

Creative Saturation Balance

Decision-making in Rescuing or Intensifying saturation is usually straightforward. Something's out of whack saturation-wise and the direction the image needs to go with regard to saturation is obvious.

But even images that seem OK can sometimes be substantially improved by using the two saturation masks on dual layers to creatively Balance saturation. There's no rule that the masks and their adjustment layers have to be used only when saturation is out of balance. The ease of creating the dual Hue/Saturation layers with the Photoshop action and the quickness with which they can be adjusted means saturation adjustment can become a regular part of the creative workflow, not just a salvage operation.

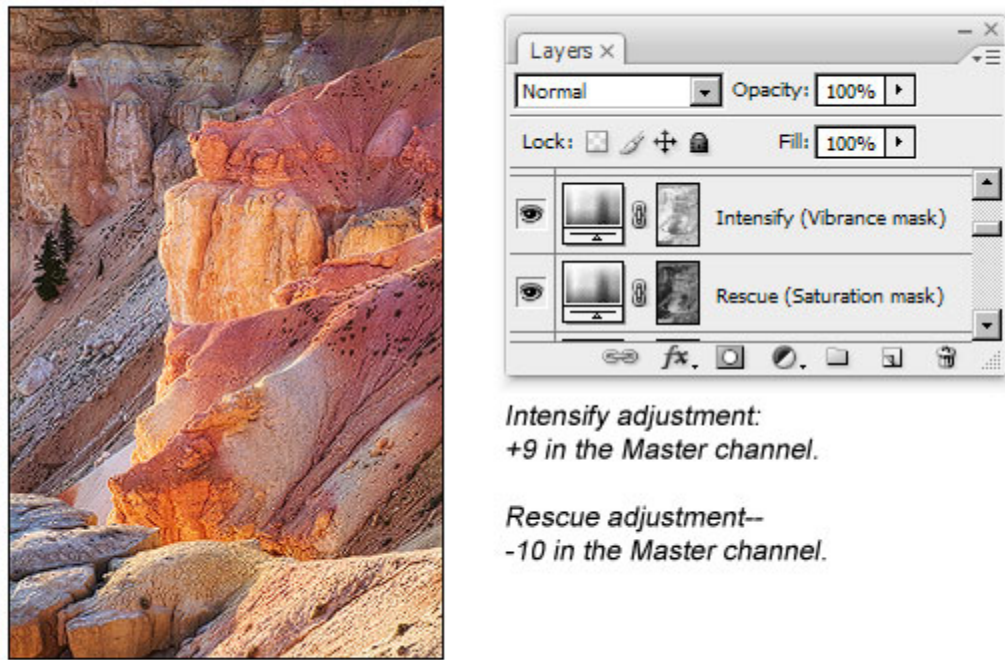
Regarding workflow, it's usually a better to work on Creative Saturation Balance later in the workflow, when image is nearing completion. If you play with saturation early on in your workflow when basic things light color, brightness, and contrast are still unsettled, there's a chance that subsequent adjustments to these factors could skew the creative saturation efforts. Since other Photoshop maneuvers frequently affect saturation, do the Rescue and Intensify operation when they are needed, but save the Creative Balance for closer to the end. Images that are considered "finished" are often the best ones for experimenting with Creative Saturation Balance.

Creative Saturation Balance begins with the two Hue/Saturation adjustment layers being placed on the Layers palette with no adjustment, so the image is unaffected. You then click back and forth between the dialog boxes for the two layers and play with the Saturation slider to see what might improve the image. Don't be afraid to slightly over-adjust in whatever direction you prefer. The other layer makes it easy to correct an excess you might have accidentally or intentionally introduced. A point is quickly reached where there is improved saturation throughout the frame. Deciding on where this ideal saturation point is located is entirely up to you. There are frequently some pleasant surprises waiting when the saturation balance of an image is creatively considered and addressed in this manner.

Saturation is definitely subjective, and you'll need to decide how saturated, or unsaturated, you'd like your picture to be. The utility of the masks is that they give you a new level of control for making these saturation decisions. This concept of being able to take charge of saturation may feel a little odd at first because you might not intuitively know how saturation of the image could be improved or how the masked adjustment layers will do it. A couple of clicks to open the dialog boxes to make some adjustments, however, and you'll quickly get a sense for the process and what it can do. The masks and the dual-layer technique will make you a saturation expert in no time at all.

Below are some images where the two-layer technique for Creative Saturation Balance was used. The values of the Hue/Saturation adjustment on each layer are listed along with some explanatory notes.

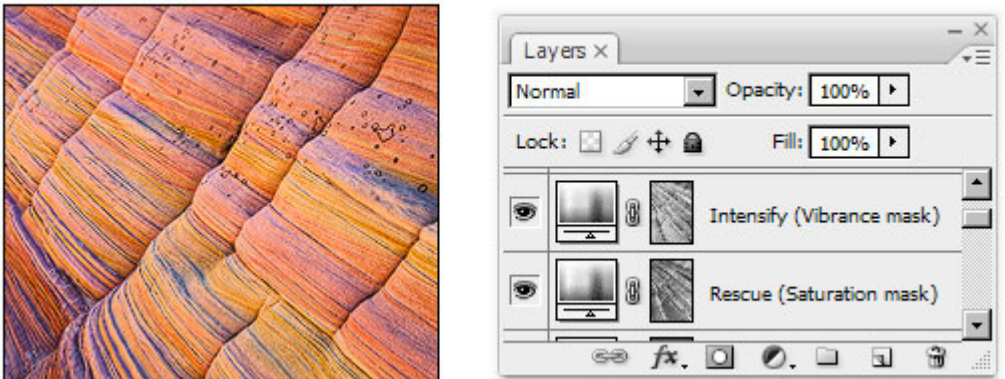
Figure 25



*Intensify adjustment:
+9 in the Master channel.*

*Rescue adjustment--
-10 in the Master channel.*

Figure 26



*Intensify adjustment:
+20 in the Master channel.*

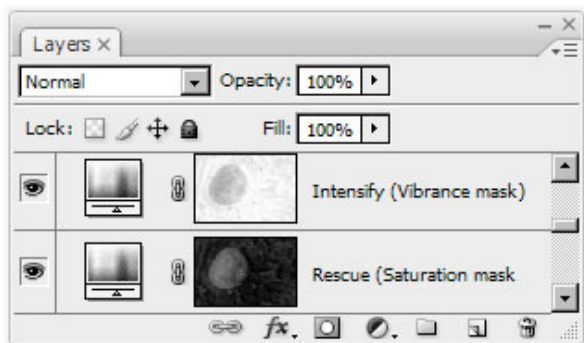
*Rescue adjustment:
-20 in the Master channel.*

While these adjustments would appear to cancel each other out, the masks concentrate their effect at opposite ends of the saturation spectrum so the most saturated and most unsaturated colors will be more Balanced.

Figure 27



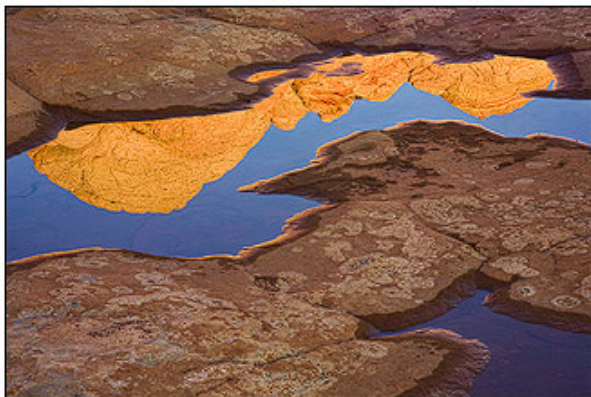
In this image, the dual masks facilitated a Rescue operation as well as some creative desaturation, hence the negative numbers on both the Intensify and Rescue layers.



Intensify adjustment: -25 in the Master Channel.

Rescue adjustment: -55 in the Master Channel.

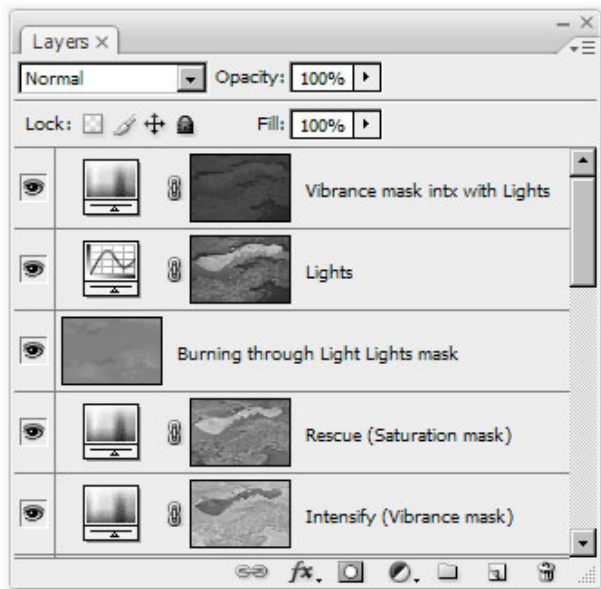
Figure 28



Intensify adjustment: +10 in the Master channel.

Rescue adjustment: -5 in the Master channel.

This is the image used in the example of Saturation Rescue. Creative Saturation Balance was explored later in the workflow with the dual layers adjusted as listed above. Note also that the top layer in the stack for this image is a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer where the mask was created by intersecting the Vibrance saturation mask with a "Lights" luminosity mask. This facilitated saturation adjustment primarily in the lighter tones. The adjustment was +15 in the Master channel.



Since Creative Saturation Balance is done on adjustment layers, the saturation changes are non-destructive and completely changeable. So it's fine to just play with saturation to see what happens. The adjustments can easily be reset or trashed if things aren't working.

There are no predetermined numbers that create the right saturation Balance for an image. It's completely open to artistic interpretation. Because they're filtered through the masks, you can make both subtle and dramatic saturation changes that blend perfectly throughout the frame. Some images, like JPGs straight out of the camera, might even benefit from increased saturation on both the Vibrance and the Saturation layers, though in different amounts. Playing with saturation Balance in this manner almost always reveals new opportunities to improve an image's overall saturation. It's hard to imagine how well this works—or that it even works at all—until you've actually tried it on a few pictures.

Saturation masks are new territory for most photographers and Photoshop users. Your explorations into using them will take you through unexplored terrain. While I've presented my ideas about them in this tutorial, it's still wide-open as to how you will apply the masks to your photography. Once you get past the initial set-up, though, I'm sure the masks will quickly become an integral part of your creativity. I hope you will give them a try and be adventurous on your journey.