# Curves in Highlights or Shadows

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In this lesson, we're going to talk about another concept relating to the Curves adjustment. When you adjust an area in Curves, you might want to consider how that change should be blended into the brightest and darkest portions of your image.

In many of my images, I will isolate individual areas and then shift their colors to make them separate from their surroundings. I use very precise selections in order to isolate the areas. Because this lesson is not about making selections, I didn't want to spend a lot of time on that here. Instead, I have created the selections ahead of time and saved them for quick access in this lesson.

In the downloadable lesson file, there are several saved selections. There are two ways of accessing saved selections. You can click on the Select menu and choose Load Selection and then use the Channel menu to choose from the saved selections. Alternatively, you could open the Channels Panel to see a more visual preview of each selection. When a selection is saved, it is actually being saved as a channel, so it will show up in the channel list within this panel.
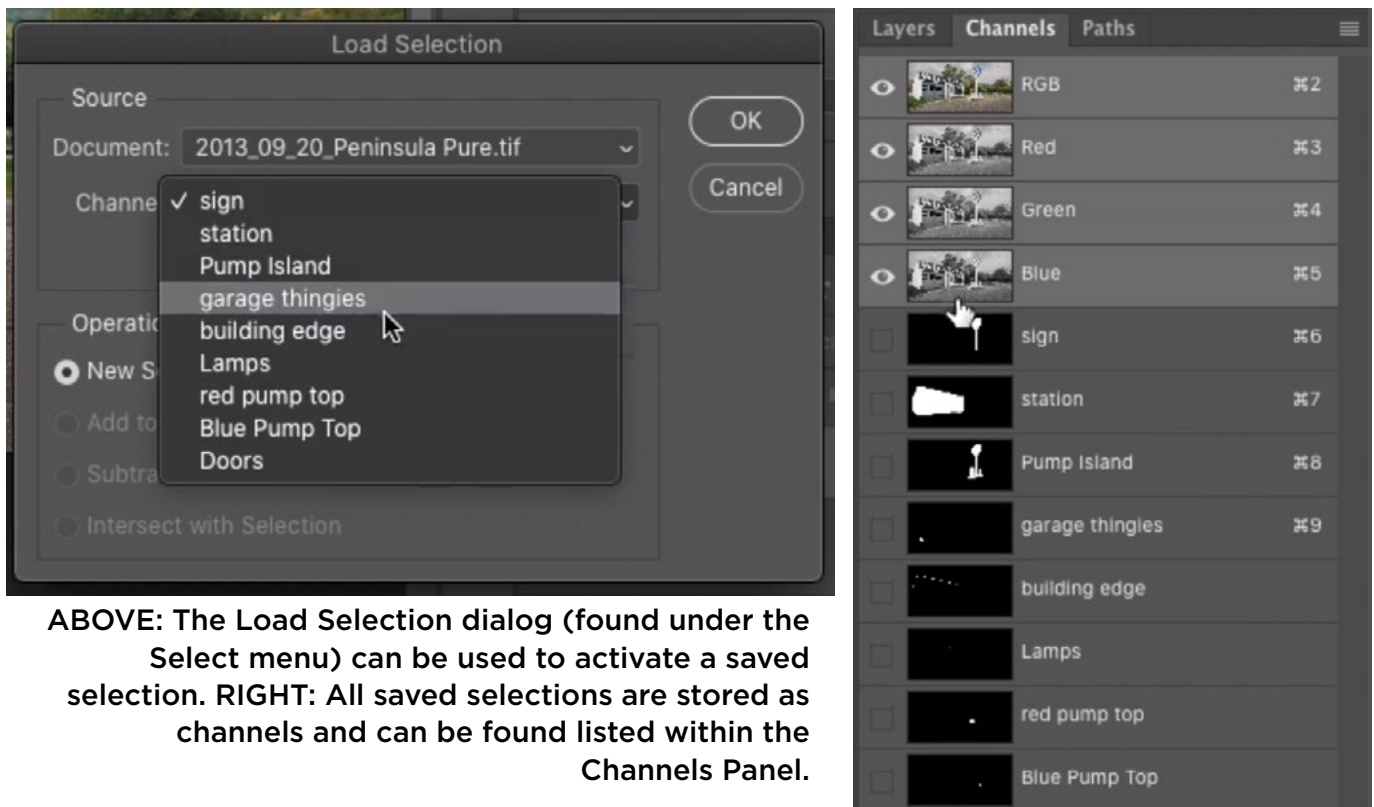
ABOVE: The Load Selection dialog (found under the Select menu) can be used to activate a saved selection. RIGHT: All saved selections are stored as channels and can be found listed within the Channels Panel.

To load a selection from the Channels Panel, either drag the channel thumbnail to the select icon at the bottom of the panel (the left-most icon) or hold down the Command key (Ctrl on Win) and click on the channel thumbnail. The channel will be loaded as a selection and you will see the "marching ants" selection appear on the image. In the video example, I loaded the selection of the doors in this image.


In the lesson video, we loaded the saved selection of the doors in this image.

## Make Curves Adjustment (Timestamp 1:47)

After isolating an area with a selection, I'll adjust that area with a Curves Adjustment Layer. To create a Curves Adjustment Layer, I'll click on the Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers Panel and choose Curves from the pop-up menu. The Curves adjustment will appear in the Layers Panel and the selection will automatically be applied to the mask that's attached to the layer. The areas that were selected will be the white part of the mask. The white parts of a mask represent the parts of the layer that will be visible, which means the Curves adjustment will only be visible in that isolated area.

The Properties Panel will contain the settings for the Curves adjustment. I want to make sure that the Targeted Adjustment Tool is turned on. It looks like a little hand icon on the left side of the Properties Panel.
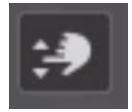
TIP: I always want the Targeted Adjustment Tool to be turned on and there is a way to make it so it's turned on automatically. Click on the little menu in the top right corner of the Properties Panel and choose "Auto Select Targeted Adjustment Tool" from the drop-down menu.

I want to adjust the color of this particular area in order to make it stand out from its surroundings. There is a little shortcut you can use for adjusting colors in Curves. I'll hold down the Shift and Command keys (Shift and Ctrl on Win) and then click on the area I want to adjust. By using that keyboard shortcut, it measures the exact amount of red, green and blue that's in the area where I clicked. If I look at those individual color curves, there will be a dot on each one, representing the target area. (You can switch between the different color curves by using the color menu above the curve chart in the Properties Panel.)
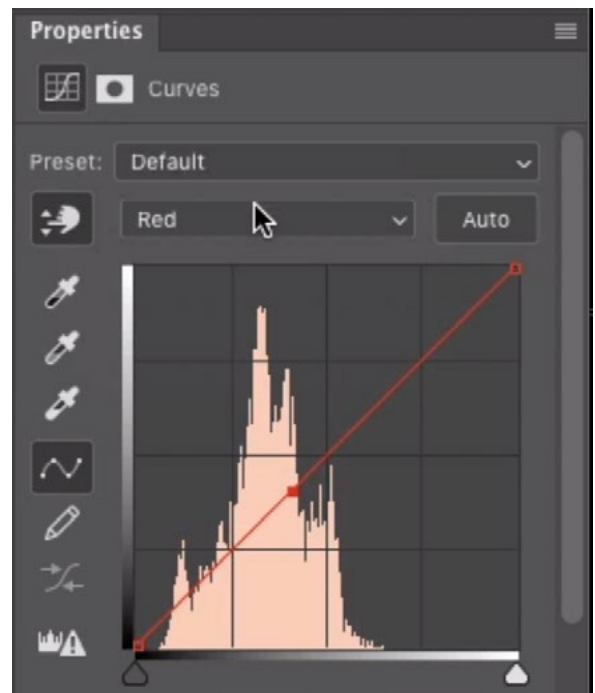
LEFT: The Targeted Adjustment Tool is being used to sample the color on the garage door. RIGHT: By holding down Shift+Command when sampling, we are placing a point on each of the three color curves.

In order to make the targeted area (the doors) stand out from the rest of the image, I can change the amount of each color that is contained in the area.

I'll open the blue curve and make sure that the point is selected. (It will be solid if it is selected and hollow if it is not selected.) The arrow keys can be used to move the point up and down. If you add the Shift key, it will move the point up or down in larger increments. If I move the blue curve point up, it will make the targeted area more blue. If I were to move that point down, it would make the area less blue and more yellow (because yellow is the opposite of blue). I will move the point up in order to make the targeted doors more blue.
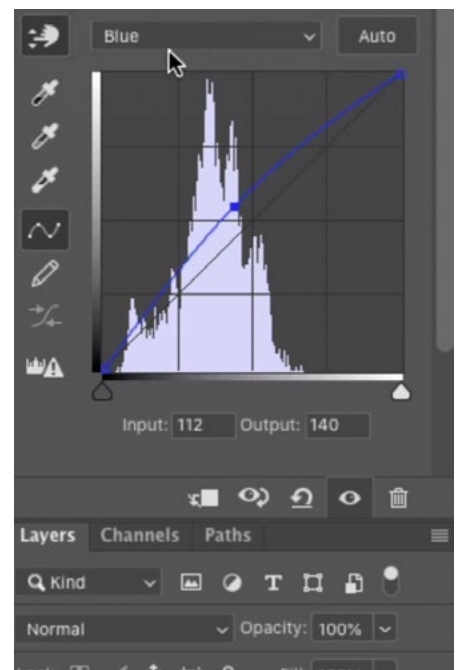
After placing a point on the color curves to represent the color of the doors, we are working with the blue curve, moving the point up in order to add more blue to the targeted area.

Then I will switch to the next color (green) and do the same thing. I'll make sure the dot is active and then I'll use the up and down arrow keys to see how the changes affect the doors. In the video example, I found that the colors separated more when I moved the dot up, adding more green to the area. Finally, I'll switch to the red curve and again move the dot up and down, finding a position that makes the doors look most ideal.
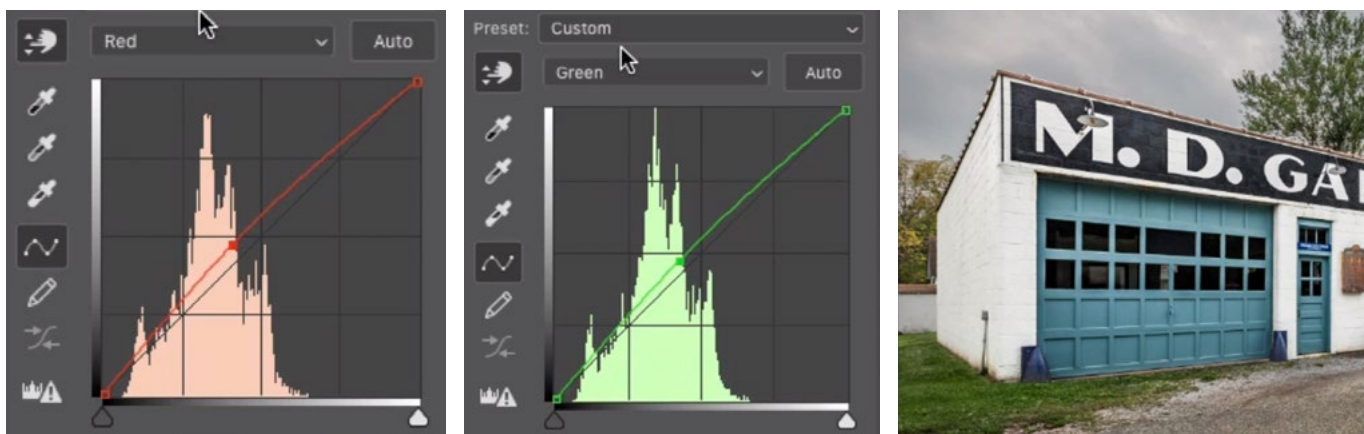
The red and green points were moved as well. You can see the result on the doors.

Now I'll move on to another area that could use some adjusting and that is the red portion of the gas pump in the scene. There is a saved selection for this area and I will load it by holding down the Command key (Ctrl on Win) and clicking on its thumbnail in the Channels Panel. I'll then return to the Layers Panel and create a new Curves adjustment layer. The selection will automatically be applied to the layer mask.

With the Targeted Adjustment Tool active, I will Shift+Command+Click (Shift+Ctrl+Click on Win) on the area I would like to adjust. Remember, by using this shortcut, a point is being placed on each of the three color curves. Once again, I will move between the three color curves, moving the point up and down until I find the position where the color looks ideal.
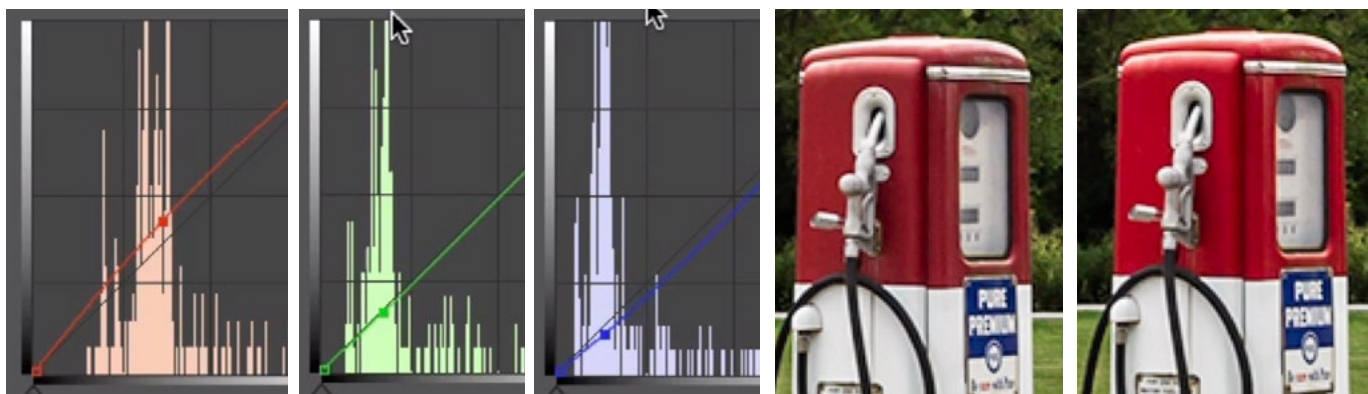
The red part of the gas pump was adjusted using the three color curves. You can see a before and after view above.
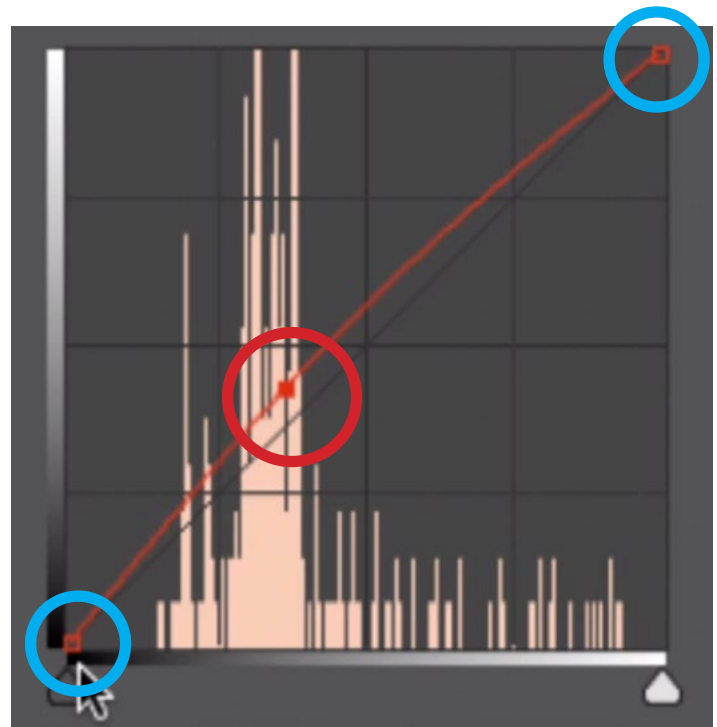
Using Curves to Adjust the Shadows and Highlights (6:05)

After adjusting the three color curves, I will find the one that made the largest change to the image. In the case of the gas pump, it was the red curve. I'll open the red curve and inspect the chart. The distance between the new curve (the red line) and the original curve (the black diagonal line) reflects how big of a change we're making. The farther the two lines are from one another, the larger the change. Looking at the red curve, the largest change is taking place in the area where the curve point is. That change tapers off and becomes less and less as it reaches the top right and bottom left parts of the curve.

The largest change is taking place where the point is (red circle). There is virtually no change in the brightest and darkest parts of the image (blue circles).

The top right part of the curve represents the brightest parts of the image and the bottom left part of the curve represents the darkest parts of the image. This means that there is virtually no change happening in the brightest and darkest parts of the image.

Sometimes, I like to make changes on those far ends, where the darkest and brightest parts of the image are. An example of this would be when I want some color to appear in the highlights or the shadows of an object.

Add color to the shadows In the video example, let's say that I'd like to inject some color into the shadows of the red gas pump. Looking at the curve chart, the dark areas are represented on the left and the bright areas are represented on the right.

If I want the change that I made using Curves to affect the darkest areas of the image, I will click on the dot that is on the bottom left end of the curve line and I'll drag it up. In the video example, I want to inject more red into the shadows of the red pump, so I will make sure that I'm working with the red curve. I will click on that bottom left dot and drag it up just enough that the curve line becomes straight and looks natural. Now, the darkest part of the targeted area becomes more red.
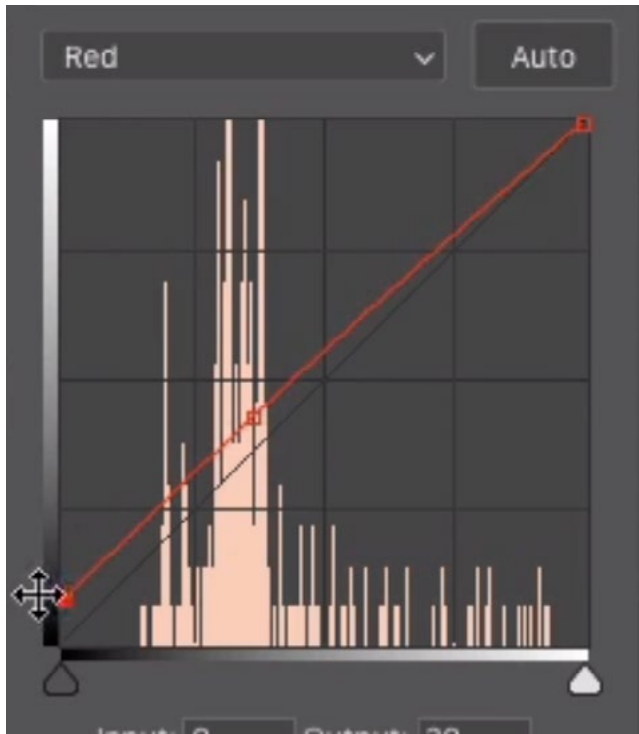
In order to make the darkest areas more red, we moved the bottom left point on the red curve up a bit. Above, you can see a before and after view.

Add color to the highlights If you have an object that has a really bright highlight, you might find that the bright highlight will have no color whatsoever. It will instead be perfectly white. White is located on the far right side of the curve. If you are looking at the color curves and there are no bars on the far right side, it means that there is no color in those brightest highlights.


There are no bars on the far right side of this red curve, which means there are no reds in the area.

You can not inject a particular color in that area because the right side of the curve line is already as high as it can go. In this instance, you will need to use a trick in order to make a color change to the brightest portion of the image.

The highlight on the gas pump has no color, which means that there is an equal amount of red, green and blue. Whenever you have an equal amount of red, green and blue, you will have a shade of gray. In order to get a color, these three values need to be out of balance.

I want to add more red into the highlights of the gas pump, so I am working with the red curve. But in order to make red more prominent (so that it can be adjusted in the highlights), I'll need to open the other two color curves (green and blue) and lessen them. By lessening the greens and blues, I will be making the three values out of balance, with the reds being more prominent.

I'll open the green curve, grab the dot in the upper right and then move it down a bit. Then I'll do the same thing with the blue curve. Now, if we look at the top of the gas pump (where the highlight is), we can see that there is more color than there was before. The more red that I want to add to the highlights, the more I will need to lower the other two curves.
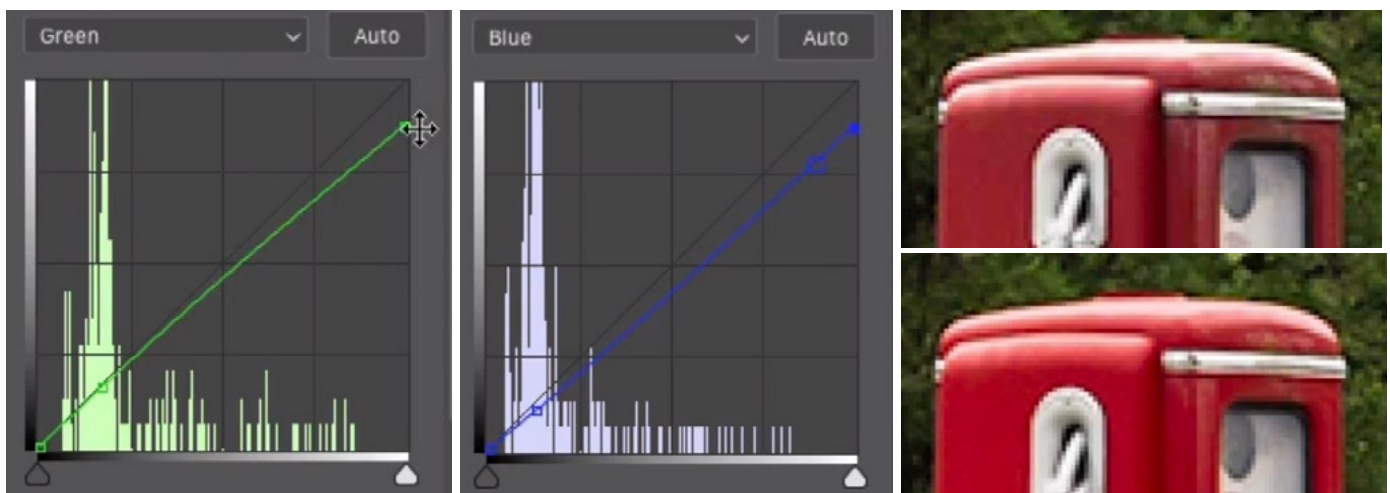
In order to make the reds more prominent in the highlights, we had to lessen the greens and blues, as you can see in the curves above. At right, you can see a before (top) and after view.