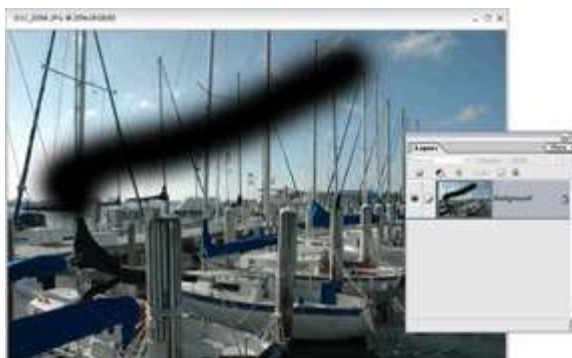


Adobe Photoshop Elements  
**INTRO TO LAYERS (PART 1)**

By Dave Cross

If you've never used layers or have just never quite got the hang of them, here's a very quick overview of layers: what they are and why you should use them.

Look at the photo on your screen in Photoshop Elements and imagine that it's lying on your desk. If you took a Sharpie marker and drew on your photo, you would be making a major change to that image. Unless it's an erasable marker, you have literally made a permanent (and pretty damaging) change to the photo. It would have been better to place a sheet of clear plastic acetate over the photo and use the marker on the plastic—that way the photo would have been protected.



**Figure 1**

You should think of working in Photoshop Elements in the same way: Don't work directly on the photo and risk changing it permanently; use layers to "protect" it.

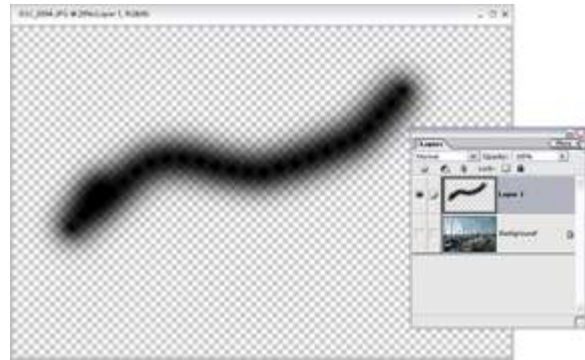
In this first example (**Figure 1**), the Brush tool was used to paint directly on the photo. In the Layers palette, the photo is represented by a layer called Background. If we then saved the document, well, that would become our permanent image: a photo with a black painted stroke on it.



**Figure 2**

Instead, we should use Photoshop Elements' equivalent of a clear plastic overlay: a new layer (**Figure 2**). Click on the Create a New Layer icon in the Layers palette and a new blank, see-through (transparent) layer is added to the document. By painting on the new layer, the original photo is untouched, even though it looks like we're painting right on the background image.

There's an important difference, however, the painted stroke is on a separate layer (**Figure 3**). If you click on the Eye icon to the left of the Background layer in the Layers palette, that layer will be hidden, leaving only the additional layer visible (called Layer 1 in our example). Notice the gray-and-white checkerboard — that's Elements' way of indicating transparency.



**Figure 3**



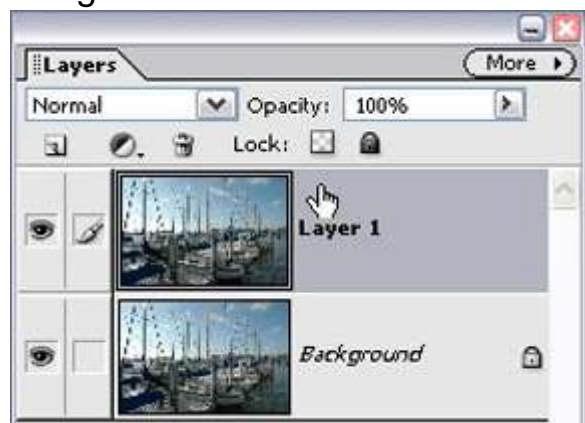
**Figure 4**

Also, since the painted stroke is on a separate layer, you can use the Layers palette Opacity slider to make the paint semi-see-through and/or use the Move tool to drag the paint to a different part of the photo (**Figure 4**).

Plus, you can click on the Trash icon — at the top of the Layers palette — to delete the painted stroke layer and return to the original image.

What if you want to edit the actual pixels of the photo, for example using the Clone Stamp tool, Healing Brush, or Dodge and Burn tools?

Once again, we need to “protect” the original photo, this time by duplicating the Background layer and working on a copy. To do this, either press **Ctrl+J** or, from the Layers palette's More menu, choose Duplicate Layer (**Figure 5**). You'll create a copy of the Background that you'll work on, while the original Background sits at the bottom of the Layers palette safely stored away in case you need it.



**Figure 5**

So any time you're tempted to start working directly on the background image, pause for a moment. If you are

going to add painted objects, add a new layer first. If you need to work on the pixels themselves, duplicate first. (If you add type, a new Type layer is created automatically.)

In Part 2, we'll look at creating collages from multiple images.