Skin Retouching

In this video I will show you how I retouch skin in my portraits.

I like to use 4 Photoshop tools while retouching:
1. Clone Stamp Tool
2. Healing Brush Tool
3. Spot Healing Brush Tool
4. Patch Tool

I usually make my changes on a new layer, so I can recover easily if I don't like the changes, and I zoom in on the area I want to change while I work.

Clone Stamp Tool

The **Clone Stamp Tool** copies pixels from the sample area to the target area.

Options	Settings
Sample Layer	Current & Below
Aligned	Checked
Opacity	~15%
Mode	Normal
Brush	Round, 0% hardness, size just larger than the spot I am fixing

Position the cursor over the sample area and ALT-left-click to sample pixels, and then left-click multiple times over the target area until the blemish is gone. Painting with a soft brush with low opacity multiple times blurs the edges of the change, blending it with the rest of the image, but at the cost of losing some of the fine skin texture. You must be careful to not place multiple copies close enough together that they are recognized as a repeating pattern.

Healing Brush Tool

The **Healing Brush Tool** copies only the details from the sample area to the target area, leaving the original colors and shading.

Options	Settings
Sample Layer	Current & Below
Aligned	Checked
Source	Sampled
Mode	Normal
Brush	Round, 100% hardness, size just larger than the blemish

Position the cursor over the sample area, ALT-left-click to sample pixels, and then left-click over the target area to remove the blemish. Changing only the details while leaving the colors and shading blends the changes with the rest of the image and makes repeating patterns less recognizable.

SPOT HEALING BRUSH TOOL

The **Spot Healing Brush Tool** works like the Healing Brush Tool, but it automatically selects details from near the target area to replace the detail in the target area. It leaves the colors and shading unchanged.

Options	Settings
Sample All Layers	Checked
Type	Proximity Match
Mode	Normal
Brush	Round, 100% hardness, size just larger than the blemish

Left click over the target area to remove the blemish. This is quick and easy, but sometimes it makes poor choices for replacing the details, especially in areas with different textures or near edges.

PATCH TOOL

The **Patch Tool** works like the Healing Brush Tool except you define the shape of the area that you want to change and then drag it into position. You can't make changes on a new layer with this tool, so I make a copy and make changes to it. It also leaves the colors and shading unchanged.

Options	Settings
Patch	Destination
Transparent	Unchecked

Hold the left mouse down to draw an area around the pixels you want to copy. Then left-click inside the sample area and drag it to your target area.

FREQUENCY SEPARATION TECHNIQUE

My favorite technique for retouching is based on **Frequency Separation**. This technique separates the image into a high frequency layer (details and texture) and a low frequency layer (color and shading) which can be corrected separately, removing blemishes while leaving proper fine skin texture and color. It gives you more control over your corrections.

Create two new layers by copying your original image, and name them "low-color" and "high-texture", with the "high-texture" layer on top.

Turn off the "high-texture" layer visibility.
Apply the Gaussian Blur filter to the "low-color" layer, blur just enough to hide skin detail.

Turn on the "high-texture" layer visibility.
Select the "high-texture" layer and apply the Image|Apply Image function.
The settings will be slightly different depending on the bit depth of your image.

	8-bit images	16-bit images
Source:	your image file	your image file
Layer:	low-color	low-color
Channel:	RGB	RGB
Invert:	not checked	checked
Blending:	subtract	add
Opacity:	100.00%	100.00%
Scale:	2	2
Preserve Transparency:	not checked	not checked
Mask:	not checked	not checked
Offset:	128	0

You should see a gray scale version of the image details.
Now change the blending mode for the "high-texture" layer to "Linear Light"
Your image should look like it was before you started now.

Make changes on the "high-texture" layer to fix detail problems by copying good texture details over bad.
Use clone stamp with "Current Layer Only" sampling.
Set hardness to 100%.
Set opacity to 100%.
Set brush size just larger than defect to be fixed.
A hard opaque brush will not blur the texture.

Make changes on the "low-color" layer to fix color and shading problems by copying good color and shading over bad.
Use clone stamp with "Current Layer Only" sampling.
Set hardness low ~0%.
Set opacity low 5-15%.
Set brush size larger than area to be fixed.
A soft low opacity brush will blur the color and shading transitions.

Continue making changes to the "high-texture" and "low-color" layers until you are satisfied with the image. This is the technique that most professional retouchers use because it gives them so much control over the retouching.

Retouching Intensity

Some problems should be removed completely, like blemishes, stray hairs and spots, and some problems should be de-emphasized but not removed completely, like wrinkles, scars and discolored areas.

I use one layer for correcting problems that need to be removed and one layer for correcting problems that I want to de-emphasize. When I have finished making these changes I adjust the opacity of the de-emphasis correction layer to allow some of the original image to show through. This allows me to minimize items like wrinkles but not remove them.

You have to decide how much to change a portrait, most everyone wants to look a little better than their photographs, but everyone wants to be recognizable.