

Anasazi Moon Composite

Twenty years ago, Galen Rowell stood in California's high Sierras near sunset and captured a rather startling image. The moon was setting ahead of him as the sun rose behind him. The sun's rays were essentially red, turning snowcapped peaks red as they tinted the moon's mares a dark reddish color.

Let's consider two images:

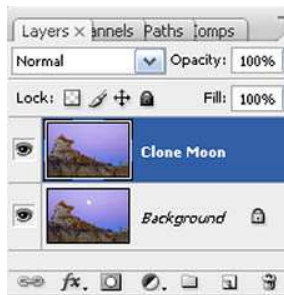
The first is Earth's full moon! The second is a Moonrise



image in the Bisti Badlands of northern New Mexico. While the first image is familiar to all of us, our imagination begins to stretch as we perceive unique hoodoos and subtle colors of the second. Rowell's *Edge of Light* is captured by pink-over-blue band of light above the two smaller hoodoos on the right.

What can we do with these individual images to create a combined, surrealistic vision of another planet in an ancient time?

Advanced Layer Blending



Open the Hoodoo Image and Remove the Moon

With Ctrl++ scale your image to 100% zoom. Put the moon in the middle of the Photoshop viewing space.

Select the Clone tool and capture a space (Alt-click) slightly bigger than the moon just to the right of the moon. Then paint over the moon on a duplicate layer. This step removes the small, white original moon from our image.



Save this image as a PSD file.

Prepare Moon as a Separate File

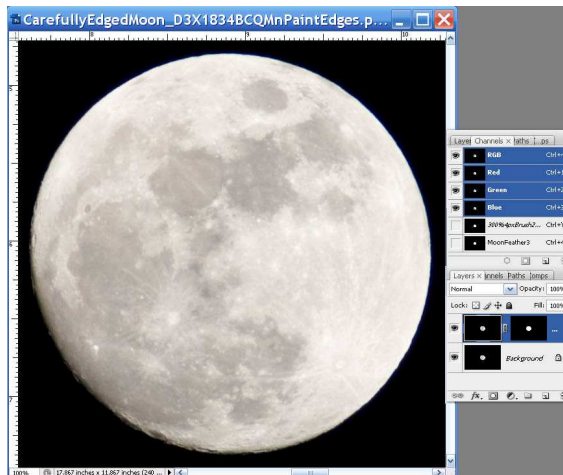
Our moon image was captured several hours after sunset. A 400 mm lens created a raw file with moon 2.75 inches in diameter. The image was shot at daylight settings f/8 and 1/100 second at ISO 200 with a spot meter.

Using the Quick Selection tool in Photoshop CS3, the white moon was quickly selected from the black background yet needed detailed corrections. Then, the moon was scaled up to 300%. Several craters at the moon's edge created a wavy surface, particularly near the base.

Since the Quick Selection did not clearly define precise edges, we began to use Quick Mask to carefully refine that edge. By toggling a red quick mask on and off, we could easily discern the moon's real boundary. By toggling the X key, we could paint with on either black or white (Black conceals; White reveals) to make our marching ants fit.

We set brush width to 4 pixels, 100% opacity, no hardness, and began to carefully move the red quick mask to the very edge of the white moon data. While a laborious process, this vigilant step assured us the moon would not appear to have a black edge when viewed against Rowell's Edge-of-Light colors at sunset. Clearly, a black edge would be a judges no-no!

When we successfully completed our revised selection, we quickly saved it as an alpha channel, then made a layer mask on a copy of the original background.



Results were saved as a PSD file

First, we cropped near the original moon border. Then, we upsized the moon to 5 inches. In this image, you can see the layers and channels palette for this combined operation. Now, we had our foreground in one Photoshop file and our moon and mask in another (second layer in the Layers Palette).

Click-and-Drag the Moon on Top of the Hoodoos

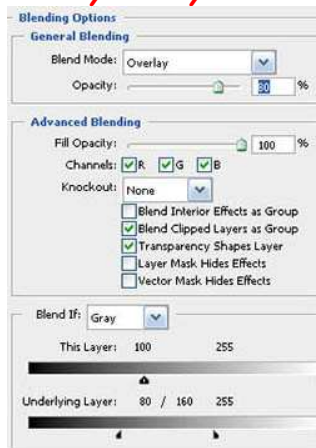
Making sure they both have the same bit depth, we did a drag-and-drop from



our moon file to foreground file. Finally, we have a foreground moon and a background image in the same file.

But, our moon should really be out beyond and behind Earth! What can we do to softly mitigate?

Layer Style Presets



Double-click on the moon layer to bring up Layer Styles dialog box. Or, click *fx* on the Layer palette's base. Now, choose Blending Options.

Blending Options begins with Blend Mode (normal) and Blend If (gray) sliders for This Layer (moon) and Underlying Layers (foreground) at their predefined black and white points.

At first, we're just going to be concerned with the Blend If sliders at the bottom. When sliders are at the black or white points for both layers, there is no blending effort. Note - the moon blanks out our hoodoos.

This Layer setting.

First, let's move the black This Layer slider to 100. Beyond this point, mares began to show the underlying sky.

Let's See Some Underlying Layer Blend If Slider Magic!

We can recover more of the Edge of Light if we separate the underlying Layer Blend If slider. To perform this separation, hold down the Alt key and right click on the slider's right edge. Move right slider apart until you begin to get some moon back (at 120 for Blend If value). In effect, you're blending the upper and lower layers across a zone between 80 and 160.

There's a point near 160 black point where the moon can begin to obscure the foreground. Carefully adjust the sliders for the best effect.



You really might say *gee whiz!*

You got dark edges on the moon and it's not reflecting the right mare light, etc. Our moon presently is light gray and mares are dark gray. But, the atmosphere between us and the moon varies from light blue to light pink.

What Do Those Wacky Judges Know?

Bet you a perceptive judge would really *ding* you for just those oversights alone...

Atmospheric Effect

If you go to the general Blend Mode box and choose Overlay, the moon layer blends with our subtly changing sky color.

The big benefit of paying such positive attention to what you're doing with Blend If's, Blend Modes, and Opacity *is*:

You get the right colored bluish reflected light in the lower mares *and* You still get pinkish direct light in mares on top of the moon!

So You Think You're Done...

Not quite!

What about fine detail on the moon?

First, we create a 50% gray layer at the top of the layers palette. With a brush set to multiply blend mode and a black brush, we choose 15% opacity. Then, using a pen tablet, we carefully brushed the mares to make them slightly darker.

Do the mares appear just a little blurry? Yes - we've not applied any sharpening so our raw capture is 'as is'. Using Photokit Sharpener from Pixel Genius, we set normal blending mode on a white brush with an opacity of 20% and begin to creatively sharpen regions around the mares. Between multiply and local sharpening, our moon achieves a stronger character.

Voilà...



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