HEALING AND CLONE TOOLS TUTORIAL

 No matter how good a photographer you are there are always occasions when there is something in an image that either needs changing or removing. Elements, like its big brother Photoshop has the healing and clone tools for fixing problems. There is the Spot Healing Brush and the Healing Brush for healing or camouflaging small imperfections (pressing "J" on the keyboard toggles between the two) and the Clone Stamp and Pattern Stamp for covering mistakes or unwanted areas (pressing "S" key toggles between them). Both tools are found on the tool bar and have drop down extensions. (See picture, left).

SPOT HEALING BRUSH

This tool is good for removing small imperfections especially on people. For blemishes such as spots, scars etc. one click can remove the offending area. Below are photographs of Cindy Crawford showing her famous mole and removing same.

TOOLBAR

The healing brush only requires you to select the brush size and shape to cover the area, use the [and] keys will decrease and increase the brush size and Shift +[or] will decrease/increase brush softness/hardness in 25% increments. The brush should be slightly larger than the flaw.

In addition to brush settings the Spot Healing Brush has other controls:

Proximity Match uses pixels around the brush to patch the image.

Create Texture takes the pixels within the brush area to create a texture for the repair. Use for fixing very small blemishes.

All Layers, when selected, allows you to put your healing on a separate layer. If you have a lot of repairs to make, create a new blank layer and then by selecting this option all changes are made on this new layer which can be discarded if you don't like the result without damaging the original.

HEALING BRUSH

Is similar to the Spot Healing Brush but more versatile. After you have chosen a brush and hardness an area is selected to use as the healing source and then you just drag your mouse over the flawed area to cover it.

In the image below I removed the golf ball from the green.
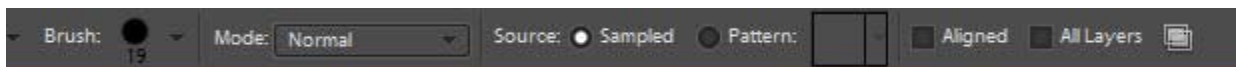
TOOLBAR

In addition to the brush selection this tool has the following unique options:

Mode, allows you to specify how the selected healing pixels will blend with the existing pixels. Normal completely covers old with new, replace will preserve noise etc. the other modes behave in a similar manner to how they do when used with layers.

Source, sets where the replacement pixels are selected within the image using "sampled" or you can choose "pattern" to use one of the choices from the pattern drop down menu.

Aligned, by checking this box you will keep the source of the replacement pixels (indicated by a + sign on the image) and your brush aligned with each other even if you release the mouse button.

Clone Overlay, this icon located next to the "all layers" icon allows you to see a movable translucent copy of the image during the process.

CLONE STAMP

Before healing brushes Photoshop had the Clone Stamp Tool as a retouch option. It can be used in a similar way to the Healing Brush but it can also be used to duplicate areas of an image to cover large flaws or to repeat a section of the image. Below I took the previous image and put in another golf ball by duplicating with the clone stamp tool.
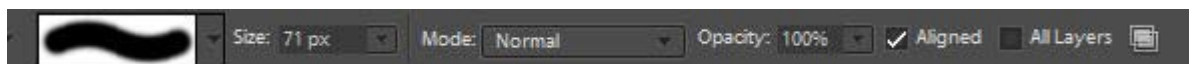
TOOLBAR

In addition to the brush tool the clone stamp has the following unique options:

Opacity: Sets the opacity of the pixels being applied. The lower the number the more the original pixels show through. A handy adjustment when trying to disguise the overlay.

PATTERN STAMP TOOL

This tool, unlike the healing brushes and clone stamp tool doesn't repair your image but instead adds interesting effects to the photograph.

Basically what you do is select a pattern from the drop down menu and apply it to the image. The mode and opacity can be adjusted and you can also select the "Impressionist" effect to give you a …..well….impressionist effect! I have not had occasion to use this tool very often but in the spirit of adventure I played around and produced the following:
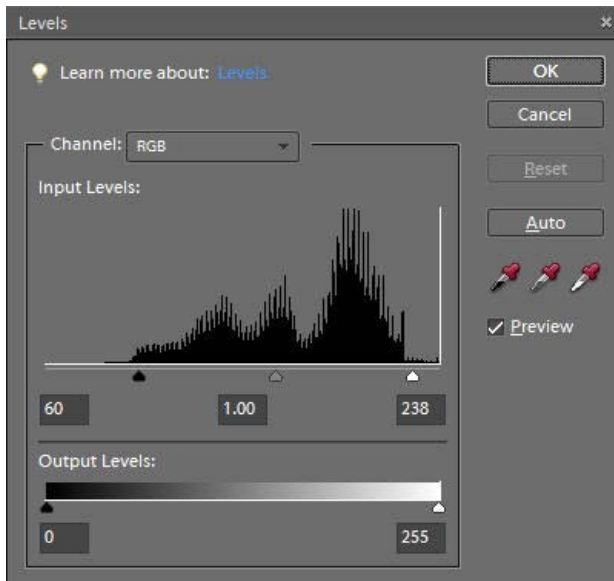

BEFORE

AFTER

I took the image, created a new layer to perform my changes on without affecting the original and applied the following:

First I applied a stamp tool pattern of "pink fur" (yes that is one of the options!) at 25% opacity over the whole duplicate layer. This actually made the image subdued and with a pink tinge but I was after brightening the bridge so this was desirable. I then opened up the levels adjustment on the duplicate layer and moved the black and white input levels to the ends of the histogram. (See picture).

This added a "glow" to the bridge which I find interesting.

Some tips about using these tools.

1. Use the "All Layers" option after creating a new blank layer above your image layer to work on. This keeps your image safe and if things don't work out just trash the duplicate layer and start again.

2. Make sure that the hardness or softness of your brush edge matches the area you are healing or cloning. Nothing looks worse than a hard brush on a soft background.

3. When cloning, especially something repetitive such as the ocean or grass don't use a source too close to the area to be covered to avoid repetition.

You should also remember that sometimes the easiest way to cover something up is to use the marquee tool and copy and paste. Here is an example:

Here a portion of the grass was copied and pasted covering the dog, simple!

Another way this can be used is as shown below:

Here another set of shutters was added by copying the lower set and pasting them over the upper portion of the window.

These tools can be invaluable in cleaning up your images so take a little time to practice and you will find it pays off!