



Photo retouching in the context of a packaging for a publicity campaign consists of giving an immediate and clear vision of the products that are presented by removing everything that could divert

people's attention. However, they are shown the facts. When they look at this image, then at the real products, they do not feel as if they were misled.

studio 08

CYRIL BRUNEAU

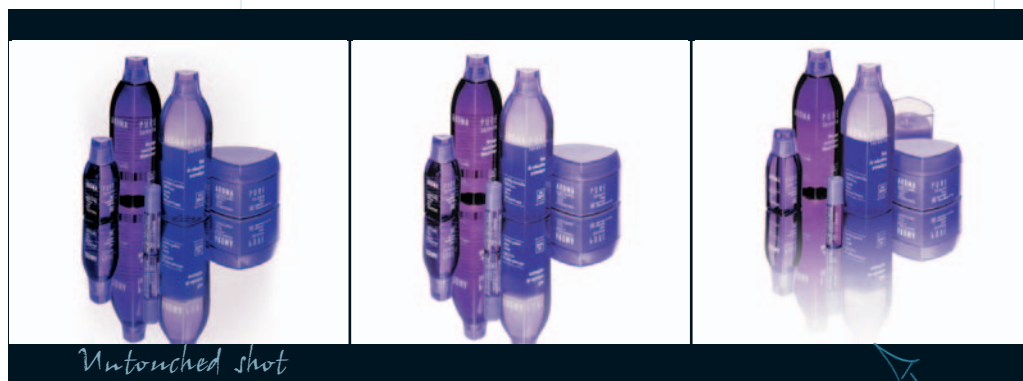
Hardware used

- Sinar P 4x5 view camera
- Provia *Fuji film
- Lighting sources: lighting box
- G4 dual-processor 533 MHz
- 1.5 GB of RAM
- Gretagmacbeth Eye-one spectrophotometer

Software used

- Photoshop CS

Aroma



Untouched shot

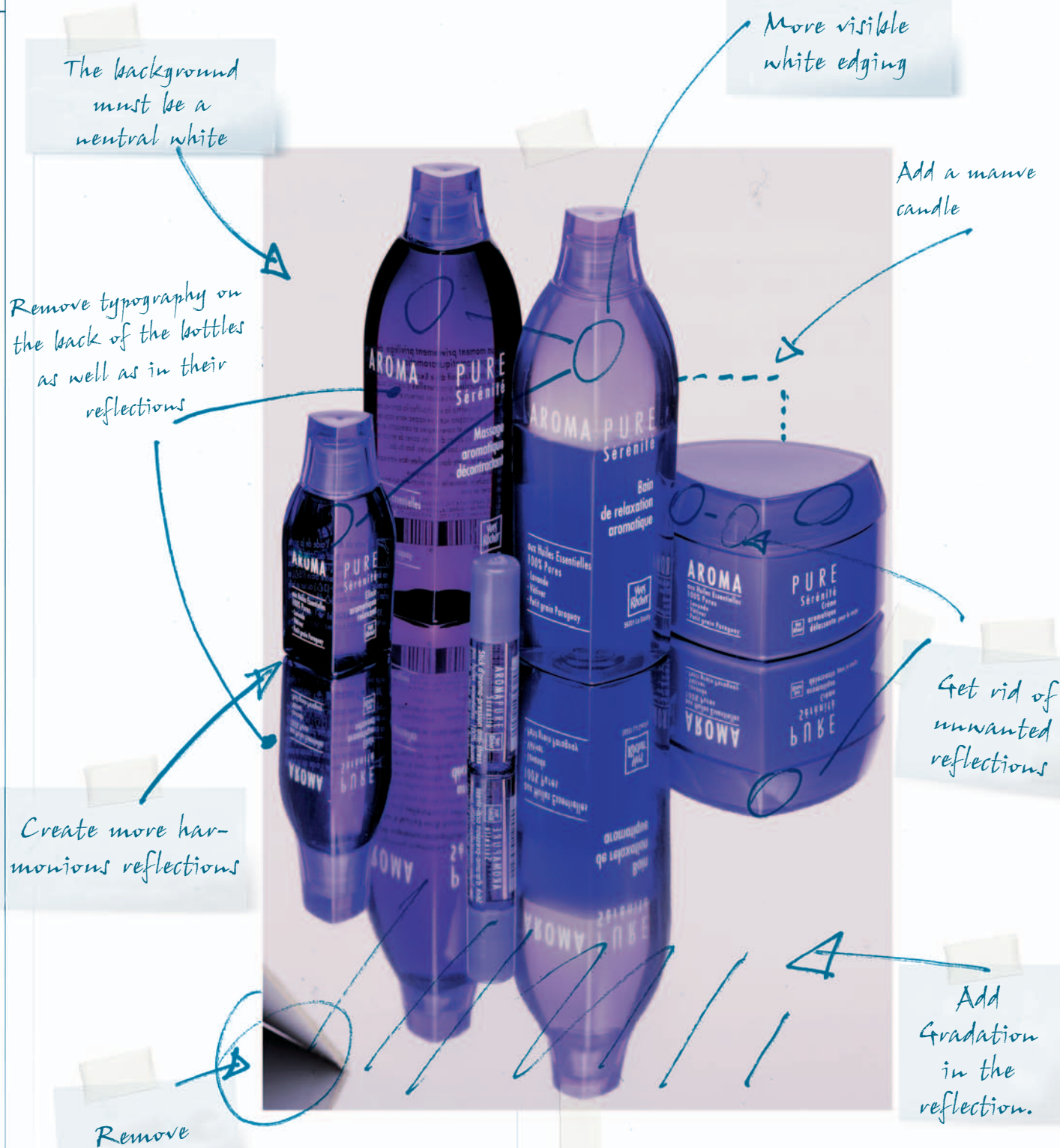
In order to illustrate this studio, I chose an image of beauty products which clearly showed the different problems one regularly confronts when retouching studio shots. These were some of Yves Rocher's Aroma cosmetic line. The advertising agency, Lowe Alice, is very demanding when it comes to the quality of the images. It demands esthetics and meticulousness. The products that are photographed must be readable and identifiable straight away. In order to meet that objective, the agency called on one of the most famous still life photographers, Christian Cournut.

My work then consisted of making this image more readable by removing the typography on the back of the products, which were transparent, and in harmonizing the reflections on the bottles.



Final image

It is necessary to work on the legibility of the image without betraying the products themselves.

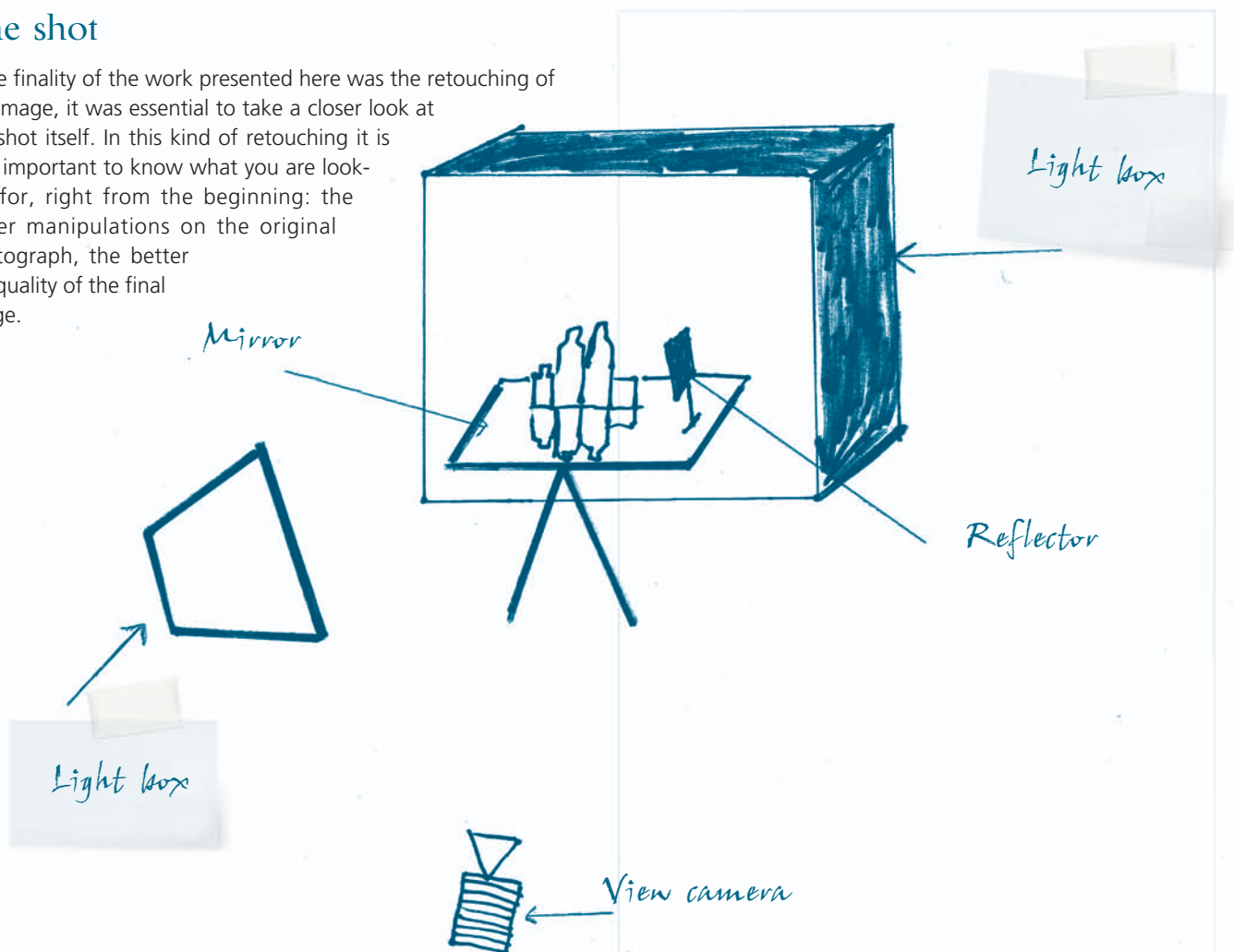


S t a g e



The shot

If the finality of the work presented here was the retouching of the image, it was essential to take a closer look at the shot itself. In this kind of retouching it is very important to know what you are looking for, right from the beginning: the fewer manipulations on the original photograph, the better the quality of the final image.



The products were set on a very clean mirror in order to have beautiful reflections. They were lit thanks to two sources of light, called light boxes. These are boxes that are closed by a Plexiglass plate, inside of which several large flashes are placed. They provide a diffuse and homogeneous light.

The largest box was placed behind the products so as to give a nice, white support and transparency to the bottles.

A second box was placed in front of the products, to light them. However, the latter was slightly off to the side to add contrast.

Then, by using several white card boards of various sizes, the light was reflected on areas that were a little too dark, or to create slight gradations. On the other hand, black card boards would stop the light. This technique enabled us to direct the light in a very precise way and create beautiful reflections in the liquids. ■

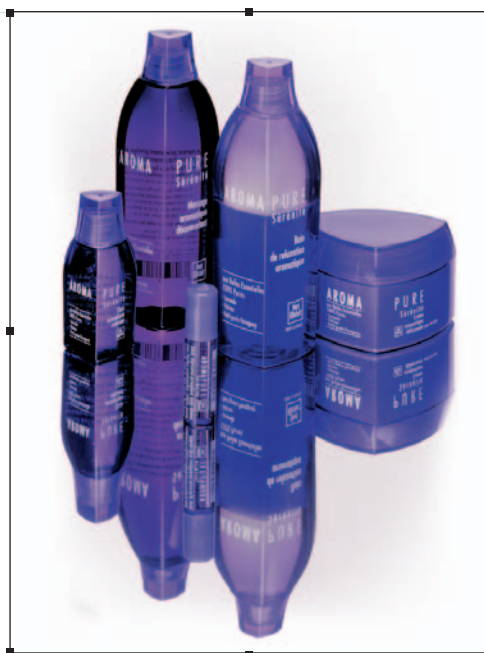
The etymology of (“to photograph” means:
to write with light . . .

Stage 2

Preparing the ground

It is always best to set a work scheme right from the beginning. It is very important to think about the way you want to reach your goal in order to avoid doing things unnecessarily. Very often, when the retouching work is finished, the customer, or the agency, require modifications—and that is why it is necessary to plan the different steps of the project.

Here, for example, I indicated that I wanted a white gradation in the reflection. My choice might not correspond to that of the agency: it might prefer a lighter, or denser gradation. That is why I put that reflection on an individual copy so as to regulate its intensity later on.



The RGB file is lighter than the CMYK file, therefore it is easier to use.

I decided to work in RGB and to convert everything to CMYK at the end of the work. That way, if the photo-engraver decided to do the conversion herself, in order to adapt it to her printing machines, I would be able to give her an RGB file without having to start all over again.

*The screen needs to be re-calibrated quite often, because its values change with time.
As far as I am concerned, I do that each week.*

First of all, I calibrated my screen to make sure my colors were all right. I used the Gretagmacbeth Eye-one to do that. It is very important to work on a properly calibrated screen, since you use it in order to adjust colors. Of course, the products in the photograph must without fail have the same colors as the real ones.



This is how I was going to proceed: outline all the products and their reflections, remove the typography on the back of the products as well as the unwanted reflections and, finally, work on the white gradation. ■

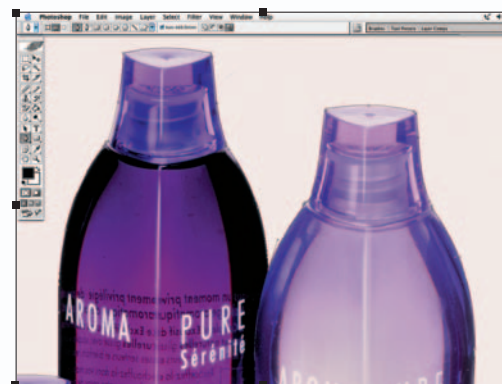
Stage 3

Outlining

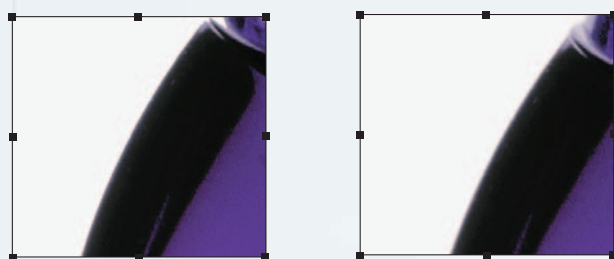
It is imperative to master outlining well in order to do a good retouching job. It must be precise and it often takes time. There are several ways of outlining an image. For the bottles and their reflections, I picked the Pen tool in order to carry out a precise selection. This tool works very well with geometrical forms.

The Pen tool is delicate to handle at first, because it is difficult to learn how to use the directing points and anchoring points properly.

However, it is worth some perseverance. It is one of the most precise tools available and often provides very good results.



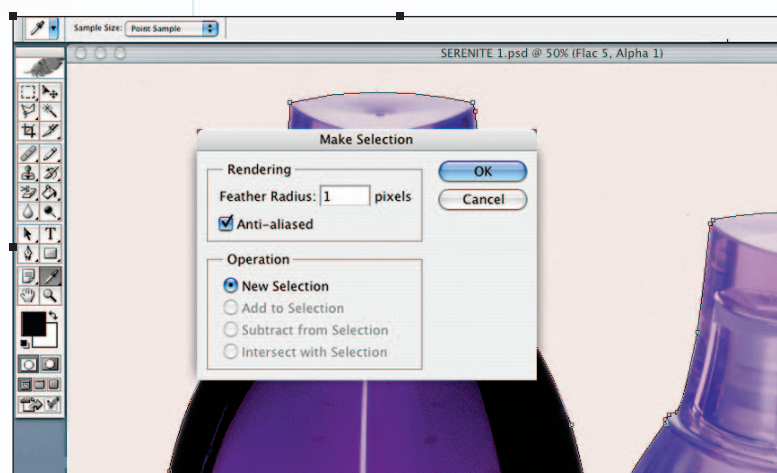
Precise outlining with the Pen



Once I finished, all I had to do was transform it into a selection. In the options at the bottom of the paths palette, I chose Create a Selection from Path. I picked a 1-pixel radius in order to have a rather clear-cut selection. ■

Rough outlining with the Magic Wand tool

The Magic Wand tool, for the type of outlining we are dealing with here, gives a “staircase-like” selection. It lacks precision and does not provide quality results.



S t a g e

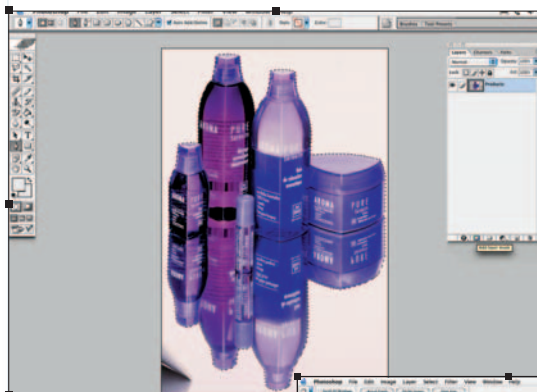
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It is important to name your layers properly, because their number increases very quickly and it is essential to see where you are going. You can even form groups of layers when there are too many of them.

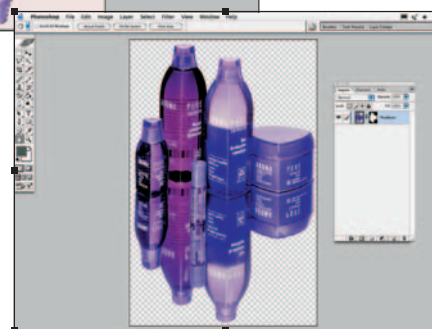


Creating a layer mask

Now I had a selection based on the products. I transformed the background layer into a normal layer by clicking on it twice. It is not possible to apply a mask on the background layer. I named it "Products." I clicked on the "Add a Mask" icon, at the bottom of the layers palette. The outlined products appeared.



Next, I created a new layer which I filled with white. I named it "Background" and I placed it underneath the Products layer so as to give the image a brighter appearance than with a checked background. This also made it easier to see potential flaws in the outlining.



I prefer to use a mask rather than eliminate a part of the background which does not interest me. The mask also enables you to come back to a selection if need be.

When in Mask mode, it is possible to refine outlines by painting the areas you wish to hide in black and the parts you wish to reveal in white. This could not be done if the background had been erased. ■

In this example, it was not necessary to come back to the outlines that often, because the forms were rather simple to outline with the pen. This is relatively rare. In the majority of cases, I use the Brush tool to work on the mask and do spend a lot of time on it. For example, when I deal with transparencies, gradations, blurs, or complicated forms . . .

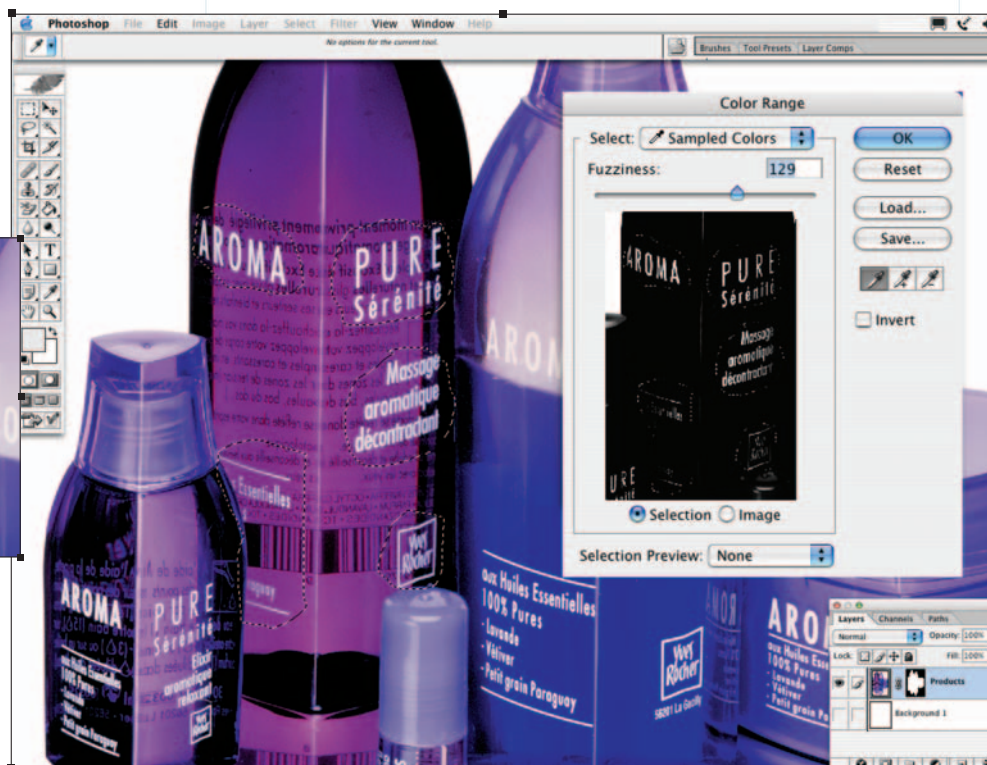
Stage 5

Protecting typography from the rear

Seeing the quantity of the characters that needed to be erased on the back of the first two bottles, I decided to re-do the liquid inside, rather than remove each letter one by one.



In a new layer that I named “Inside bottles,” I would recreate the color of the bottle. First, I had to allot a mask to that layer in order to protect the areas I did not want to touch. All that would be in black in the mask would be preserved.



With the lasso, I made a rough selection around the letters, then I took a sample of their color with the eyedropper tool. In the Select → Color Range menu, I saved a selection of the letters that I wanted to keep. By moving the tolerance, I stopped on the value which not only gave me white letters, but really black bottles so that in the end, the computer would select the letters alone. I quickly got a very nice selection.

It does save time when you know the short-cuts on the keyboard! It prevents you from displacing the mouse in the tablets and the menus. It also allows you to gain more room on the screen because some palettes can be closed.

In the Layer menu, I selected Add Layer Mask for the selection. I proceeded the same way for each letter and each vertical edging. This would enable me to paint my reflections while preserving the typography.

Protecting the background

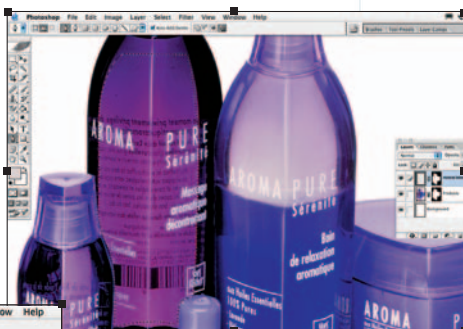
The background also had to be protected in order to paint only on the products. To do that, I recalled the selection of my products again by clicking on the Products layer mask, while pressing the Command key. The product selection appeared on the screen. Then I inverted it (Cmd+Shift+I) in order to keep the background selection only. Once the Letters layer mask was activated, I selected black as my background color by pressing the D key. I filled the selection with that color while pressing Alt+Return. ■

Stage 6

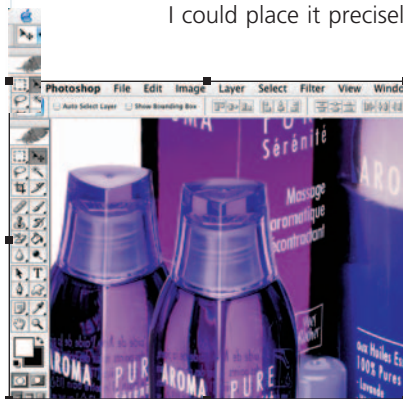
Recreating the inside of the products

With the Pen tool, I made a selection of the mauve area I had to work on.

I started by painting in mauve with the brush, very roughly, in order



to get rid of the letters on the back of the bottles. With the eyedropper, I made sure to select exactly the same mauve color.

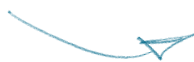


Then I took a fairly large brush (30% opacity, with a 50% flow), and played with the various mauves to recreate a liquid with all the nuances and gradations it might have.

I did the same with the reflections. With the bottle on the left it was even necessary to create new reflections to make it more "attractive" and give it more presence. The photographer had shown me a version of the photograph taken under a different light. It would work better for this bottle: the reflections were more harmonious and the large black flat has disappeared.



You can use the arrows on the keyboard to move the layer with extreme precision before validating the transformation.



Retouching comes in whenever something cannot be done through a direct shot. Here, the photographer took a picture in which the light was perfect for four bottles out of five. When he regulated it to take the last bottle, the other four did not look as nice. The retoucher is able to obtain an image in which the light on each product is exactly where the photographer wants it to be.

I thus outlined this new bottle and applied it on a new layer in my image. I used the Displacement tool so that I could place it precisely over the other layers.

Then I reduced its opacity to 50% in order to see the product that was underneath and to position it exactly where it should be. With the Transformation portion of the Move tool, I gave it a slight rotation (the scans were not positioned strictly in that same way).

Stage 6



As in Stage 5, I protected the letters on the back of the bottle and selected each color.

It is very difficult to preserve both the material the bottles are made of as well as the appearance of the liquid. Usually, whether you are touching up a face, a product, a sky, or anything else, the problem you encounter is preserving the material. Photoshop is a very powerful tool but it is not “magic,” unfortunately. It requires know-how and patience.

Here is the result I got after a little work.

Before



After



This step was particularly important because I need to recreate the inside of the first two products. The reflections had to look real. They had to correspond to the atmosphere the photographer wanted to instill through the type of light he had chosen. Of course, the same modifications had to be made in the reflections of each product. ■

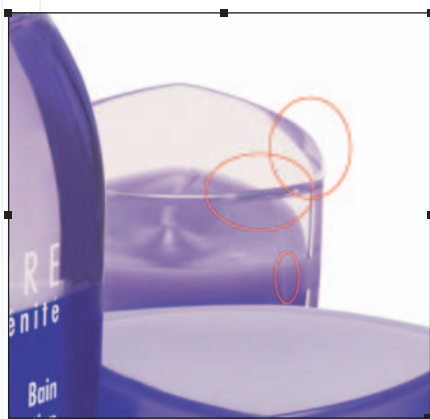
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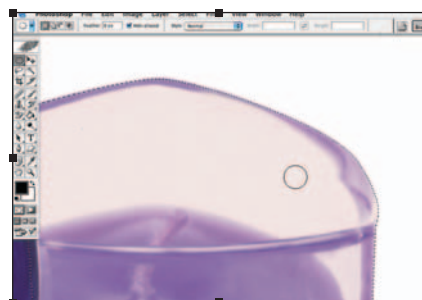
Inserting the candle

Once I had outlined the candle on another photograph, I applied it on a new layer that I named Candle. I placed it beneath the Products layer in order to put it behind the cream jar.



Looking at the candle, I noticed some unsightly reflections.

I would touch them up on a new layer called Candle reflections (it was better to do this on another layer to be able to return to it, in case I made a mistake).

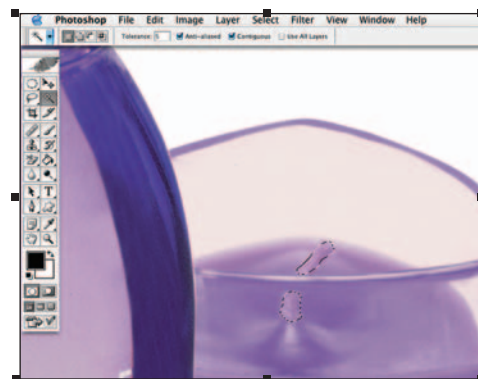


I started by calling in the selection of the candle (Command+click on the candle layer) to touch it up and was careful not to go over the edge of the background.

With the Clone Stamp tool, I removed the unwanted reflections and created a more harmonious glass rim.

It is important to make sure that the **Use all layers** option is activated.

To give the candle wick a fresher look, I used the lasso and selected it. I chose a 5-pixel tolerance so as to have a rather progressive selection. Once I got the right selection, I chose a Luminosity/Contrast adjustment layer: I added quite a lot of luminosity but little contrast. ■



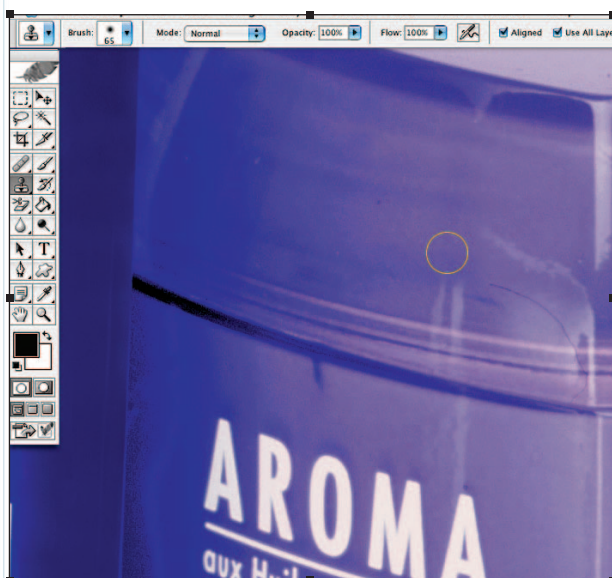
Adjustment layers are very handy because they make it possible to return as often as required to the values of each layer.

Stage 8

Unsightly reflections

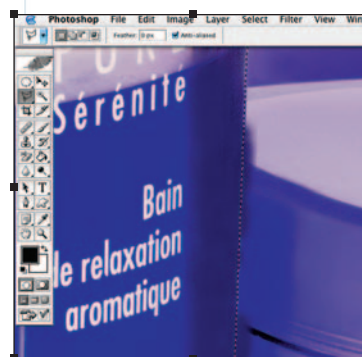
On this image, one can distinguish two kinds of problems: small “sparkles” and more significant reflections.

I usually use the Clone Stamp at 100% to remove dust and small “sparkles,” then come back to what I have done with the same tool but, this time, I used it at 30%, in order to remove what could still be seen.



To correct the most visible reflections—where the cream jar reflected in the bottle—I selected the part that I had to work on with the Pen (Line) tool. What interested me here, was the border between the two color areas, because I wanted to create a reflection with a progressive gradation. When one looks at the mauve color in the center and at the darker mauve color on the right part of the bottle, the transition between the two is progressive. It was extremely important to preserve that transition so that the retouching phase would look as realistic as possible.

I do not think that there are specific rules that apply to the use of the clone stamp, since each image has its own characteristics. First, the surface that needs retouching should be closely observed so that whatever has to be done remains as discreet as possible. The size of the tool, its opacity, and its color mode have to be carefully selected.

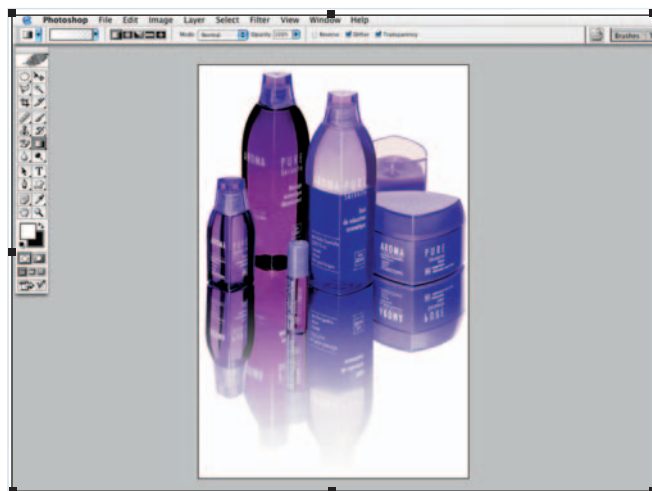


Once the lining phase was over, I chose Load Path as a Selection at the bottom of the paths palette. Within that selection, and on a new Reflections bottle 4 layer, I removed any unsightly reflections that were left from the clone stamp and the brush. I masked the selection (Cmd+H) to see what I was doing.



With the polygonal lasso, I selected the retouching parts that had been gone over by moving along the right side of the bottle. I erased them with the Return key. ■

Stage 9



The white gradation

I was going to create a gradation which would let the reflections of the products show progressively. I placed a new layer named "Gradation" over the Products layer and then picked white as the foreground color. With the Gradient tool, I selected a linear gradation between the color of the foreground and the transparency. Finally, I started at the bottom of the image and stopped at the base of the large bottles.



You can see that the gradation went over the small bottle in the foreground. It was thus necessary to create a layer mask in order to hide that part of the gradation. The first thing I did was to select the small bottle with the Pen tool, which was ideal for a geometrical form like this.

I transformed the line into a 1-pixel selection (so that it would be sharp).



In the Layer → Add Layer Mask → Hide Selection menu, I again changed it to a mask. That gave the impression that the gradation had gone behind the bottle. ■

Stage 10

Final touches and verifications

I went through the entire image once again to check if there were any flaws that I had to eliminate (such as dust, an outline that was not quite perfect, or a layer that had moved). This was an essential phase since I did not want to send a file with errors in it to the printer.

Therefore, I looked at each part of the image according to the real size of the pixels by clicking on the magnifying glass (or by using the Cmd+Alt+0 short cut on the keyboard).

I started at the top left-hand corner of the image, and very meticulously scanned it with the Beginning and End arrows. These allow you to screen an entire image and not miss a single thing.

I believe that this technique is much more rigorous than using the Hand tool.

In a new layer named “Final touches,” I got rid of all the small flaws by using the clone stamp. Of course, I placed that layer over all the others.

I then printed the image in on A4 paper from my photo printer. This enabled me to spot details I might not have seen otherwise.



In a new layer named “Final touches,” I got rid of all the small flaws . . .

Once that was done, I saved my image with all its layers on my hard disk. I saved a flattened version of it (in TIFF format, without compression) once I had removed all the lines. That one was for the photoengraver. The retouching was now entirely done . . . ■

