



Stone Creek Silk ©

Making Selections ~ part 3

This is the third tutorial on making selections in Photoshop Elements. Earlier we looked at the principles of making selection using the marquee tools and at adding and subtracting from selections. We then looked at the Magic wand, which selects areas of an image based on each pixel's colour, and the Quick Selection tool which looks for edges or boundaries and tries to make a selection based on these. These tools may be all that you need but there are other tools in Elements that can be useful too.

The first is the group of Lasso tools. These are probably the tools I use least for making selections but they certainly have their uses. There are three variations, the Lasso tool, the Magnetic Lasso tool and the Polygonal Lasso tool.

The standard **Lasso tool** literally lets you draw round the area you want to select. Choose the lasso tool from the toolbox (keyboard shortcut - L). Drag the mouse round the area you want to select, holding the left hand button down. When you release the mouse the end of the line and the start point will join up with a straight line to make an enclosed shape.

I do find it difficult to control this tool with any precision and you only get one go at it but it can be useful for making a rough cut of something that you then tidy up with other tools.

The next one is the **Magnetic lasso tool**. I don't think I've ever used this tool in real life as the Quick Selection Tool is so good and works well on much the same sort of images, those with good edges or boundaries – it can't handle fuzzy areas. If you do want to try it, select it from the toolbox, then click on the image where you want to start your selection. Hover the mouse over the edge you want the lasso to follow – the selection should snap to the edge as you move the mouse. When you have gone round the area you want to select Ctrl-click or double-click to complete the shape. Don't move the mouse too quickly with this one – it works best if it has time to do its calculations.

I picked this image to demonstrate the Magnetic Lasso tool as it shows the difference between the image and the background clearly but it's also a good example of why choosing the right selection tool is so important. As there are quite strong edges I could have chosen one of the Lasso tools, the Quick Selection tool or even the Magic Extractor tool – more on that later. By far the

most effective way to do this is to use the Magic Wand tool to select the sky and then simply delete it.

The third version is the **Polygonal lasso tool**. This is really the only lasso tool that I do use. It works by putting down anchor points, with straight lines between each one, each time you click with the mouse. You would think that its use would be limited to images with straight lines but it handles curves remarkably well. You simply move the mouse very short distances between clicks. If you slip a bit and want to undo the last anchor point without losing all the others then you press the backspace or delete key. If you want to force the tool to join back up with the start point you can Ctrl-click or double-click to do this.

Next we have the **Magic extractor**. This tool isn't in the toolbox but is at the bottom of the Image menu.

It works on a similar basis to the Quick Selection tool, so it's trying to find edges or boundaries, but the way you use it is different. Here you mark roughly which parts of the image are going to be the foreground, the area you want to keep, and which are going to be background, which is the area that is going to be deleted.

The standard colours are red to mark the foreground area and blue to mark the background area. These colours can be changed by clicking on one and selecting a replacement colour. For comparison, I'm going to use the same lily image as I did in Selections 2 and red doesn't show up very well on the dark pink petals so we can change it to yellow or something else that shows up well.

Next you make some marks to indicate the foreground and then some to indicate the background.

Once you've done some rough marks, click on the Preview button so you can see how you are doing. You'll probably have to go in and indicate any areas that aren't correctly marked then click on Preview again.

- If you get a mark where you don't want it you can use the Point Eraser Tool – in the left mini toolbox - to get rid of it.
- You have a Zoom tool to let you zoom in to the image to make it easier to see what you are doing, and the Move Image tool to let you move the image around in its window.

Normally in Elements if you select the Zoom tool you get options on the Options Bar to zoom in (+) and out (-). In the Magic Extractor you only get an icon to Zoom in (!). This is ok as long as you know that you need to hold the Alt key down to reverse the action and zoom back out again.

Even though the Magic Extractor usually does a good job, on an image like the lily, I still prefer using the Quick Selection tool and inverting the image. With the Quick Selection tool you are focused on the area you are currently

working on and rarely miss an area that needs to be added to or subtracted from the selection, whereas I find that I don't have the same concentration when I'm using the Magic Extractor as the tool is doing most of the work for me. However, that may just be me ...

Notes on selections:

Now, I just want to mention a few bits and pieces to do with selections:

- Creating a really good, refined selection can take some time to do well. So you may want to save the selection so you can use it another time. To do this you simply go to the Select menu and click on **Save Selection**. You'll need to give it a name and then click on OK. You will also have to save the image as a .psd (Photoshop format) file otherwise your saved selection will have disappeared when you open the image the next time. I did this for the lily head – now I can go back to the Select menu and click on Load Selection, select the name I gave it, click on OK, and the selection reappears.
- Remember you can change the size, shape and orientation of your selection by using **Transform Selection** – see how to do this in Selections part 1.
- You don't have to use a single tool to make your selections – as long as you have everything set to Add to Selection you can swap from one selection tool to another.
- Some of the selection tools have an option called **feather**. This applies a soft edge, of a depth that you specify, to the edges of the selection. This helps integrate an image into a background so it doesn't look 'stuck on'. We'll cover this when we look more at digital collage and 'edges and borders'.

Text on a selection

In the Basic Manipulations tutorial we looked at making text follow a preset shape (available in v 10 and later). I thought we would finish this tutorial by having a look at making text follow a selection.

You can use any of the selection tools for this – I'll show you the basic sequence on a simple marquee generated shape and then at the same process on a photograph.

- First create a new, blank document and a stepped shape using the rectangular marquee tool set on 'add to selection'.
- Once the selection is complete, change to the Text on Selection tool.
- Clicked once inside the shape.
- Now, click on the green tick and the marching ants, showing a selection, changes to a solid line indicating that this is the path that the text will follow. This path does not print, it is just a guide on the screen so you can see the shape you've created.
- Next move the cursor over the path until it turns into the text insertion point, the 'I' cursor and click once. Select the font, size, colour of text that you want from the Options bar, then start typing. The text will do its best to follow the path you've set. Once you have finished typing click on the green tick to accept what you've done.

I then went back to the lily image I used to illustrate the Quick Selection tool. The image has been cut out of its background and the selection around the lily head is active.

- Select the Text on Selection tool but before you do anything else move the marching ants a little bit away from the flower using the Offset slider on the Options bar. Dragging this to the right moves the marching ants a little bit away from the shape, dragging it to the left moves the marching ants inside the shape.
- Now click inside the selection and then on the green tick to create the path.
- Next move your cursor over the path until you get the text insertion point, and start typing. Once you're finished, click on the green arrow to complete the action.

As usual, the text is on its own layer so you can now switch off the lily layer and just see the text in the lily shape. You could, of course, now add a new layer at the bottom of the layer stack and insert a new background or colour layer if you wish.

Note that you can only use one shape at a time for this. So, if you make two **separate** rectangles with the marquee tool, the Text on Selection tool will only let you use one of them to put text on.

Tasks:

For this task I'm only going to give you a basic description of what I want you to do rather than how to do it. All the techniques have already been covered in the tutorials but if you get stuck, don't flounder too long – drop me an email and I'll point you in the right direction.

Task 1

- Choose 4 images from your collections and make a selection from each one using one or more tools from this tutorial plus, if you wish, one tool from any of the previous tutorials.
- Remove the background so each selection is on a transparent background. Upload before and after images for each one, including a brief note of which tools you used and why.

Remember there is as much skill in choosing which tool to use to make a selection as in using the tool itself. The more images you analyse and the more selections you make, the better you will get at it so, if you want to do more than the 4, that would be great.

Task 2

Choose your favourite selection from Task 1 and repeat the contents to make a mirror image. Feel free to fill your selection with colour(s) or a different image and to add a background of some sort. You could also add text in some form or another if you wish. These instructions are deliberately vague! I would like you to 'do your own thing'. The only real request from me is that you use

selections in some form and that you start combining the techniques you've learned so far.

Task 3

Resize the image from Task 2 twice:

- Once to 600 pixels wide – this is a useful size for inclusion on a web site and since it isn't initially for printing, only the Image Size matters. Save this to a new name, in a jpeg file format.
- Secondly, go back to the original image and resize it so that it will print at 150 ppi to fit on an A5 piece of paper. Save this to a new name, which indicates which version it is, in a jpeg file format.

Upload both versions. **For this task only** you can ignore the normal size restrictions for uploading images.