Lighting Effects Filter

The lighting effects filter is like a little program in itself. With this filter, you can create a wealth of different lighting effects, from making a particular object look like it's under a spotlight to bathing you entire picture in soft, omni-directional light. You can even add colored lights.

The lighting effect filter is not an essential part of Elements; you can work quite happily for years without even finding a use for it. However there are times when this filter is just what you need for special effects like putting an object in your photo under a spotlight or adding a strong directional ray of light to an image.

NOTE:

If you just want to correct the overall lightness of your photo use one of the other enhancement features such as shadows/highlights. This filter is for crating special effects.
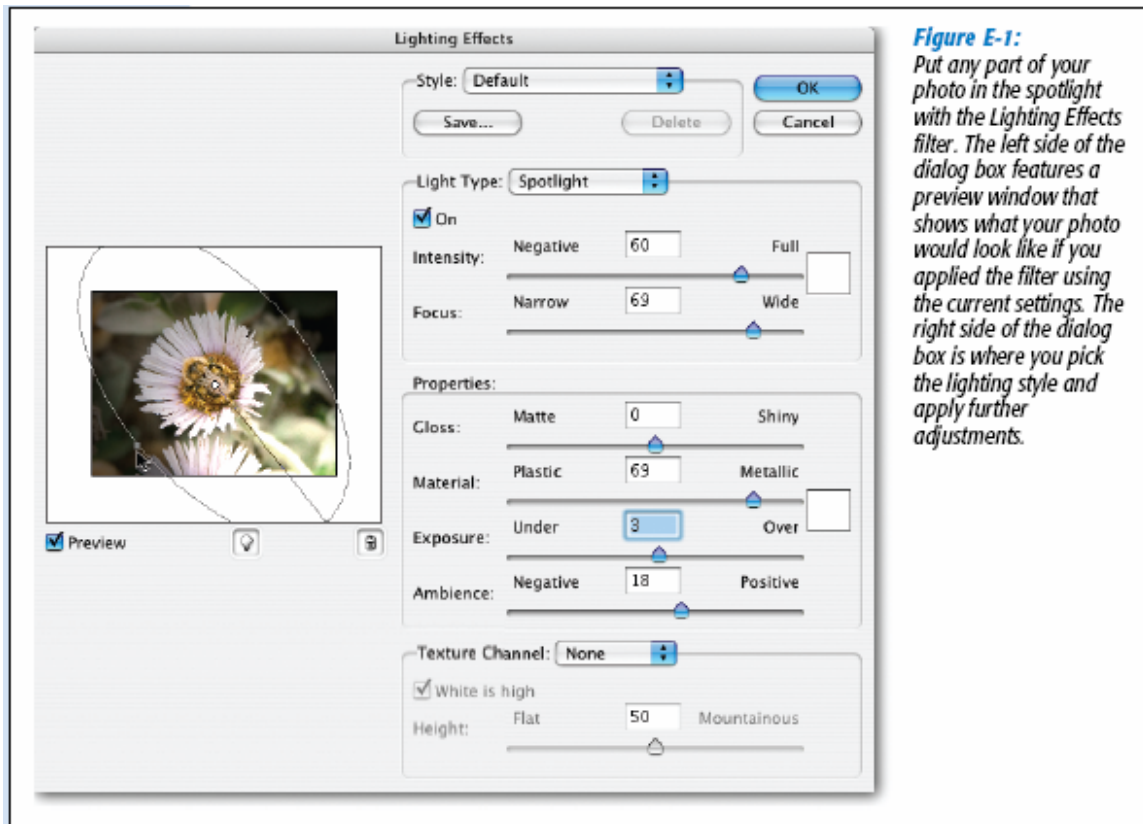
GETTING STARTED

Using this filter can be a little bit complex. What follows is a brief rundown of how the filter works and what the controls do. That should get you started but experimenting with the filter is what will help you more than anything.

First it's usually a good idea to create a duplicate layer (Layer>Duplicate) when using this filter. That way you can adjust the layer's opacity after you've applied the filter.

To get started using the Lighting Effects Filter go to Filter>Render>Lighting Effects or select it from the Styles and Effects Pallet.

You will see the dialog box as shown in figure E-1 below. This assumes the dialog box opens at the "default" style and in this case the spotlight (see on the figure Style = default, Light Type = Spotlight).

Lighting Effects

Style: Default

Save... Delete OK Cancel

Light Type: Spotlight

☑ On

Intensity: Negative 60 Full

Focus: Narrow 69 Wide

Properties:

Gloss: Matte 0 Shiny

Material: Plastic 69 Metallic

Exposure: Under 8 Over

Ambience: Negative 18 Positive

Texture Channel: None

☑ White is high

Height: Flat 50 Mountainous

☑ Preview

The dialog box I divided into two main parts. On the left side is a preview of your picture with the current settings applied to it. You can reposition the source point of the light here, add additional lights or change the angle of the light.

 On the right-hand side is a list of settings divided into four main areas:

Style is where you choose the general type of light you want. There is a long list of styles to choose which vary according to the light type chosen. Default is a good place to start. If you find a style for a particular light type you can save your settings here for future projects.

Light Type is where you choose the coverage area (directional, spotlight, omni etc), its intensity, and how wide the focus will be and change the lights color.
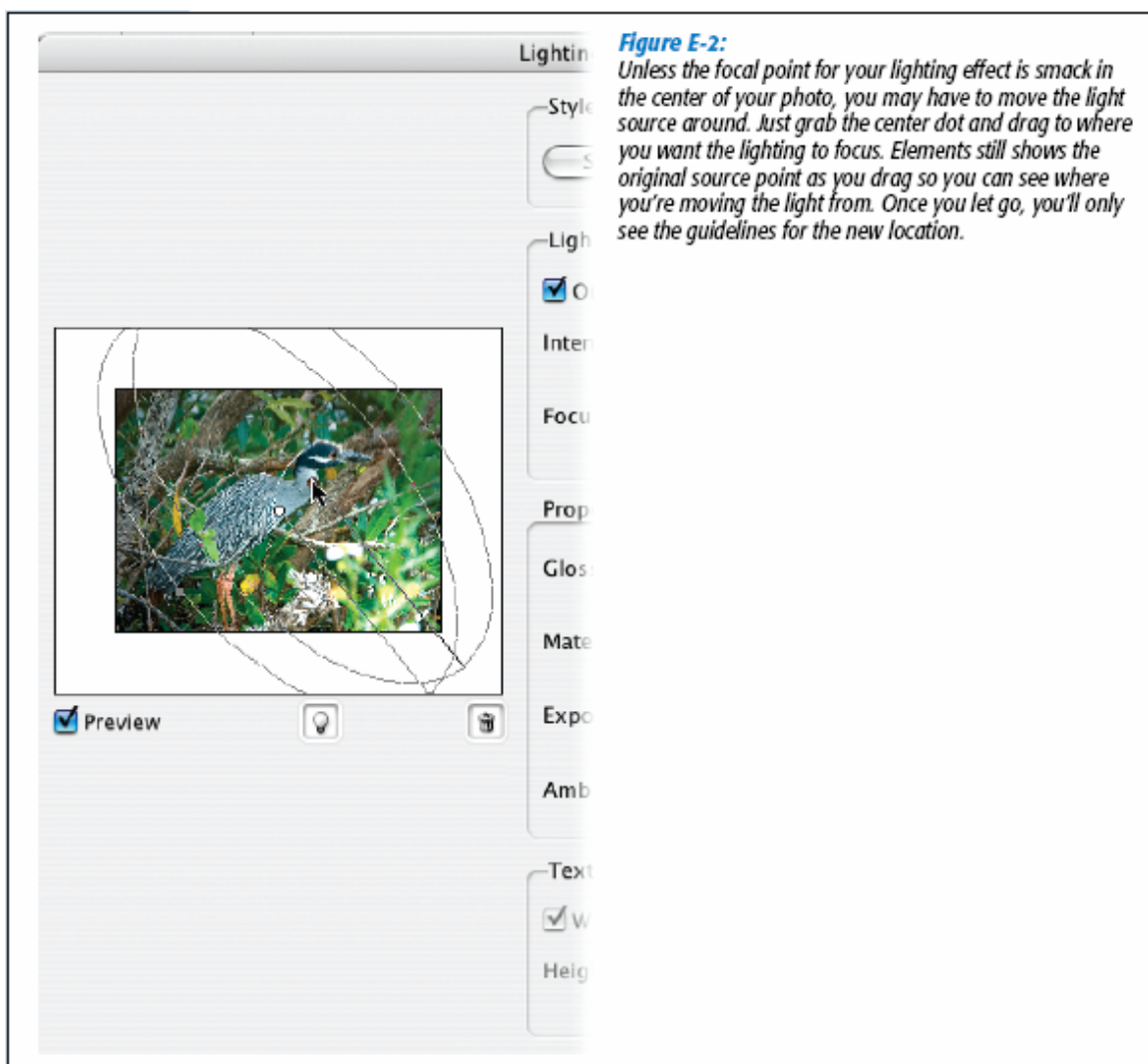
Properties contain the settings that control how the light reflects and how bright the *ambience* is (that is the area outside your chosen light). You can also change the color of the ambient light.

Texture Channel lets you add texture to your lighting effect by creating a relief effect.

ADDING AND CHANGING LIGHT SOURCES

You have to select at least one light source when you use this filter. Just as in real life, the light has to come from somewhere. You can move the light source around in the filter just as you might move a spotlight or a photo studio lighting setup, and you'll do it for the same reason to create optimum lighting for your subject.

Usually the filter opens with one light source, but a few of the styles have multiple sources. In the preview you'll see a dot in the center of a circle, which represents the originating point of your light source. You can move the light source as shown in Figure E-2.

Figure E-2:
Unless the focal point for your lighting effect is smack in the center of your photo, you may have to move the light source around. Just grab the center dot and drag to where you want the lighting to focus. Elements still shows the original source point as you drag so you can see where you're moving the light from. Once you let go, you'll only see the guidelines for the new location.

When you move the light source you change the location of the light source relative to your photo. This changes the light in the image the same way that

moving a real light would make a difference in how light shines on an object you are photographing. You can also add more light sources if you want the light to come from additional directions.

If you want to add another light source, drag the little light bulb icon from under the preview window to the spot in the preview window where you want the light to focus. Every time you drag you set up yet another source. You would use another source, for instance, if you were using the spotlight style but wanted to make two areas of the photo brighter than the surroundings, rather than just one. You would then need to adjust each light separately.

You can adjust how large the lighted area is in two ways. All the styles have a line extending from the light source showing the direction of the light. You can grab the dot at the end of the line (opposite the source) and pull it farther from the source to increase the distance the light travels. Or you can push it closer to the source to decrease the coverage. (This won't have a lot of effect on some of the omni styles). To change the direction of the light, grab the dot at the end of the line and pull it in the direction you want the light to shine.

TIP

You can drag the light source anywhere in the preview area, even outside the boundaries if you want only the edge of the light to enter the photo.

Most styles also have a circle around the source showing the focal radius of the light. To light a broader area, grab on of the dots on the side of the circle and pull it wider. To reduce the area the light covers, push a dot closer to the light source to reduce the size of the circle. You can make all kinds of adjustments to the lights using the settings as explained next.

If you want to get rid of a light source just drag it to the little trash can icon below the preview window.

ADJUSTING LIGHTING EFFECTS SETTINGS

You can produce very subtle effects with the Lighting Effects Filter but it usually takes a lot of tweaking to get things exactly as you want. This is a very complex filter with lots of settings and at first you may find having so many options a little confusing. If you play with each one you'll quickly come to see how each can help you adjust the qualities of your light. You don't always need to change all the settings, but each one is valuable sometimes, depending on the image you are lighting.

Each of the four settings sections of the dialog box comes in handy for getting exactly the effect you want. Here's a rough guide to what the settings in each section does. Not every setting is available for every light style. For instance, the

focus setting is grayed out for omni lights because omni lights are unfocused by definition.

The first section **STYLE** is where you choose the kind of lighting you want. Your choices are:

Default.
The basic lighting style which you can customize with any of the settings in the following areas. It creates a single light spotlight of medium intensity.

Blue Omni.
An unfocused overall light. It starts out blue but you can use the color square in the Light Type section of the dialog box to change it to another color.

Circle of Light.
Creates four colored spotlights arranged in a circle. The colors are red, blue, yellow and white.

Crossing.
Creates an effect like a spotlight with a wide focus and medium intensity.

Crossing Down.
Similar to Crossing but with two lights instead of one.

Five Lights Down.
Makes five white spotlights shining down from the top of the image.

Five Lights Up.
Reverse of the previous.

Flashlight.
Creates a focused yellow spotlight of medium intensity just like a real flashlight.

Floodflight.
A white spotlight with a wide focus.

Parallel Directional.
Gives a full intensity blue directional light or a white medium intensity directional light. Neither is focused.

RGB Lights.
Produces three spotlights one each red, green and blue.

Soft Direct Lights.
Similar to Parallel Directional but less intense.

Soft Omni.
Gives one medium intensity spotlight with a wide focus.

Three Down.
Produces three parallel medium intensity lights that shine down from the top of the image (See Five Lights Down).

Triple Spotlight.
Similar to Three Down but all three lights focus on one point in the image.

The two buttons, save and delete, let you choose to save the settings for a particular style and later remove it respectively. If you want to apply the same effect to another photo, you can click the save button and name the style when asked. From then on you will se it as a menu choice in the available styles. To permanently remove a style click the delete button.

The next section **LIGHT TYPE** lets you turn lights on and off and make basic adjustments like color, focus and the intensity of the light.

Light Type.
Determines which of the three main lighting varieties your style will use:

Directional: The light flows in one direction from the light source.

Omni: More diffused lighting.

Spotlight: Light is focused on a point in the image.

You can pick any of these settings, but for some Styles, choosing a Light Type that's at odds with the Style can give you a very small lighted area or none at all. For instance, if you choose Soft Omni as your Style and Spotlight as your Light Type only a very small area gets illuminated.

On.
Turn this setting off if you need to see the preview without the light. It's useful for adjusting the ambient light without getting distracted by the strength of the spotlight.

Intensity.
Determines how strong the light is. Move the slider to adjust.

Focus.
Where you pick whether your light covers a narrow or wide area. Move the slider to the right for a wide area or left for a narrow one.

The Color Square.
Let's you change the color of your light. The square starts out white for most styles but you can create a colored light as well. Double-click on the square to bring up the Elements Color Picker and choose the color you want.

The next section which Adobe calls **Properties** lets you adjust the quality of the light.

Gloss.
Determines how much the surfaces in your photo reflect the light. Matte gives you no reflection at all while gloss produces a very shiny look.

Material.
Tells Elements what characteristic is going to dominate in the reflected light. Plastic means the effect reflects the lights color, metallic means it reflects the color of the object.

Exposure.
Increases and decreases the amount of light. 0 is neutral. Positive values means more light, negative values means less light.

Ambience.
Controls how diffused and blended with other light in your photo your effect will be. If the default dark background surprises you move the slider to the right to lighten the ambience.

There's another color box on the right side of this section that lets you set a color for the ambience, if you wish.

The final section is the **Texture Channel**. You can use the Lighting Effects Filter to add texture to your image by creating a relief effect as shown in Figure E-3.

Figure E-3:
One of the more popular uses for the Lighting Effects filter is to create textures. Here's a rather exaggerated use of the Texture Channel to create a highly textured effect. Usually, you'd use this in conjunction with other filters for artistic treatments of your photos.

Color Menu
The color choices I n the pull-down menu let you adjust the amount of texture for the individual color channels in your image.

White Is High.
If you choose to use a texture the white parts of the image will stand out from the page. Turn off the "White is High" if you want the dark parts to stand out.

Height.
Determines how much the texture stands out from the page. Move the slider to the left for a flat look to the right to make the texture stand out more.

You will have to practice with the Lighting Effects Filter to really grasp its capabilities but with a little effort you can create some very dramatic lighting effects.