

Digital Diva

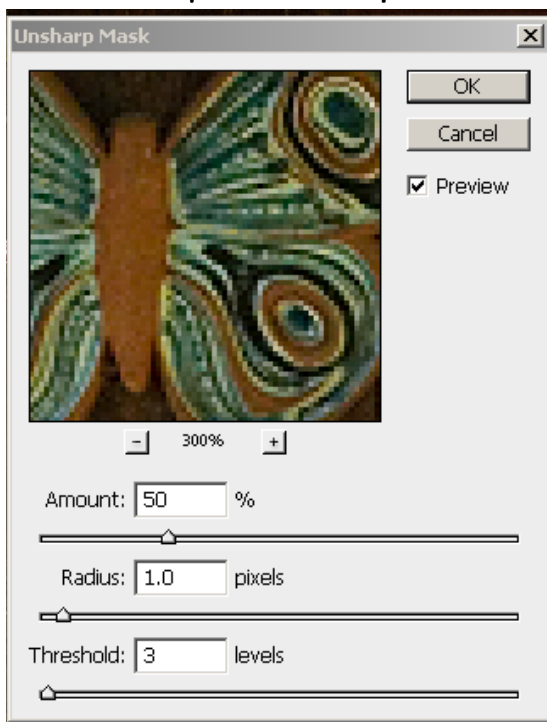
Sharpening

Sharpening files with Unsharp Mask (USM), or in CS2 Smart Sharpen, is often a baffling exercise. To begin with, why do we need to sharpen our files at all?

If you scan your slides in a slide scanner no matter how sharp they are they will lose some sharpness in the scanning process, and even more if you use a flatbed scanner, as the thickness of the glass alone will soften your image. If you shoot with a digital camera in RAW mode you will also need to sharpen as no sharpening of RAW files takes place in the camera. If you have the option of sharpening in the camera you should turn it off as Photoshop will do a much better job than any camera sharpening. If you shoot JPG's then you probably won't have the option to turn it off as all the processing, contrast, Hue and Saturation, sharpening, is done by the camera. If you have the option of choosing the amount of sharpening for your JPG files then, by all means, set it at the lowest amount.

To understand how sharpeners work - they don't actually increase sharpness in the true sense, they can't make an out of focus image look sharp - they increase the contrast of edges to give a perceived sharpness, so with that in view, go to:

Filter>Sharpen> Unsharp Mask. In the USM dialog box,



Amount - controls how strong the contrast will be.

Radius - controls how wide the area considered an edge is.

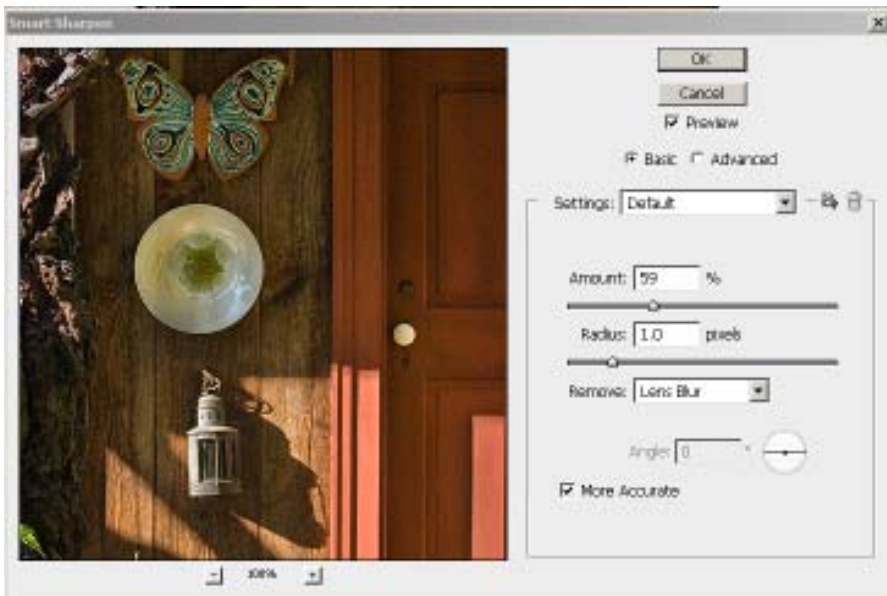
Threshold - sets the limit for how different adjacent pixels must be to be considered an edge.

A good General Purpose starting point for this filter would be: **amount 125%, Radius 1, Threshold 4.**

If you are sharpening a portrait or an image with a lot of plain sky you might want to increase the Threshold to maintain the smoothness.

In Photoshop CS2 there is a new and better sharpening tool called **Smart Sharpen**. It can be found in the same place as USM.

Filter>Sharpen> Smart Sharpen



This filter takes a lot of the guesswork out of sharpening as it can perceive better than USM what is highly detailed in the image and in need of more sharpening, and what should be smooth and require less.

Start with the settings:

Amount 58%

Radius 1

set the **Remove** to **Lens Blur** and of course check the **More Accurate** box (why would anybody want it less accurate?).

This is a mild setting that you can apply once, twice or sometimes even a third time. Sharpening is always the very last thing you should do to your file. If you resize your file at any time you need to dump the sharpening and resharpen at the new size, for this reason it's always best to sharpen on a separate layer.

Let's see those images crackle
Susannah

Send your questions to noonum@verizon.net and I will answer them in this column