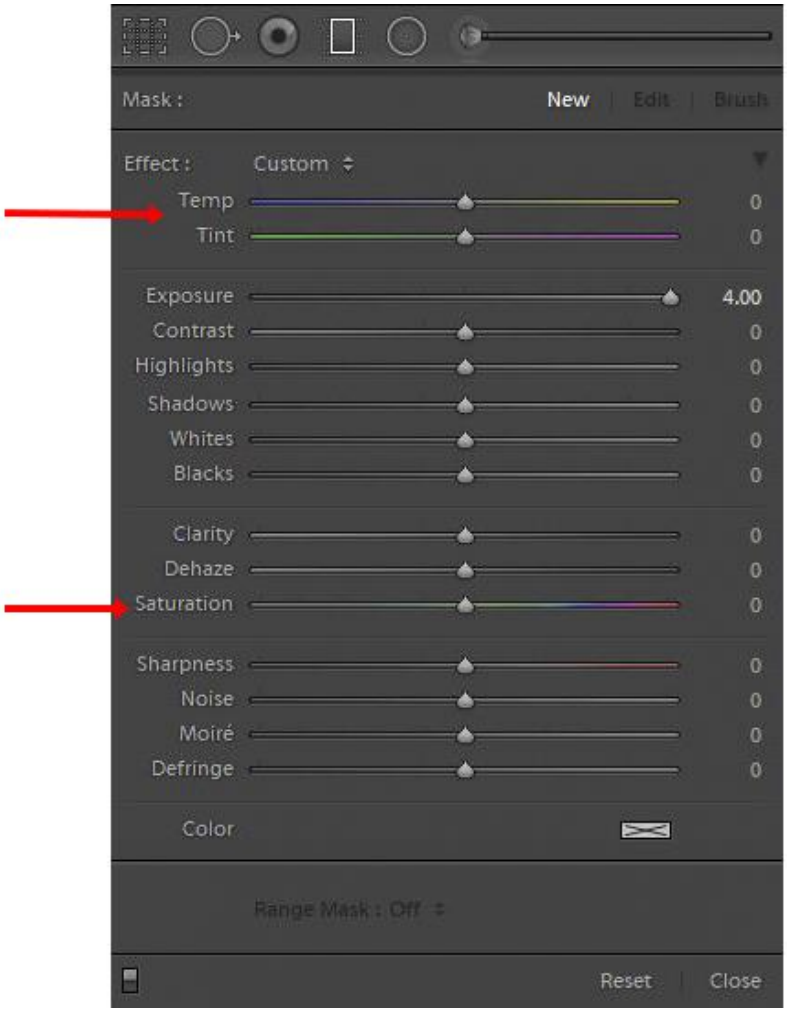
- **Vibrance:** works hardest on the most muted colors and leaves skin tones alone.

- **Saturation:** a rote adjustment that increases all colors equally.

Think of Vibrance as a "smart" color enhancement, where Lightroom is helping you enhance your colors without making them look toxic or skin tones appear off. In almost all cases, I use the Vibrance command and leave the Saturation slider alone.

Targeted Adjustments in Lightroom

Lightroom gives you two ways to make targeted adjustments of your colors. The first way is one you already know. You can grab the Adjustment Brush (or the Graduated or Radial Filters) and target the area in which you want to enhance your colors.



The color controls of the Lightroom's local adjustment tools (Adjustment Brush, Graduated Filter, and Radial filter). They are rather limited.

We have already covered how to use these local adjustment tools in Day 24. As you can see, you can now add color adjustments to your ability to make local changes. That ability, however, is rather limited. As you can see in the graphic above, the only color enhancement tool is Saturation. There is no Vibrance control, and there are no individual color channels. You can adjust the White Balance controls, and we will cover those in tomorrow's lesson.

There is actually a better way to make changes to specific parts of your image when it comes to color, and that is to target individual colors within the image. Scroll down in your Develop module a bit and you'll see a Color/HSL panel. It will have a number of controls that look like this:

This is a super powerful panel. It lists 8 different colors and you can make adjustments to each. If you move the Yellow slider, it will target only the yellow tones in your image and leave the other colors alone. Now take a look at the top row. It shows you the adjustments you can make. You can change the Hue, Saturation, or Luminance of any of these color channels.

I use this panel all the time. As bonus tips, here are a few specific ways I like to use it:

- **Reduce Toxicity:** Often you will want to add a lot of global Vibrance to your image, but there is one particular color that just looks toxic when you do so. Using this panel, you can dial back that color and then go ahead with your global Vibrance adjustment so it looks just like you want.

- **Skies:** When you want a deep, rich blue sky, but you also want to leave the clouds nice and bright, don't reduce the tones of the whole sky. Instead, just target the Blues. Switch the control setting to Luminance and then pull down.

- **Grasses:** The first thing that starts looking psychedelic in your image when you start increasing Vibrance is grass. Based on what you have learned so far, you may be inclined to reduce the saturation of the greens, but that won't do much for you. The culprit is

almost always the yellows. Set the control to Saturation and pull down on the Yellow slider.

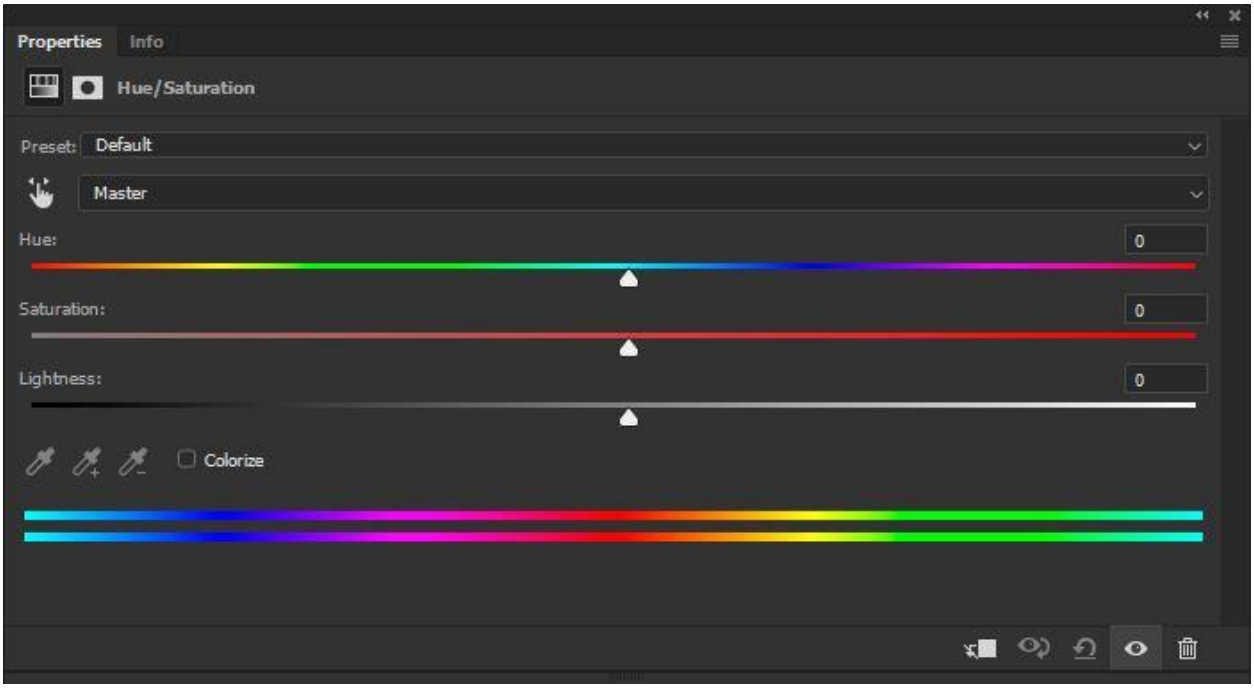
- **Lights:** Streetlights and other lights in the city often have a yellow tinge to them. Reduce the saturation of the Yellows and everything will look much better.

Color Enhancements Using Photoshop

For most color adjustments, you don't need the power of Photoshop. Even if you only use Photoshop or Photoshop Elements, you can use the sliders in the Adobe Camera Raw (ACR) screens that pop up initially. But there are some very powerful tools in Photoshop that I will introduce you to here.

Hue/Saturation

One of the main tools in Photoshop is the Hue/Saturation Adjustment Layer. This has basically the same color controls that you just saw in Lightroom. From the standpoint of color controls, this tool offers little more than you could already do using Lightroom or ACR.

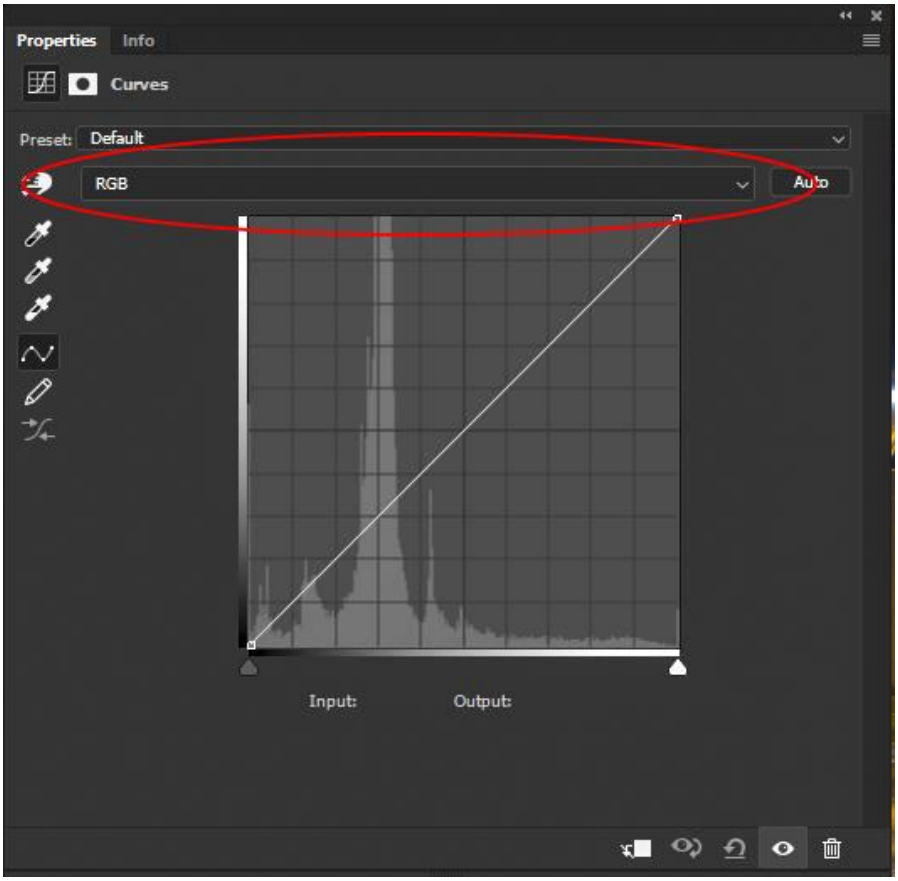


The main advantage of this control is that you have the masking capabilities you learned previously. As you might recall, using the selection tools in Photoshop you can make very fine-tuned selections and masks. That lets you make your adjustments along detailed lines or, more commonly, blend in your adjustments very smoothly.

Curves Adjustment Layers

Now we get to the Curves Adjustment Layer, which I have touted throughout this course as the most powerful post processing tool there is. We've already seen how powerful it is in adjusting brightness and contrast. Now we will add color to the mix.

Thus far, when we have used a Curves Adjustment Layer, we have done so in a master RGB channel. If you click on that, however, you will see that there are also Red, Green, and Blue Channels underneath the hood. We can go into each of them and make color adjustments to each of them.



In this fashion, you can increase the reds, greens, and blues in your images. This gets even more powerful when you remember that each of these has a complementary color. When you reduce one of these three colors (red, green, or blue) you increase its complementary color. So if you want to add more yellow to your picture - or a part of your picture - you pull down on the curve in the blues channel.

Color Workflow

Let's conclude this lesson with some notes on your workflow for enhancing color in your images. To do that, here is the chart you saw in the video with the tips in that regard:

Day 27 Assignment

Enhance Your Colors

Description:

Enhance the colors of the sunset photo you took on Day 3. Use the Lightroom or Adobe Camera Raw tools to add saturation and punch to the photo. Avoid toxic or psychedelic colors though.

Keys to Success:

- Rely on the Vibrance slider to the extent possible. Avoid global adjustments using the Saturation slider.
- Move the individual color channels up and down to see what they do. Once you have that figured out, make targeted adjustments using them.
- Work with the color channels in the Curves Adjustment Layer. You'll be glad you did. You can add contrast, brightness, and color to a photo (or portion of your photo) in one simple and powerful move.

Upon Completion of this Assignment:

Enhancing colors using these tools is a great and simple way to add punch and life to your photos. I have posted photos online that got little response, but once I changed them using these techniques the photos were very well received. Now you'll be poised to do the same.