

# T-SHIRT TEXTURE TRICKS

BY MARSHALL ATKINSON



**ATKINSON**

CONSULTING

USING YOUR **SMARTPHONE CAMERA** TO ELEVATE T-SHIRT DESIGN

# T-SHIRT TEXTURE TRICKS

Use Your SmartPhone Camera to Elevate T-shirt Design



My mission is to guide decorated apparel shops through the process of strategic change. Simply put, the goal is to elevate performance, focus on the future, and provide solution-based direction.

My role is to act as a trusted advisor, providing objective and results-oriented analysis, solutions and implementation.

This mission is expressed in my company motto:

**Helping Shops Succeed**

Learn more at [atkinsontshirt.com](http://atkinsontshirt.com)

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**Thanks!**

# T-SHIRT TEXTURE TRICKS

It is hard to imagine life these days without our cell phones. For some people, they have never been alive in a time without one.

I can remember back when finding and creating your own source for photographic examples was a much more difficult proposition. Now, everyone carries a powerful photography studio in their pocket.

The goal of this eBook is to give you some easy to learn and use tricks for using photos, taken from your cell phone, to make any t-shirt design pop. Of course, the reason for this is that better art sells.

This eBook will explore how to find these textures all around you. How to use them in Photoshop to add a texture to your design and separate the file for t-shirt printing.

I'll even throw in some lessons you can use to learn along the way too.

As always, thanks for buying this book!

Marshall

## 1

# CAMERA PHONE PICS

For starters, let's get something out of the way. We all have different phones. With that, this means that there are different models of built-in cameras. Some take fantastic shots, and even have editing software that you can use built in as well.

That's all great, but we don't care what kind of phone you are using for this eBook. As long as you can take a photo, it will work for what we are going to do.

Also, if you are one of the four or five people on the planet that does not have a phone with a camera, everything in this book can be handled using a digital camera. Which is how this stuff was handled before phones. All we need is to get the digital image captured and sent to our computer workstation so we can manipulate it with Photoshop.

Which brings up another subject. Photoshop. Yes, I know that some people use CorelDraw or even Affinity Photo now and that's fine. Everything I'm showing you in this book can be handled in those programs to a good degree. However, if you are trying this stuff on those platforms these instructions may be a little different.

## Be Aware

Before we get too much into the eBook, the thing that I want you to be aware of is that simply gorgeous and amazing textures are all around you constantly.

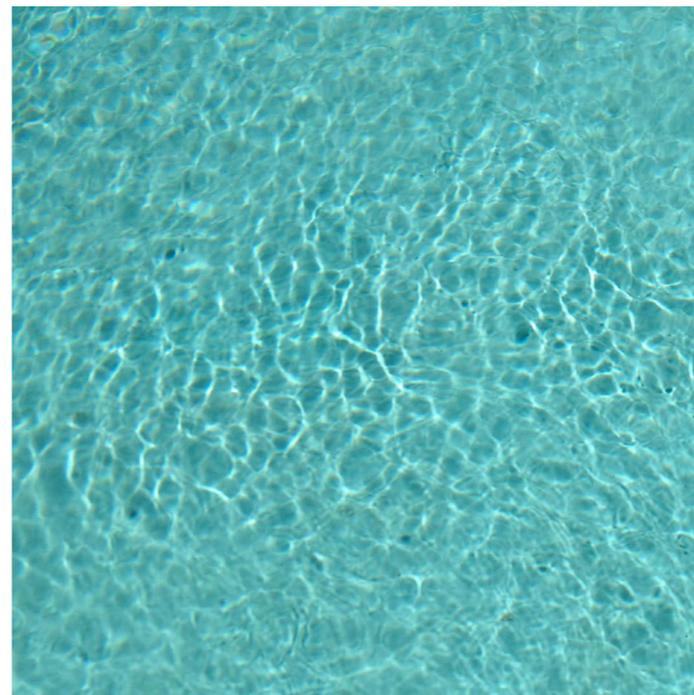
Once you start looking for these textures you may have a hard time turning off the photographer in your brain as you experience life. The best advice I can give you is to simply take a lot of shots. With digital photos, anything not up to speed can be deleted.

What I like to find are interesting textures and contrasts. You can see this in the wood grain of a table, the rust patterns on some metal, the stains on the concrete floor you are standing on. Anything with a funky pattern is fair game.

When you are taking the shot, think about how you might use it.

Is it something you'll drop in and use as a background? Could you use it to modify a shape or a word? Sometimes the weirdest things end up looking the best.

Take a look at these three different textures that I took a few moments each to capture:



The first photo was the back of a metal street sign. The second was the shallow end of my pool. The third, some bacon on my plate during a Sunday morning breakfast. (mmmm bacon!)

Here's where the fun begins. For this next part of the demonstration, I'll convert the images into a texture I can use and then paste it inside of a word, so you can get an idea of what we'll be learning in the following chapters.

Let's start with the metal texture. You might notice this was used on the front cover of the book. Believe it or not, this is the side of street lamp pole near my house. I took this shot while out walking one day for exercise.



The image on the left is the original. The one in the middle has had the color removed with a quick Desaturation. And the one on the right used the desaturated image, with a simple Tonal Curve to make it into a high contrast texture.

What's great about using this is that when you apply it to something it will look natural, and part of your design. You could possibly try to create that texture for yourself, but why bother when it can be built in about two minutes using something already from your environment?



Taking that same texture, we can now apply it to something in our design to give it a better feel. In the next few chapters, I will be

walking you through this process step by step. There will be files you can download and play with. The important thing is that you try to use them. Don't worry if it doesn't look right, or you make a mistake. That's how you are going to learn. Trust me, I'm self-taught and those mistakes are how I learned too.

Just do it!

## TAKING THE PICTURE

# 2

As my family will attest, I'm always taking shots of something. The table at a restaurant. A cinder block wall. The metal manhole cover. Asphalt.

What I'm looking for are options that I can use later, even if I don't have a specific project in mind.

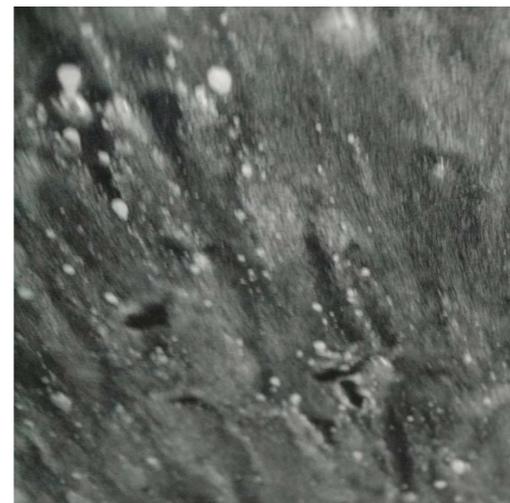
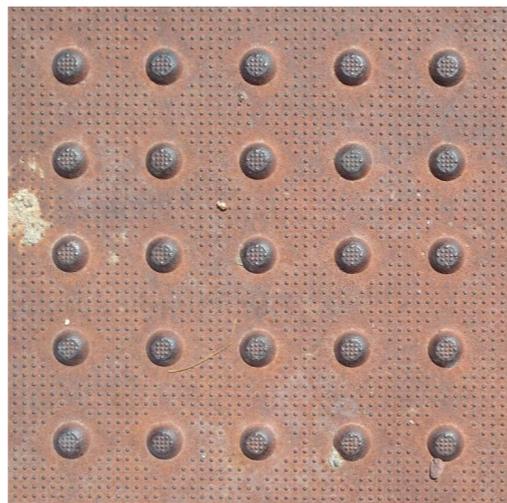
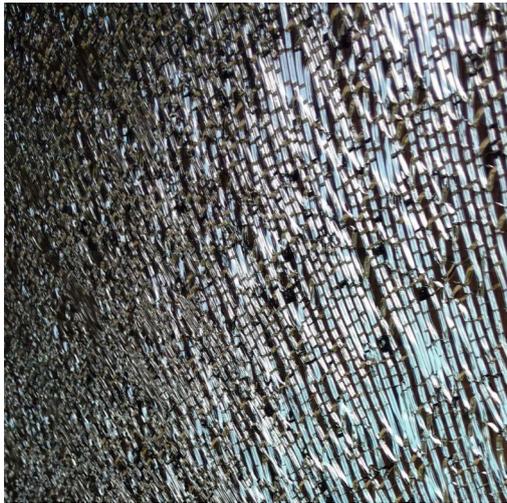
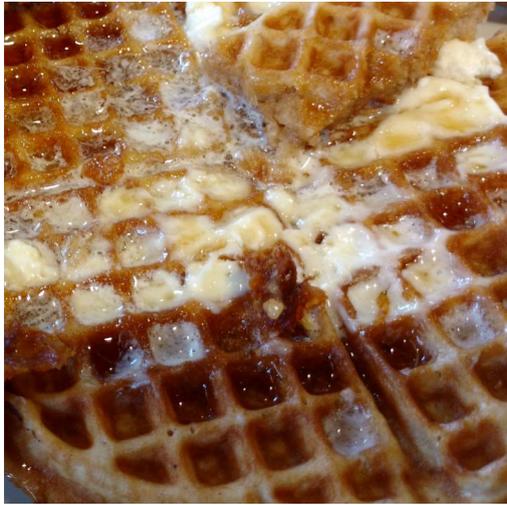
You absolutely never know when you might need something. My theory is this simple. Why pay money for textures when with a little bit of effort and some time, you can make custom ones for yourself?

Afterall, it's your creative aesthetic that is going to make a difference in the marketplace. If everyone uses the same origination point with their art, then I think that dilutes the product.

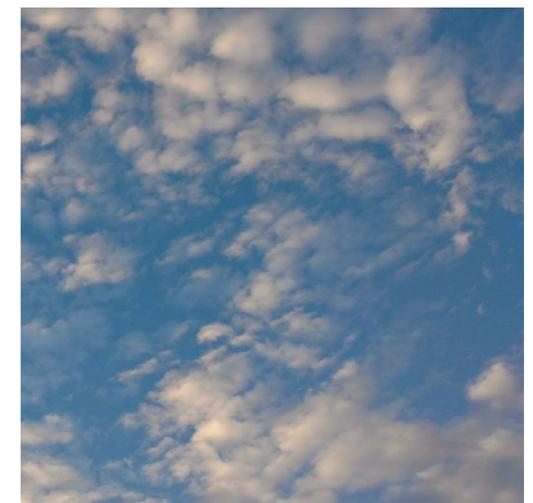
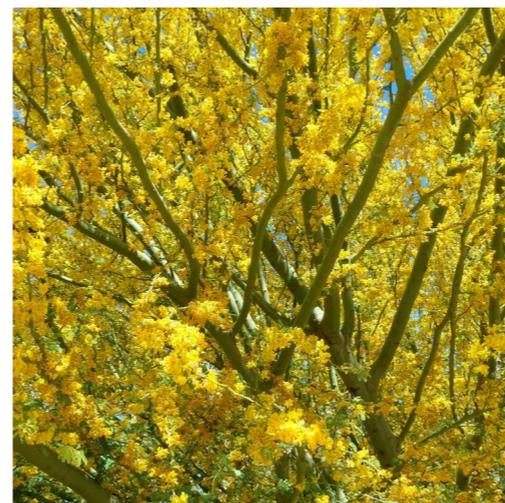
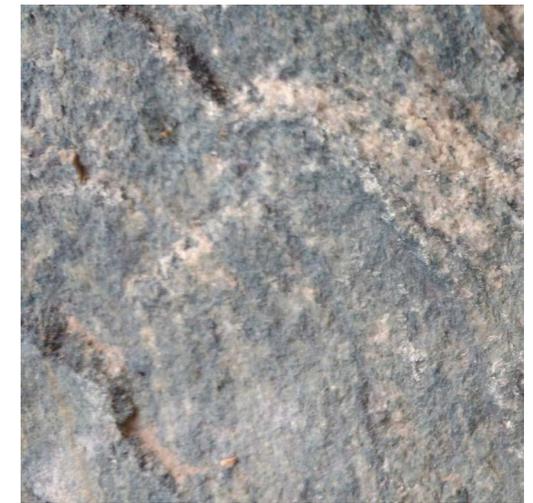
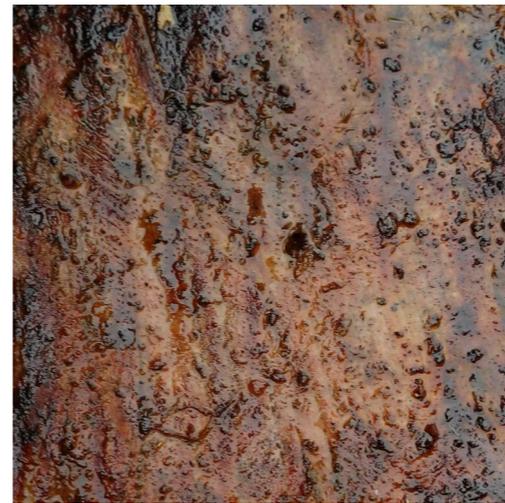
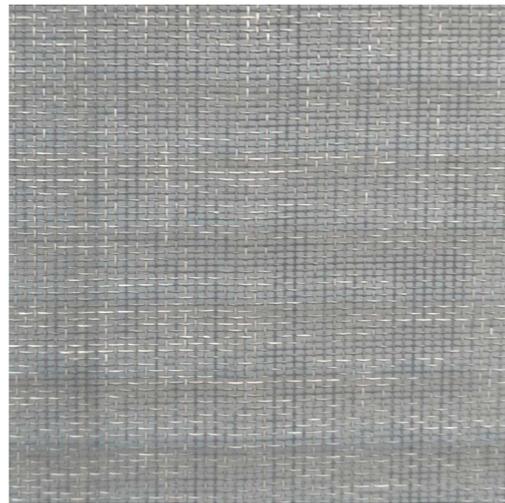
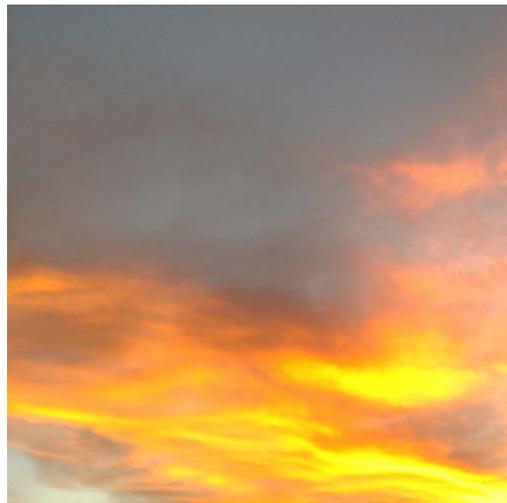
On the next few pages are some examples of different textures that I've captured. These were taken with a phone while doing something during my day. You may recognize some of these things, but maybe not.

What I want you to do is to look at what I'm taking photographs of and think about what's around you that you can shoot. Of course, because you bought this eBook, you will have access to all of these photos...but take your own and add to your texture library.

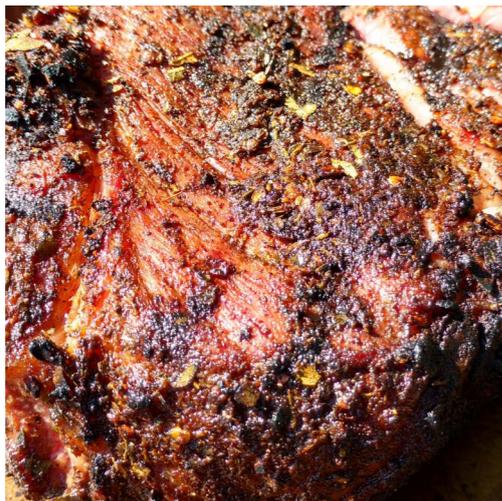
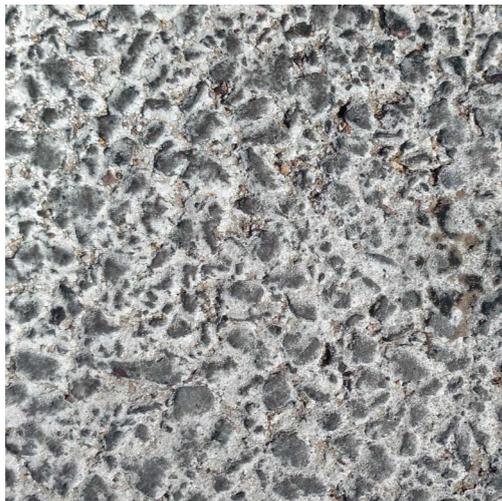
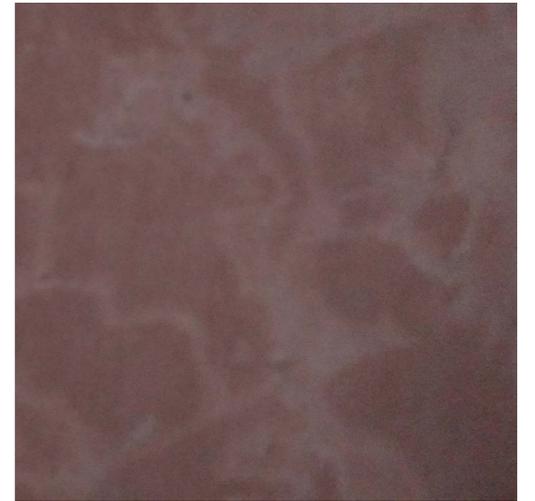
T-SHIRT TEXTURE TRICKS



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T-SHIRT TEXTURE TRICKS



So what did you notice? The photos are all random stuff. Cheese on a pizza. The soap on the windshield during a car wash. The bark of a tree. A countertop in the kitchen. Clouds.

You can take these.

In fact, take ten or fifteen minutes right now and walk around the room or outside and take some shots of different things that have patterns or textures. Delete the ones you don't like. Send the ones you do to your computer.

Now comes the fun part. Learning to use the photos.

## TRICKS: DARKEN WITH TEXTURE

# 3

Flat color on a shirt sometimes can be a little boring. You can add a thousand pounds of pizzazz by dropping a texture on top of something, into a word, or even as a background area directly on the shirt.

In this chapter, I will show you how to use one of the photos and quickly manipulate it to be used to darken an area.

Your best bet is to read the chapter, and then grab the files I've set up for you and experiment for yourself. (See the index at the end)

Like anything, there are multiple ways to accomplish the end result. You may do some of these a little differently, and if so, that's ok. The one thing that makes being creative fun is that we can arrive at the end result with many unique paths.

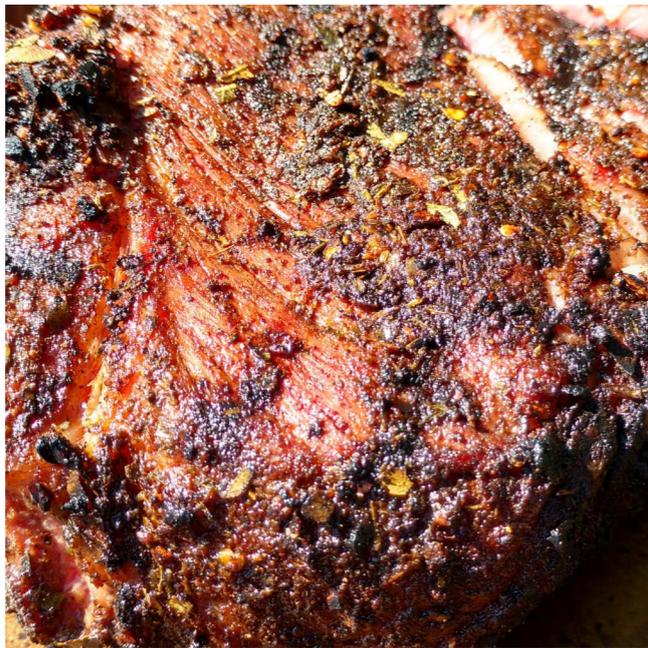
Again, don't forget that to keep things simple everything in this eBook is in Photoshop.

## Let's Start with BBQ

One of the things I really love is a good smoked pork butt. Mmm. I know many shops handle apparel for restaurants, so this may be a good place to start.

For this project we are going to take a word, "BBQ", and add a texture to it using the Darken Method. This is extremely easy to do, and once you get the hang of it, this technique may be a favorite go-to way to add some flavor. (Sorry for the bad pun, I couldn't resist.)

To get started, we are going to use a photo of an actual smoked port butt before we pulled it apart. Yep. I ate this.



Here's the photo. I know you are jealous. Unless you are a vegetarian. (I'm sorry.) For our purposes, like we did earlier we are going to take this photo and Desaturate the color so it is a Grayscale.

Later, we will be showing how to run a simulated process separation with multiple spot colors, but for now, let's keep it simple and have one color print on top of another.

This is similar to a Duotone method of printing. This means we are only using two colors to form the image.

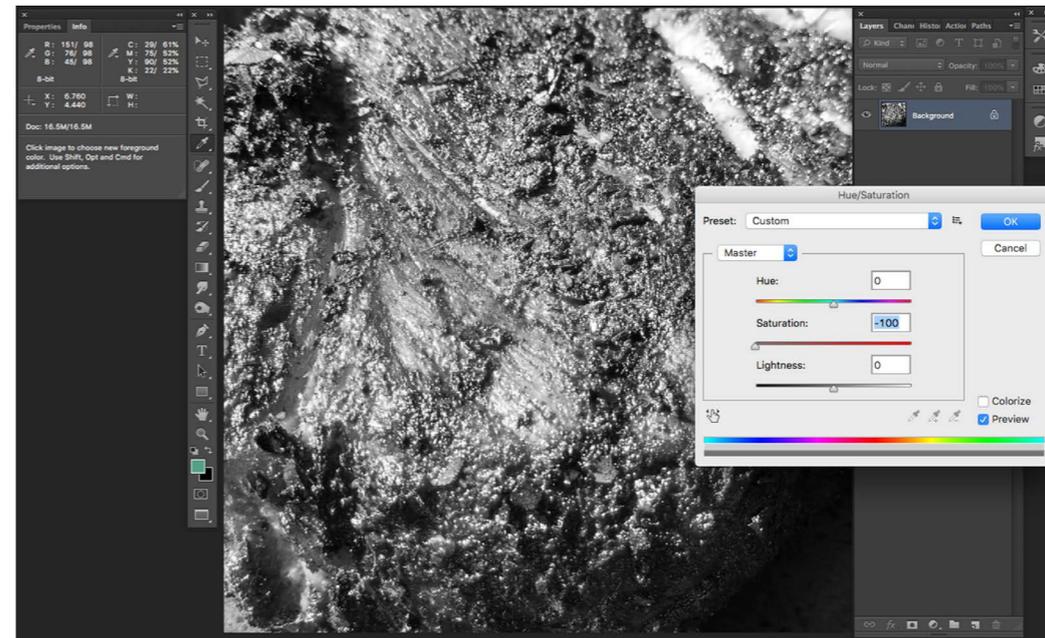
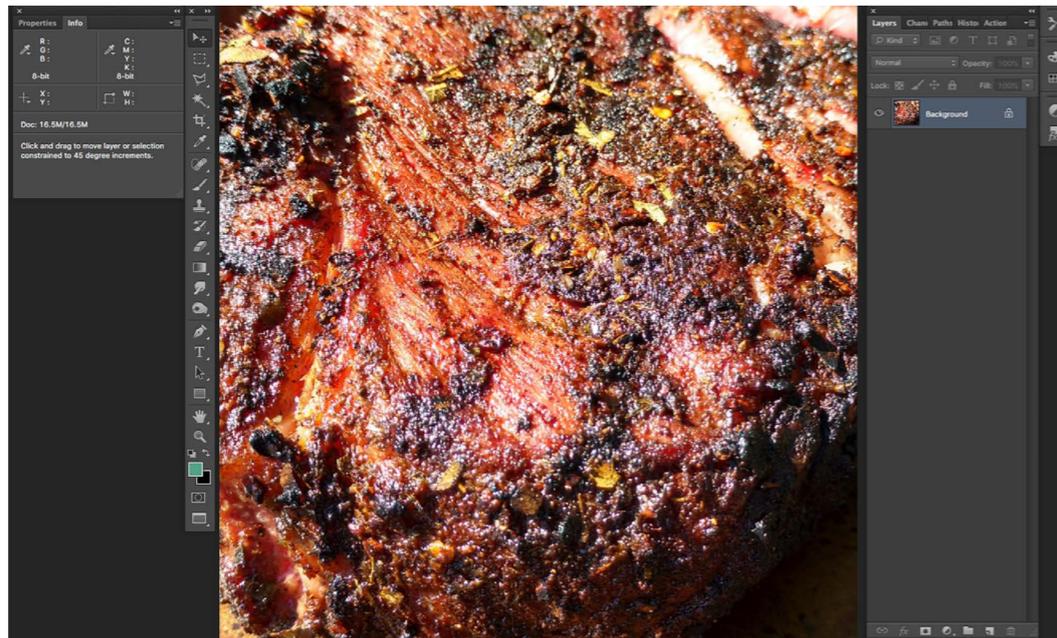
In this case, we are using a nice smoky red, Pantone 7625 for the bulk of the BBQ text. On top, we are going to drop a reddish dark brown, and we will use a darker tone to make the image more interesting.

To get started, we need to convert the full-color image to a Desaturated one.

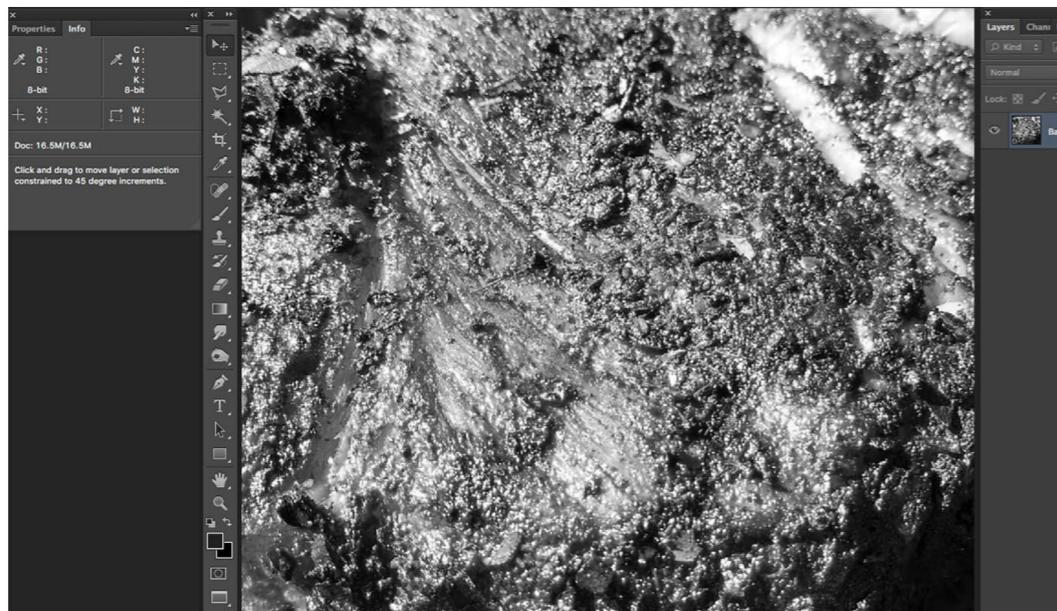
First, go ahead and open the provided file of that delicious pork butt. Sorry you can't taste it. Once it is open, you can either type in "Command U" or go to Image > Adjustments > Hue Saturation to pull up the color controls for this file.

Desaturating the color is as simple as sliding the middle slider bar all the way over to the left. The image will instantly become a Grayscale image. It looks a little less tasty, but that's ok.

## T-SHIRT TEXTURE TRICKS



As you can see, manipulating the image from color to grayscale is really easy. I'm big on saving files before we get too far down the road, so go ahead and save this to your hard drive and call it "Pork Butt Grayscale Texture.psd".



Now, let's use this bad boy.

First, we need to typeset the word BBQ. In Photoshop, I choose “Superstar M54” and type out BBQ in a 300 point size. Like we discussed, I make this PMS 7625, a nice warm red color.



While this looks ok, by adding some texture to it, we can achieve an entirely different look without much added effort. So, we copy our “Pork Butt Grayscale Texture” and paste it into the file. This should be between the BBQ type and the background layer.



Boom. It's looking better already. But now we want to get that texture into the type. Here's the tricky part if you are not used to manipulating Layers in Photoshop.

Next, you want to use the Magic Wand Tool and grab the warm red letters by clicking each, while holding down the Shift Key. This will select the type and give you the “marching ants” look around your chosen selection.



Then, click on the Pork Butt Texture Layer. Keeping the “marching ants” selection going, create a Vector Mask by clicking the tool down at the bottom of the Layer Palette. It looks sort of like the Japanese Flag, and is next to the letters *fx*.



Notice how the information on this Layer has now changed to show that there are two things combined on the one Layer. This is what makes the magic happen.

Directly above the Layer names, is a pulldown that helps you adjust your Layers. By default, this is set to “Normal”. But who wants normal BBQ?

Nobody.

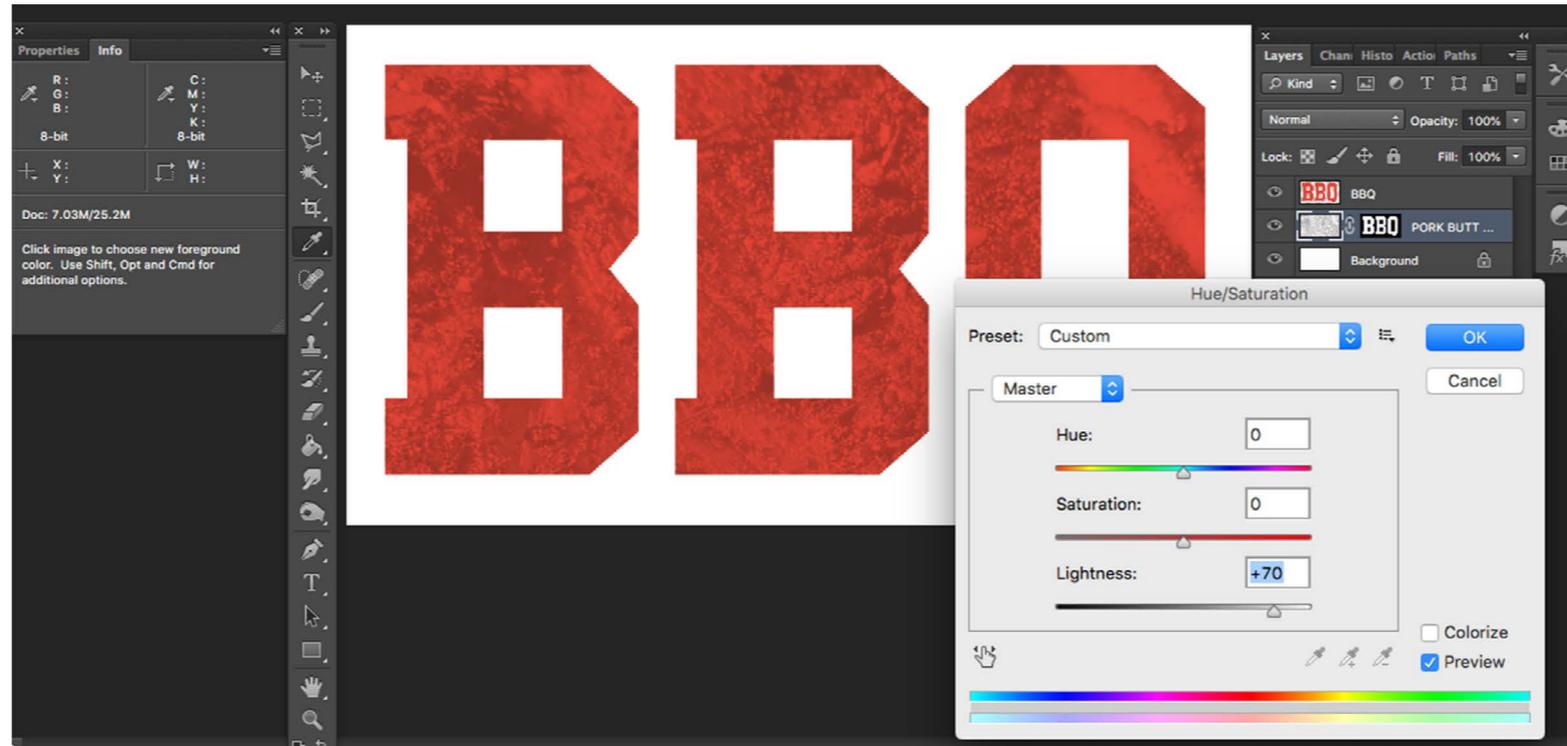
Click that pulldown and select “Multiply”.



Bingo. Instant awesomeness. Where's the cole slaw?

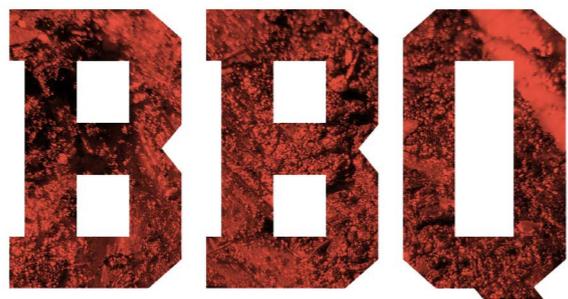


But, let's say you want something more subtle. Select the Layer with the texture and either click Command U or Image > Adjustments > Hue Saturation. We can dial in the amount of the texture and make it lighter or darker.



On the bottom slider labeled "Lightness" simply grab the slider and move it to the right to decrease the amount of the texture in the overlay. If you want the texture darker, slide it to the left.

Either way you can adjust the layer so that it looks exactly how you want it.



Now, it's your turn.

Right now we are only concerned with making a delicious image. We'll get to separating that file later in the eBook. For now, just concentrate on learning these quick and easy steps.

Also, you might want to experiment with the Adjustment Layer pulldown when applying textures to your file. All kinds of crazy fun things can happen by accident when you take a minute to just play around.

Give it a spin!

## TRICKS: FUNKY COLOR TEXTURE

# 4

Now we are going to learn how to essentially the same technique, but instead of darkening the image with the texture we will be adding some color. This works great when you object is dark and you want to add something to make it zing.

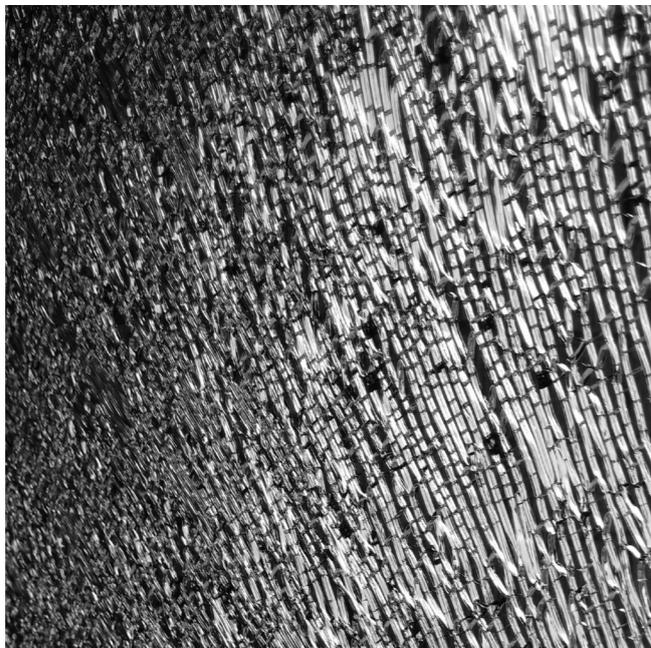
For this, let's work with the word "METAL". Yeah, I know we just did a word in the last chapter. I'm choosing basic concepts for illustration purposes so you can get the hang of this easily. We'll get into complex techniques later in the book, trust me.

I typed out the word METAL in the font, Pulp Fiction 54, in Photoshop and made it a gray. I rasterized the word, so Photoshop no longer reads it as type.

This is a fairly normal looking word, but it has tremendous potential. Let's pick a different texture and see how this might look with a pattern cooked inside.



It's almost like it was from some hair band in the 1980's right? Can you hear the power chords? What this word needs is some sort of jagged random look. I have the perfect one.



This was taken a year or so ago when someone through a brick into an office window where I was working. It's the incredibly mesmerizing pattern of broken glass.

Perfect for that Metal Hairband look I want.

Here's the thing.

When I took this photo I didn't have this project in mind. In fact, I wasn't even writing eBooks at the time. But the pattern was so fantastic I had to take the shot.

To paraphrase Wayne Gretzky, *"You miss 100% of the shots you don't take."*

So when a gem like this comes along. Whip out your phone and take three or four shots of the texture.

You may never get that chance again. For me, it wasn't like they were going to leave that window broken for long. Take the shot!



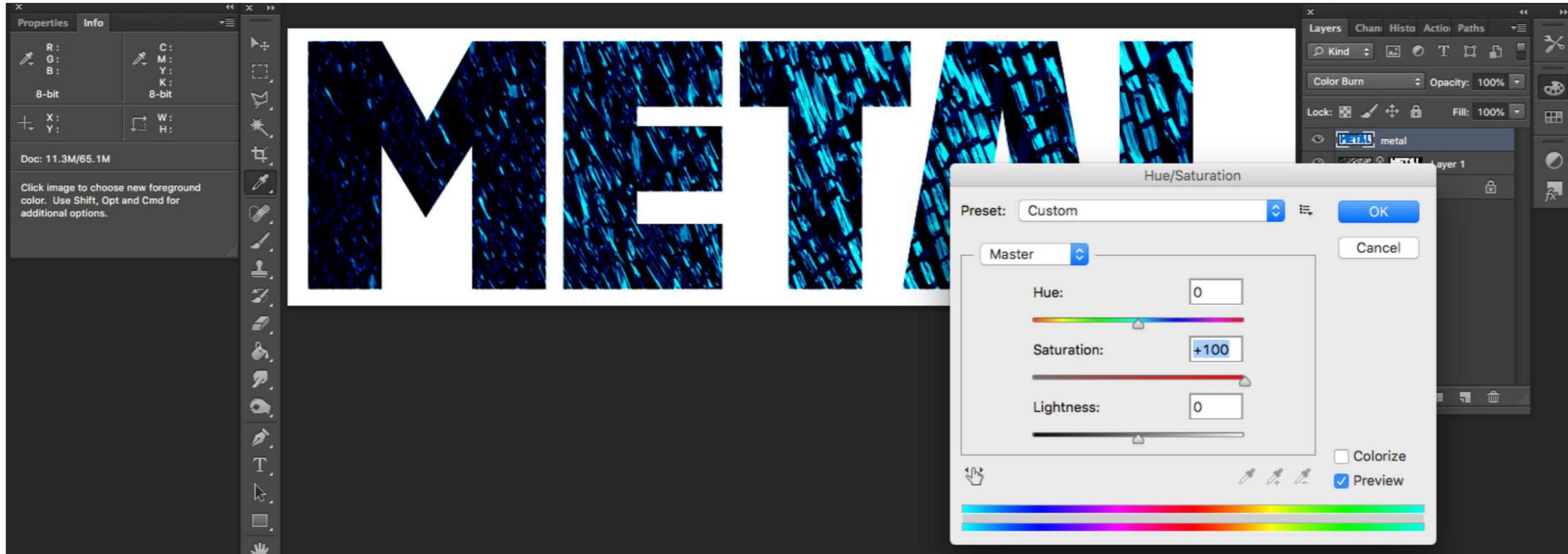
Here's our Broken Glass grayscale texture pasted into our file. I'll bet you can see how this is going to make that word much more interesting and exciting already.

Just like in our BBQ exercise, I loaded the texture up and pasted it inside with similar steps. If you have tried this already, you should be an old pro at this.



Now comes the fun part. Let's add some color to the texture with a few clicks. It's easy.

At the top of the page under Image, click down to Adjustments > Hue/Saturation. Grab the Saturation slider and zip it over all the way to the right. This adjusts all of the light parts of the texture to a color.



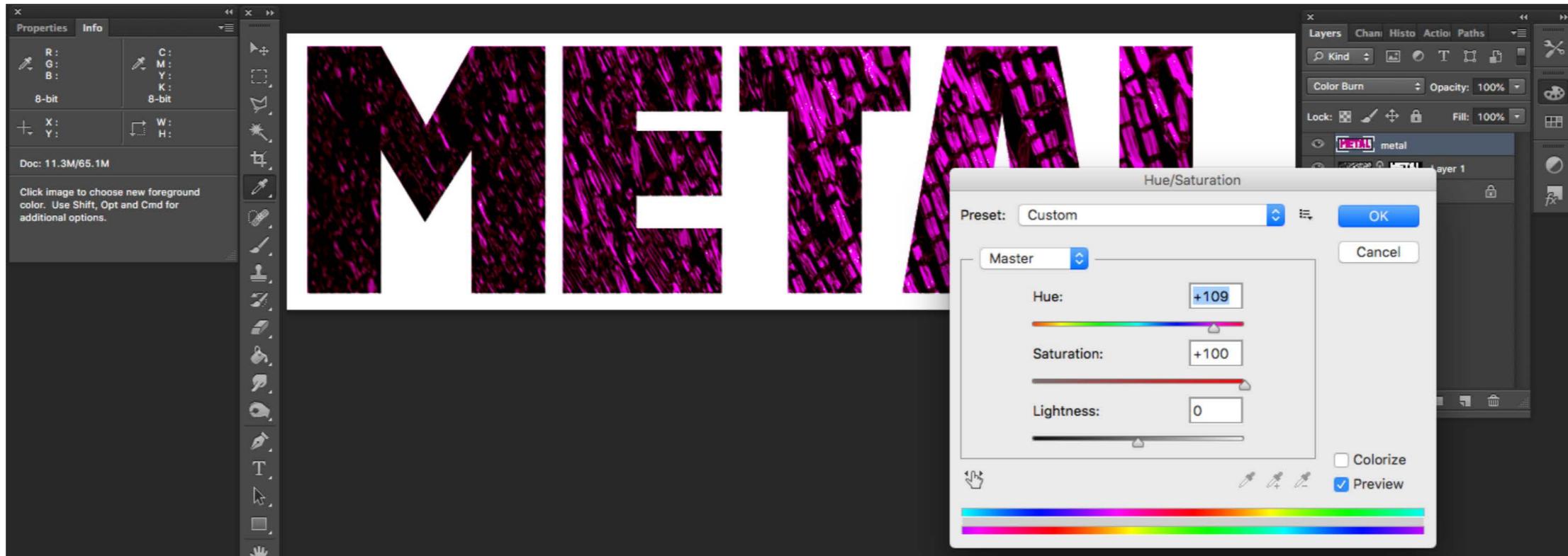
Want to change the color? Maybe light blue just isn't shocking enough for a hair band.

What about pink?

Leave the Saturation slider where it is, and grab the Hue slider.

Shoot that over to the pink color on the color bar.

Bingo. Instant Rock and Roll Hair Band.



The beauty of adjusting your color in your textures this way is that you can refine these to any shade you want. Of course, I'm using bold colors to emphasize the lesson, so yours may be a little more subtle.

So, what do you think?



## 5

# TRICKS: BACKGROUND TEXTURE

Call me a weirdo, but there is nothing worse to me than a big square on a shirt as the background. That screams to me, “lazy designer”. There’s nothing you could think up besides a square?

I get it. There has to be something behind the image or copy on the shirt to pull everything together.

Designs need that grounding sometimes.

So, instead of whipping out that incredibly boring square tool next time, consider using a textured pattern. In this chapter, I will grab a photo I’ve taken and use that to give some lift behind a t-shirt graphic.

It’s an age-old trick, and one that should be in your creative toolbox. For demonstration purposes, let’s take a spin with a design that you probably have produced for a client at one time or another the ubiquitous “Team Name” design.

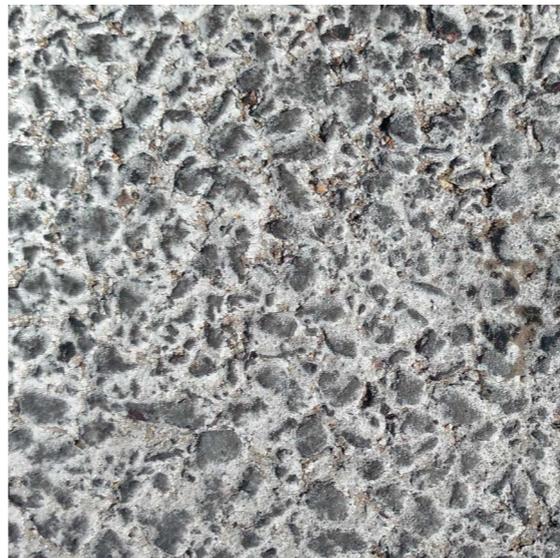
Our goal with this is to have a background element that brings the elements of the design together into one cohesive unit without be distracting or adding another color to the print.

For our purposes, let’s choose a fictitious team name, “MUSKRATS” and build out a file that you might see anywhere. If you’ve been printing shirts for any length of time you have probably handled this type of file a time or two.

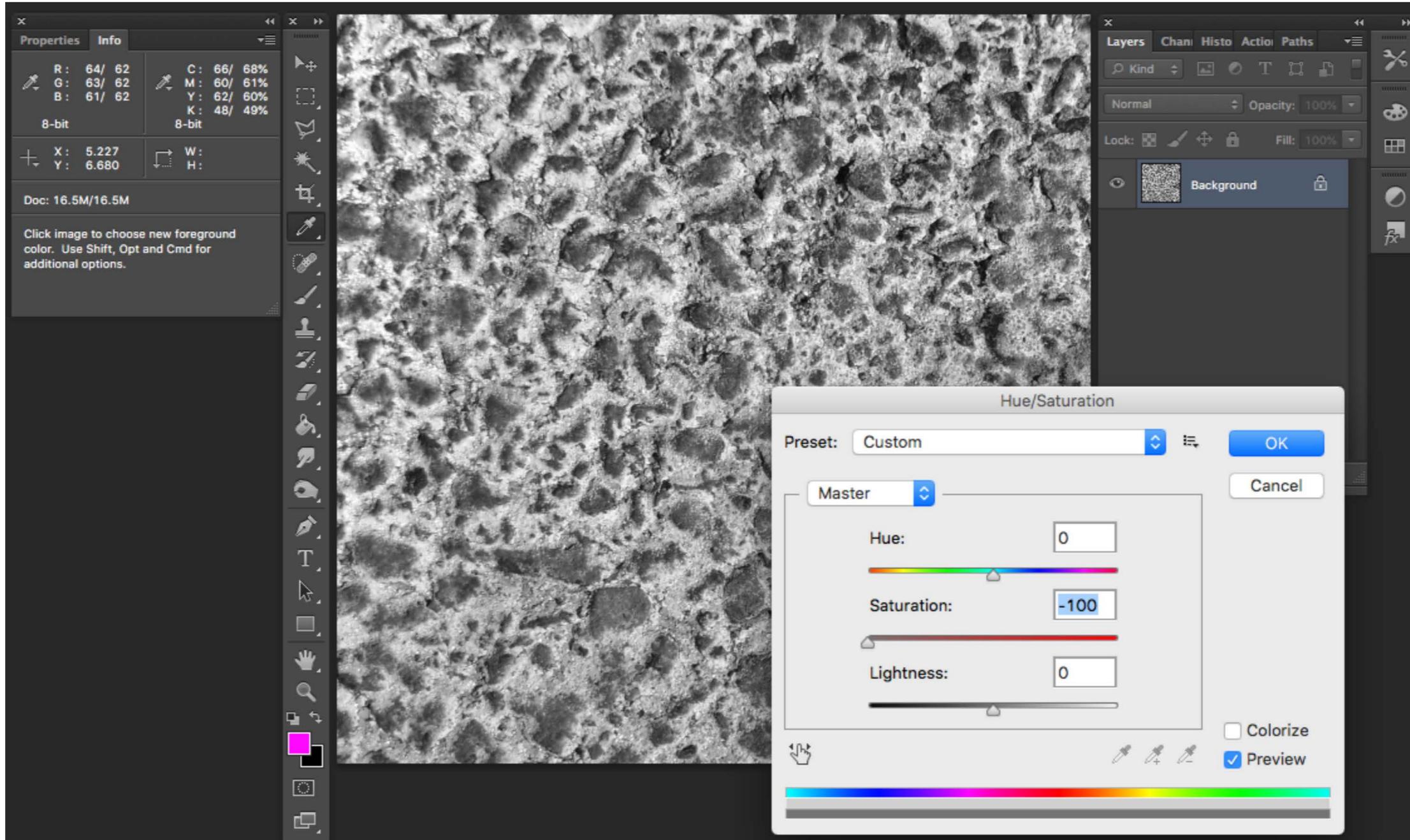
Seen this before? I thought so. But so has everyone else. What if we added a texture background in gray behind the art? Wouldn't that add some extra dimension to the design?



To do that, we'll need a texture to start from and then manipulate it to suit our needs. Here's one I took of some rough concrete with some rocks embedded. Let's use this as the starting point.

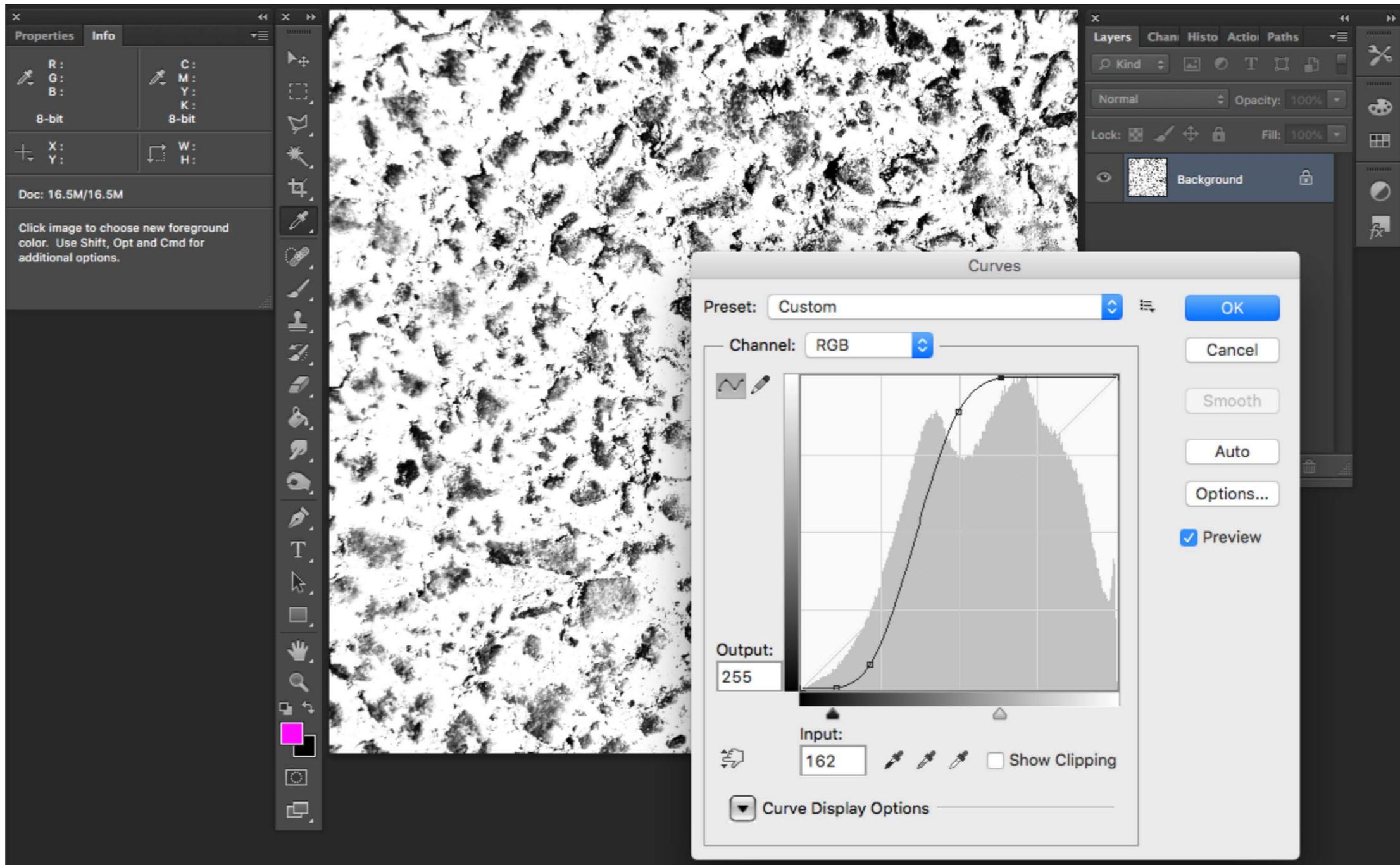


As we want a subtle pattern behind everything, we are going to eliminate a lot of the file and only keep a random, monotone pattern. We'll start by making the file a grayscale. Go to Image > Adjustments > Hue/Saturation.



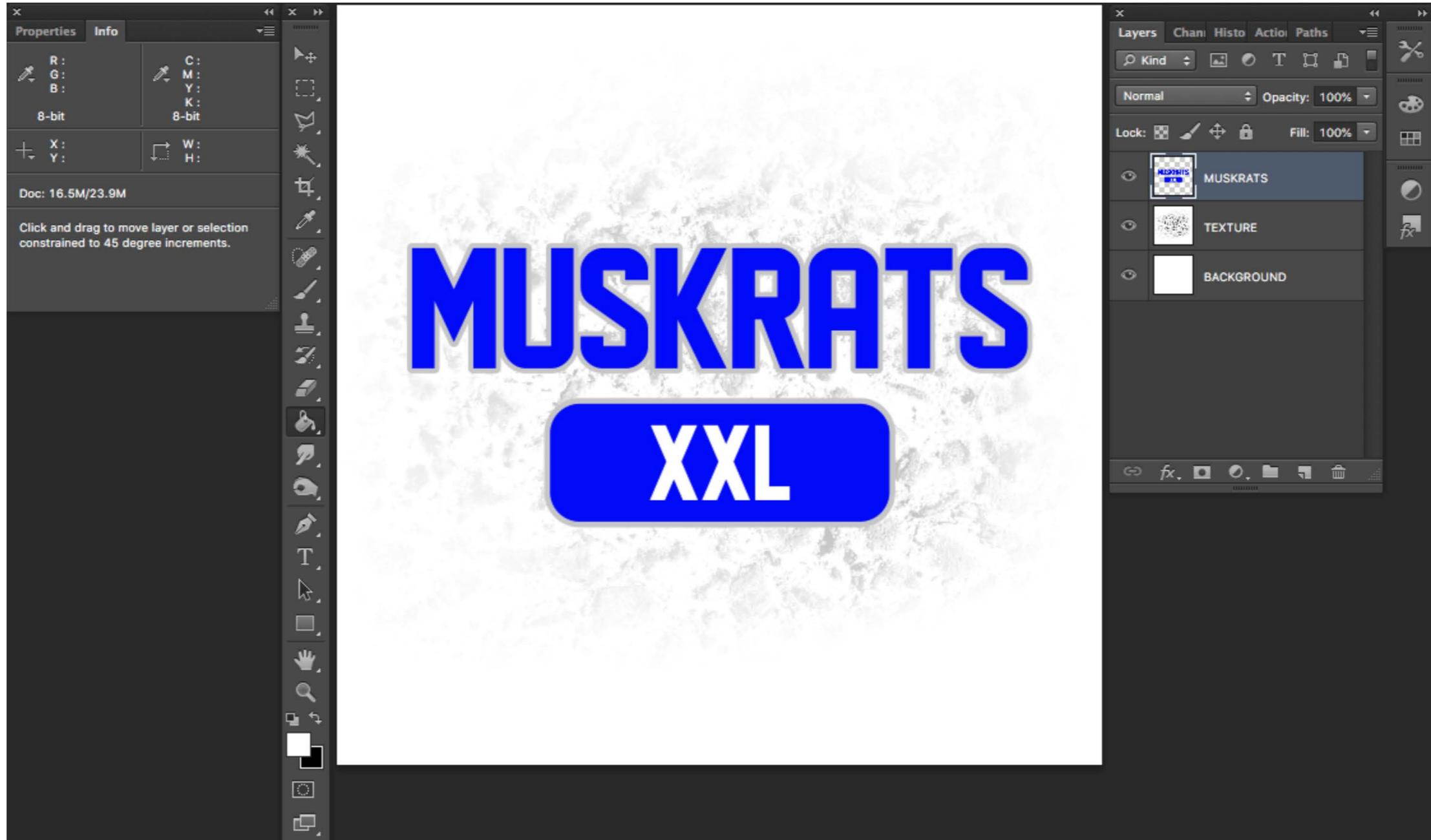
Simply adjust the slider bar and move it all the way to the left to remove all of the color, leaving a grayscale image.

Next, we run a tonal Curve on the entire image by going to Image > Adjustments > Curves, or Command M, and altering the file until a good portion of the noise is removed. I like to use an “S” curve for better balance. Notice the graph with the white and black tones on the S Curve.



But, we don't need all of this texture for our background. We only want a random pattern that looks natural. Using the Brush tool, with a large area, I simply spray out what's not needed. This only takes a few moments.

We drop in our graphic, and we now have a different spin on a classic. The texture pulls the elements together, without distracting.



## 6

# USING CHANNELS

While a lot of people always concentrate their effort in building files in Photoshop using Layers, the real power for separating art for the decorated apparel industry comes in the knowledge of how to do it with Channels.

This isn't talked about much.

But using Channels is such a simple, but yet powerful tool that I absolutely had to include it in this eBook. There's no way around it.

On the market, there are a lot of separation software programs that do this for you automatically. They work great, and I'm not about to replace them. However, if you have Photoshop you have the power to do this easily and with a few steps can have more control over your separations.

The goal in this chapter is to explain how to do this easily with a simple design, and then with a later lesson give you something more complex to work on.

Ultimately, the end result is all that matters. How we can get there easily is with building Channels in Photoshop.

For the first lesson, let's circle back to that BBQ text file we created. I know that it made you hungry. This is such a simple file and an easy one to demonstrate how to build Channel seps that work.

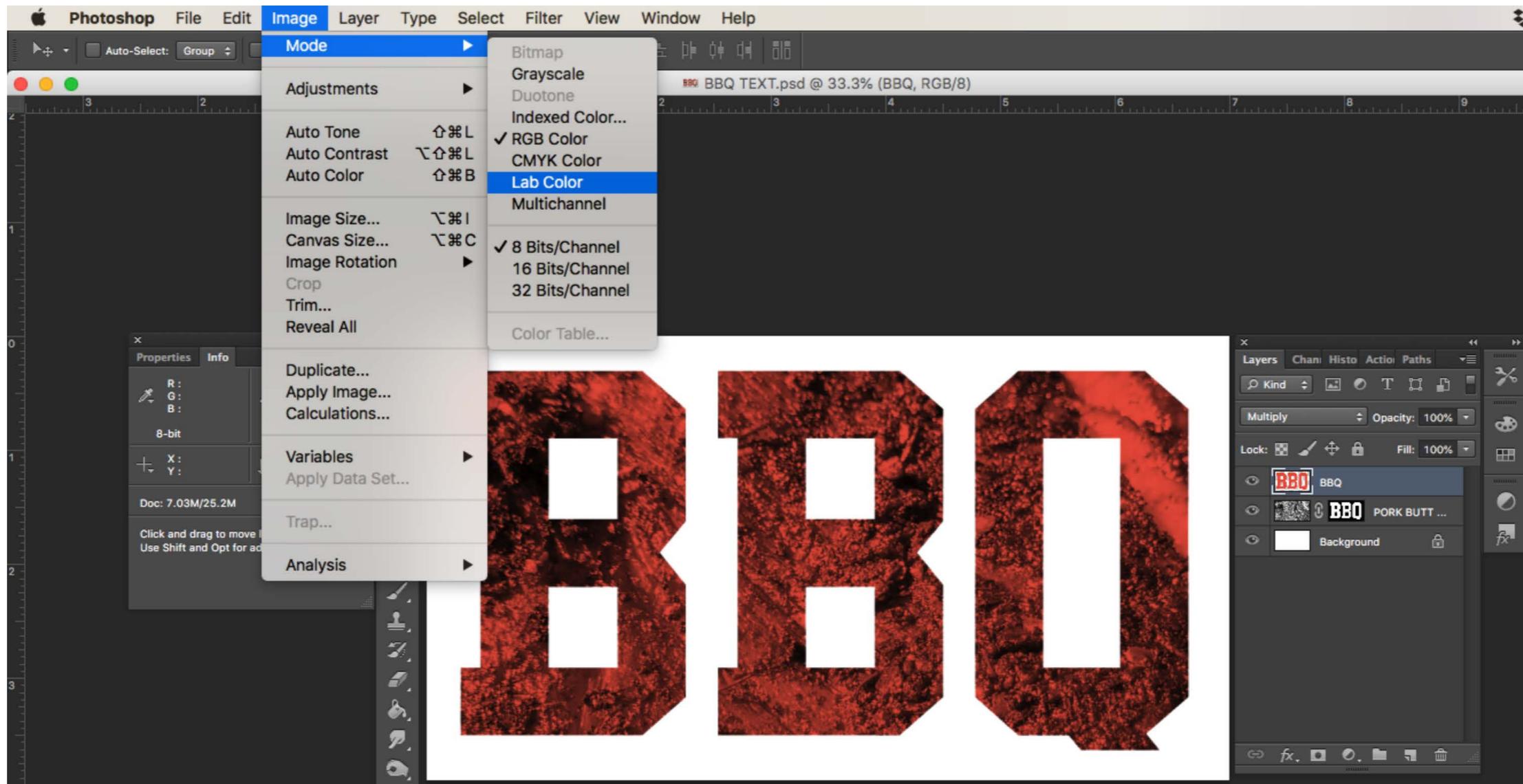
In this exercise the goal is to separate the file so that the image will self-modulate on the shirt and have a great final printed result. Let's start by looking at our image again.

We are going to create two channels. One will be the nice warm red of the letters, the second will be the texture that will drop in over

the red, and create the image with halftones.

To get started with this, I want to introduce you to your new best friend, the LAB color mode. Never heard of it?

Well, LAB is about to save you a ton of time when separating files so let's learn where to find it.



Go to Image > Mode > LAB Color. You are switching from RGB to LAB. Photoshop will ask you if you want to Flatten Layers first, and you choose, "Don't Flatten". We want to keep the Layers we've built. The image will look exactly the same.

However, now instead of the three RGB channels, the file will be built with three other channels. “L” is for lightness, which you can consider as a grayscale contrast of your file. “A” and “B” are the color composition of the file.



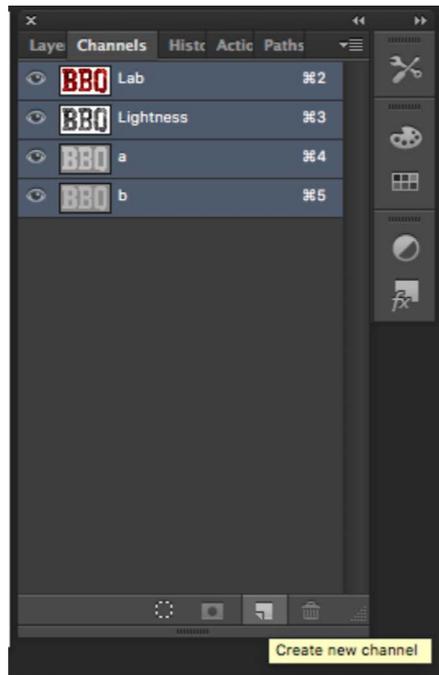
Here's where things get really easy.

For our t-shirt printing purposes, we want this to end up as two screens. The PMS 7625 Warm Red plate, and the PMS 7554 Dark Brown plate.

I'll show you how to separate this file in just a few easy steps.

For starters, we want to create a “Shirt Color” channel that we can use as the background. This is good to have for mock up purposes and other things later, so it is a best practice to always start here.

In this example, we'll be printing on a white shirt but I might throw a curveball later, so pay attention.



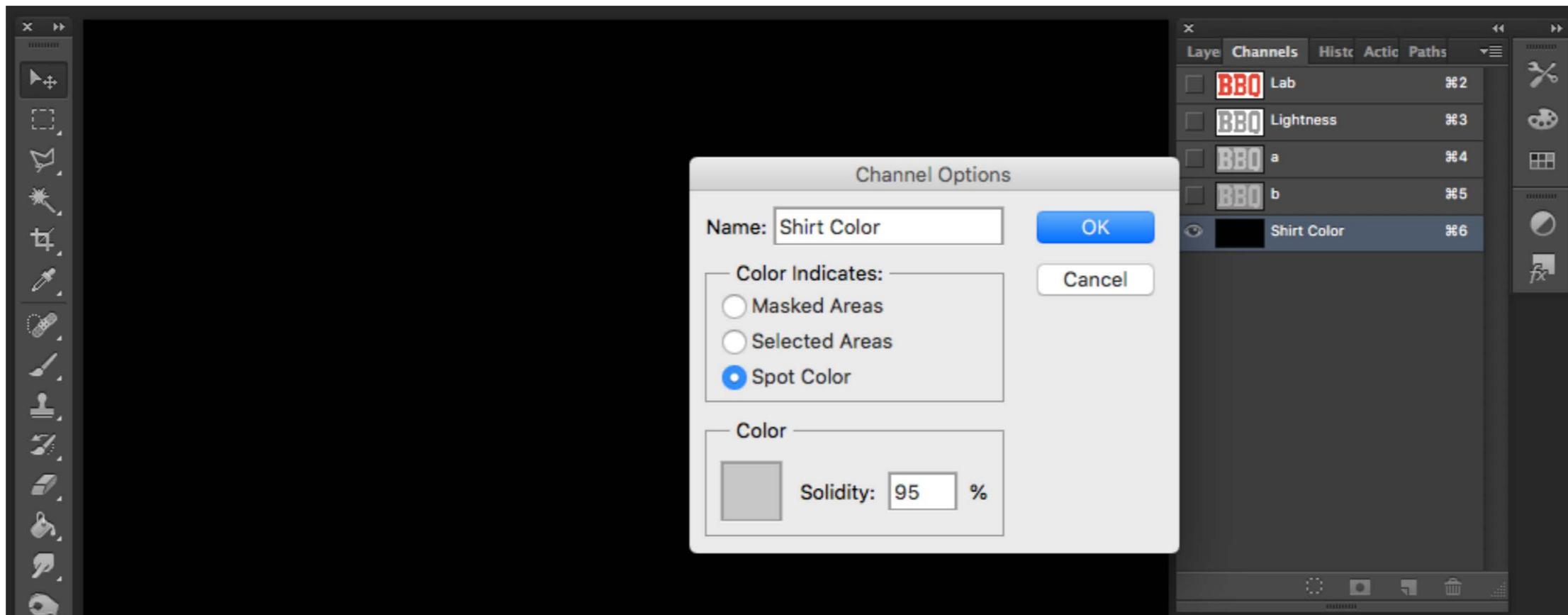
To add this new Channel, simply click on the New Channel button at the bottom of the Channel palette. This will create a new channel that we will use for the shirt color.

The new channel will automatically be titled “Alpha 1”. Double click the text name and it will highlight it so you can retile it. Rename it “Shirt Color”.

If you were using a non-white shirt color, here’s where you would make a few changes so that shirt color will show up correctly with your seps. For our example, let’s pretend we are doing the job on an Ash Shirt.

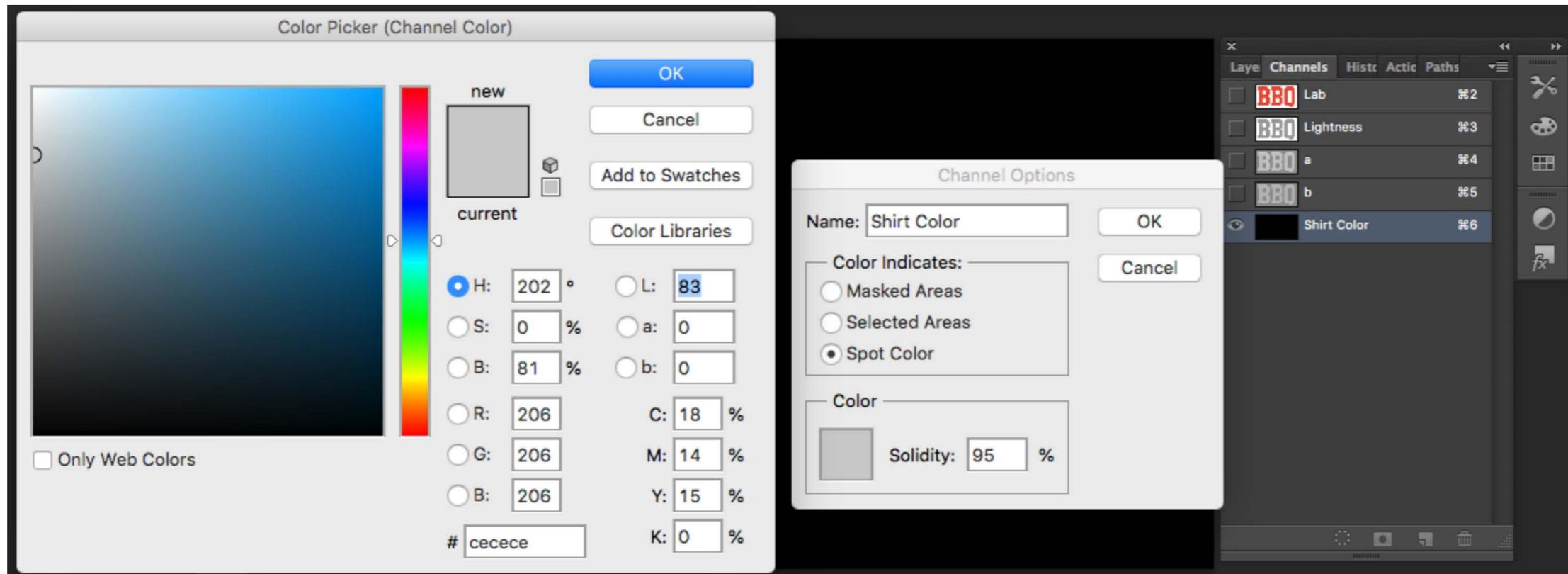
The first step is to click anywhere on the channel so you are selecting it, then click Command “A” for Select All. Then click Command/Shift “I” or Select > Inverse to turn the entire channel black.

Then, on the Channel palette, double click inside the small demo window next to the words “Shirt Color”. This is going to bring up the Spot Channel Options palette.



This is how we are going to colorize the background on this channel. On the Spot Channel Options palette, click on the small square next to the word Color.

The Color Picker (Spot Color) palette will appear. Here's where you can make that background color any hue you want. For our purposes here, we want a light shade of gray, so play around with that until you are satisfied. Please note that if you want a particular Pantone color, you can click the Color Libraries button and bring up those choices.



Once you are happy with your color choice, click the OK button for both the Color Picker window and the Spot Channel Options window. The image will still look black, but that's because we don't have another Spot Channel built out yet.

Which we are going to do immediately. Deselect the channel, and click back over to Layers.

What we want to do is to hide the layer that has the texture we built so only the basic type shows. To the left of the layer is an icon that looks like an eye. Click that and it toggles the layer off.



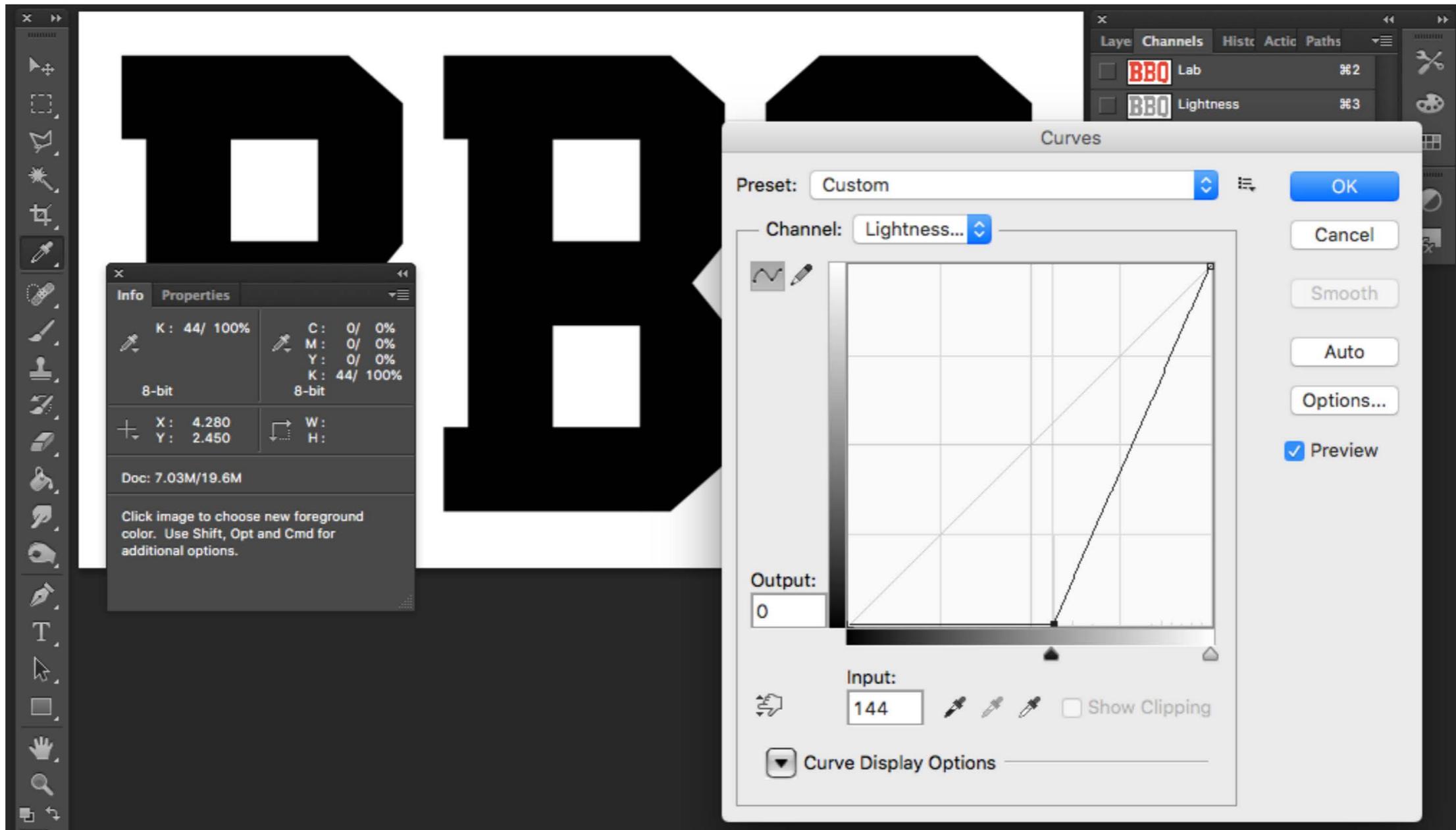
Next, we want to click back to Channels.

Select the Lightness Channel and click the Copy Channel command at the bottom of the Channel palette. This will duplicate the Lightness Channel so we can manipulate it as the base for our seps.

Remember, we're using this image as an example to show you how to create spot color separations in Photoshop. For your shop, these techniques will come in very handy when you need to make sep plates that really work.

For our new channel, we will need to manipulate it so that it looks correct on our screen. Right now, it is a grayscale because it was originally the Lightness Channel. Let's make it a solid by running a quick Curve command on it.

Command M or Image > Adjustment > Curves, brings up the Curves Adjustment palette. Use the Info palette to note the difference in modulation for your curve. Dial it in so that the adjustment brings the black to 100%.



Now that the text is completely solid, we can work on making it the right Pantone color, and take a look at how it looks on our shirt color background.

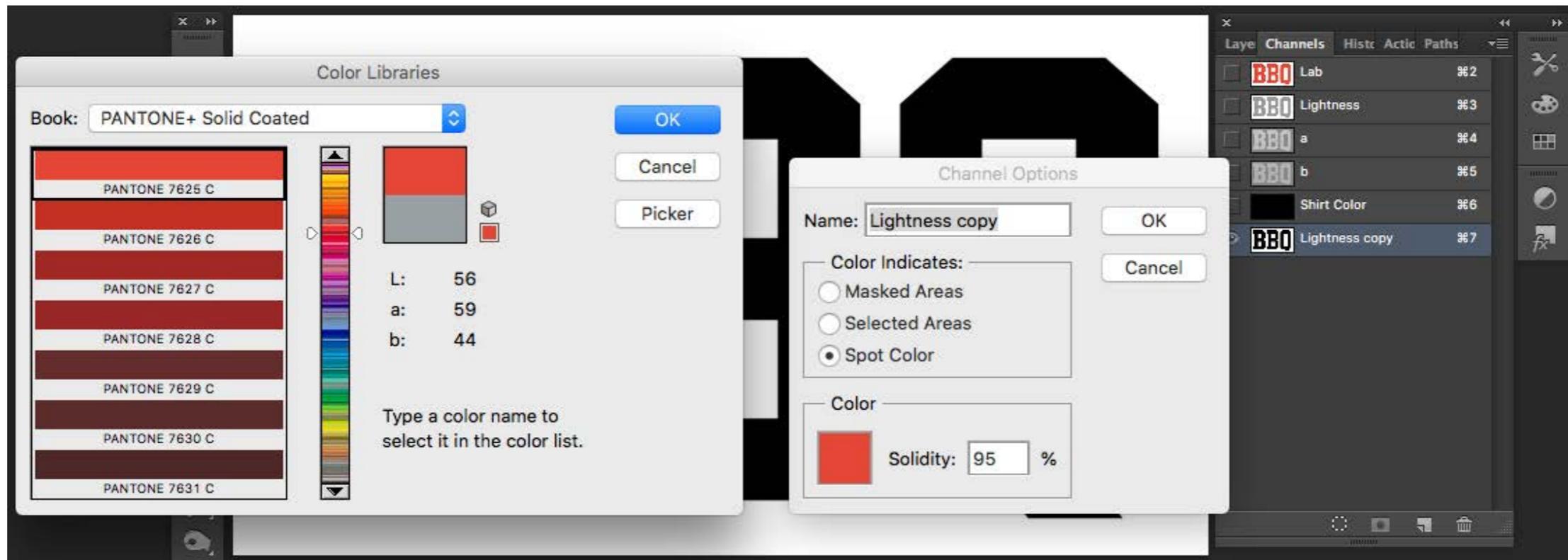
Note, that the reason we are making the text solid, is so that we can drop the texture halftone on top with a screen to get a dynamic look on press. Later in the eBook, I'll show you how to create simulated process seps with more complicated artwork. Here, let's just

keep it simple.

With the next step, we are going to make the channel PMS 7625. Similar to how we colored the Shirt Color channel, click on the small window next to the words Blue Copy.

This brings up the Channel Options palette, and we are going to click Spot Color as one of the choices. Then double click on the color square underneath the word Color. This brings up the Pantone choices. From there, click and find PMS 7625.

As soon as you click OK, the name of the channel will change from Blue Copy to Pantone 7625 C.



On the Channel Options palette click OK again, and everything black on the channel will now be PMS 7625 when viewed with other channels turned on.

To see the results of the steps that we just went through, simply click the far left button on the Shirt Color channel that looks like an

eye.

What you will see is that the Shirt Color channel now shows up as that gray you selected.

The text BBQ, also now appears in the warm red PMS 7625 like it should.

All of the other channels are off.



Now, let's use that texture that we worked so hard building earlier. Getting this right is easy.

Click back to Layers, and toggle off the red text BBQ and make sure that our texture layer is turned on.

Then, go back to Channels and deselect the Shirt Color and the Pantone 7625C channels so only the LAB channels are visible. Grab

the Lightness Channel again, and use the Create New Channel tool at the bottom of the Channel palette to duplicate it.

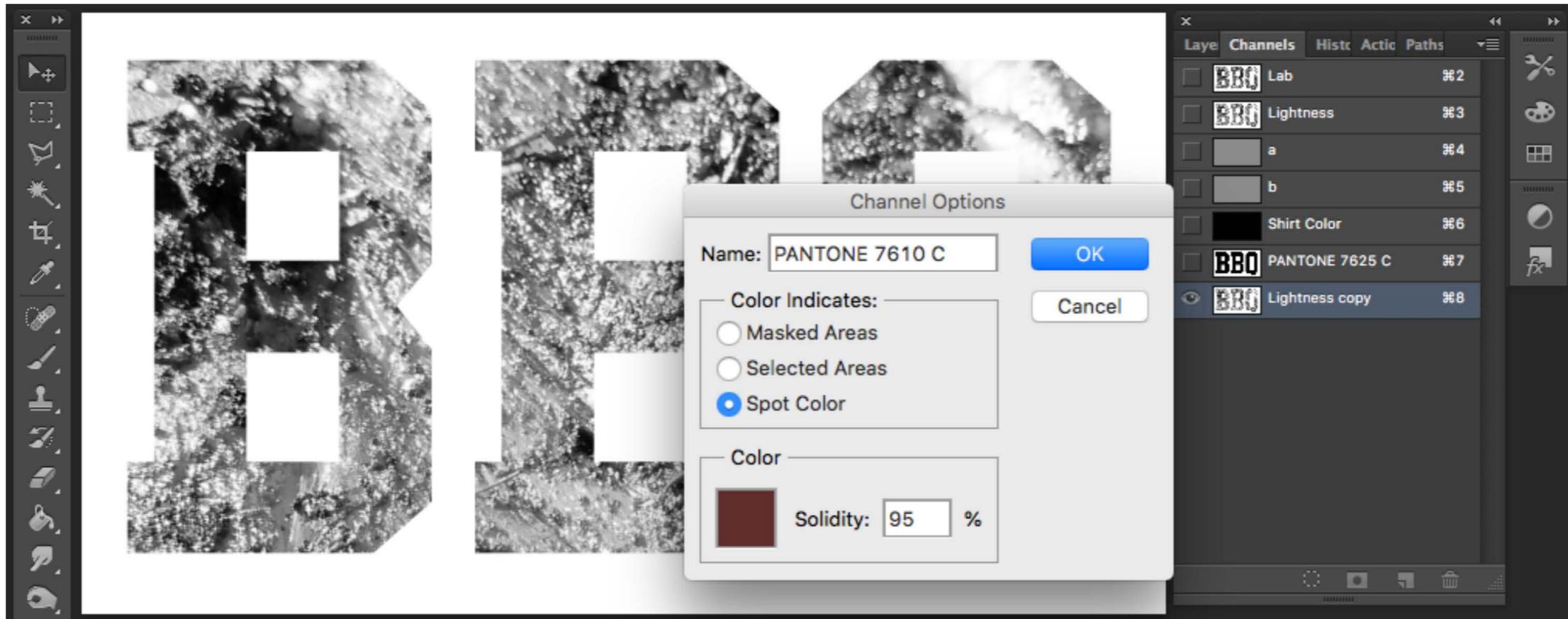
This will create a copy of the Lightness Channel that we can use and place it at the bottom of the Spot Channel order. Next, let's get this texture set up with the right color.



For that, I'm thinking a dark, reddish brown. Let's see what PMS 7610 might look like.

To do that, we are going to repeat some steps that were shown before. Start by double-clicking the Channel Thumbnail to bring up the Channel Options window.

Click Spot Color, and then double click the color box underneath the word Color. This brings up the Color Libraries window. Click OK, and the Channel name automatically changes to Pantone 7610C.



Click OK, and the Channel name will automatically change from Lightness copy to Pantone 7610c.

So, let's see how it looks with our color choices on the shirt ground color. To do that, just toggle the other spot color channels on and the file will appear exactly how it will print on the shirt.

If you were printing this on press, you would print the PMS 7625 screen first. Flash it. And then print the PMS 7610 screen after. You could also print the two screens wet on wet as well.

Printing a textured halftone on top of a solid color is a great way to build up great color modulation and shifts. You can also experiment a little bit and have multiple colors underneath the texture too.

Don't forget that this was a simple demonstration to show you how to create spot colors. We'll get into more complex ideas later.



But now we need to use these channels. Which means we need to Split them and save them in a format we can use.

Flip over to the Layers side, and Flatten them. Then go back to Channels, and in the upper right hand side of the Channel palette is a command area for Channels. It has four small horizontal lines. Click that.

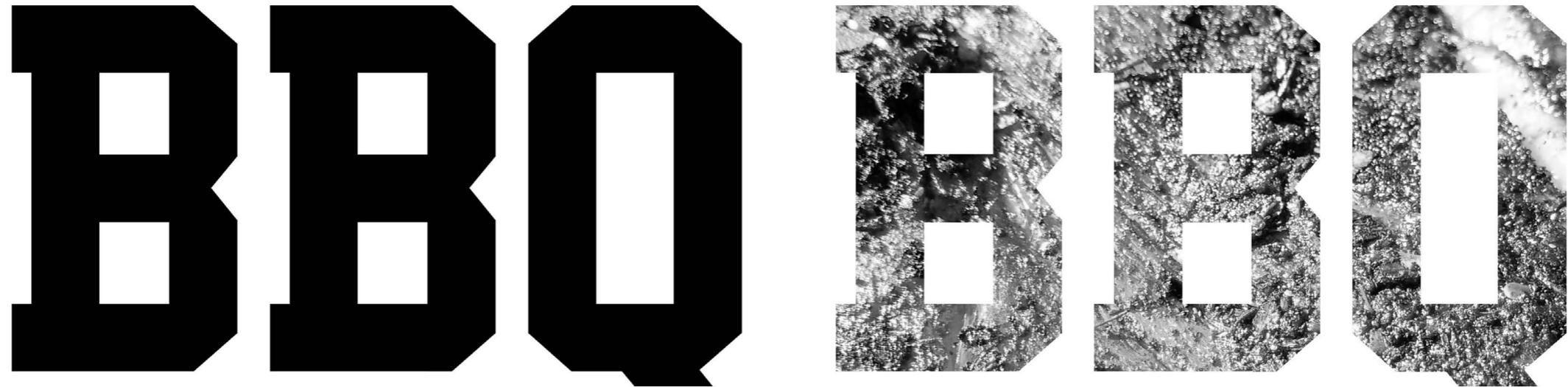
A command window for Channels will appear. Scroll down and click "Split Channels".

This is going to separate each of the Channels for this file into a new file. Some of these we will keep. Some of these we will discard.

I like to rename my files so they are shorter and make sense. Also, forever ago I started naming everything in all caps, so I could instantly identify anything that I worked on because nobody did it that way.

For these two files, I renamed them "BBQ TEXT PMS 7625" and "BBQ TEXT PMS 7610" and saved them as a .tif file. This type of file

can be imported into other programs like Illustrator or Corel Draw. You can also output directly from Photoshop if you wish. These are 100% to the size you set up the file, so if you made this a full front or back at 13" wide, that's how big the image will be.



When we get into doing more complex seps later, we'll be Splitting Channels with this same method.

## DISTRESSED TEXTURES

I love distressed textures. They are very easy to make. To the point that I can't believe people actually pay money for predesigned ones.

Here's a fun trick. Open up a new file and make the entire page black. Print it. Then take that paper page and crumple it up into a tiny ball. Then smooth it out. Then crumple it up again. Do this several times until the toner starts flaking off and making little white creases in the black page.

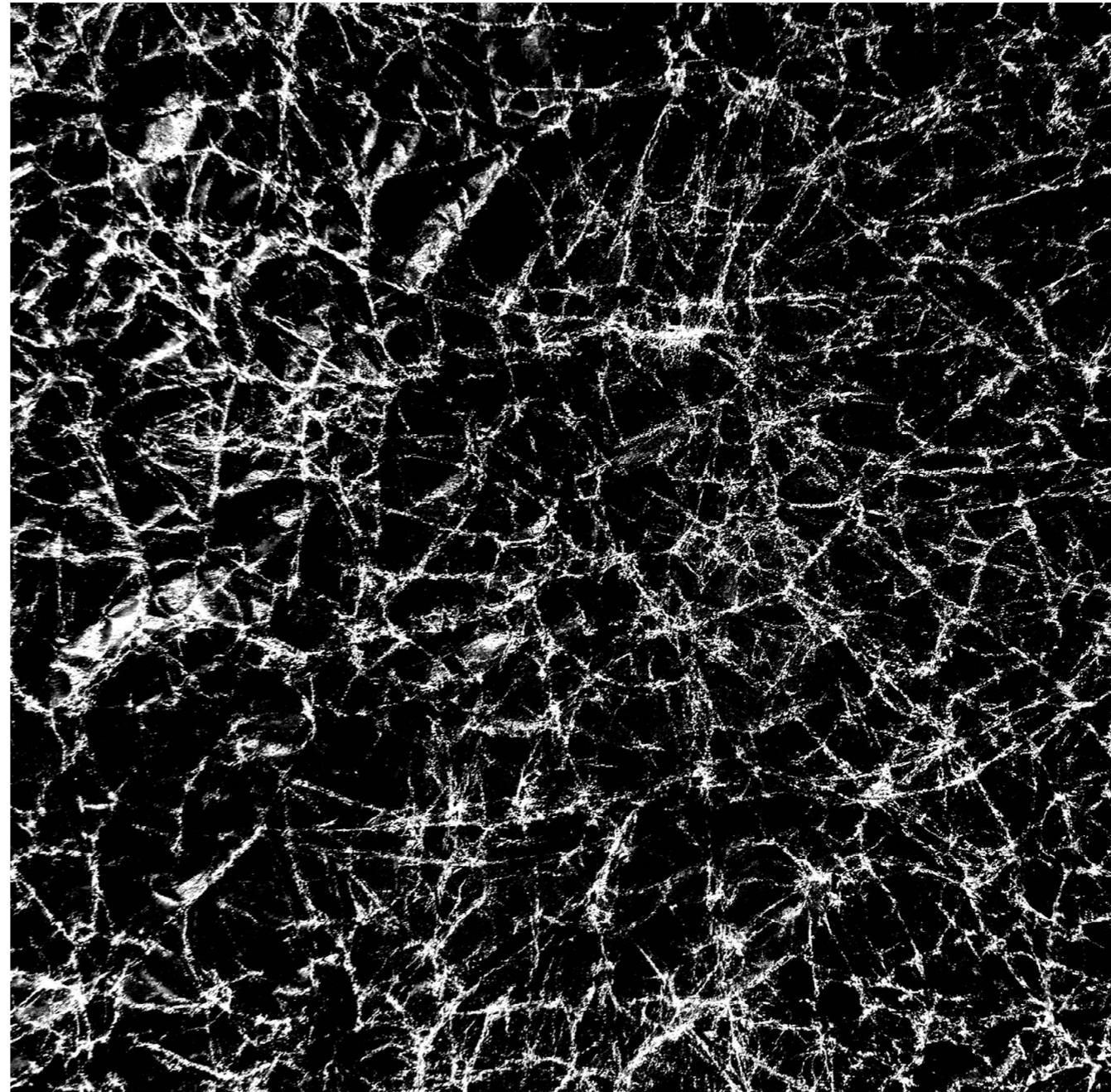
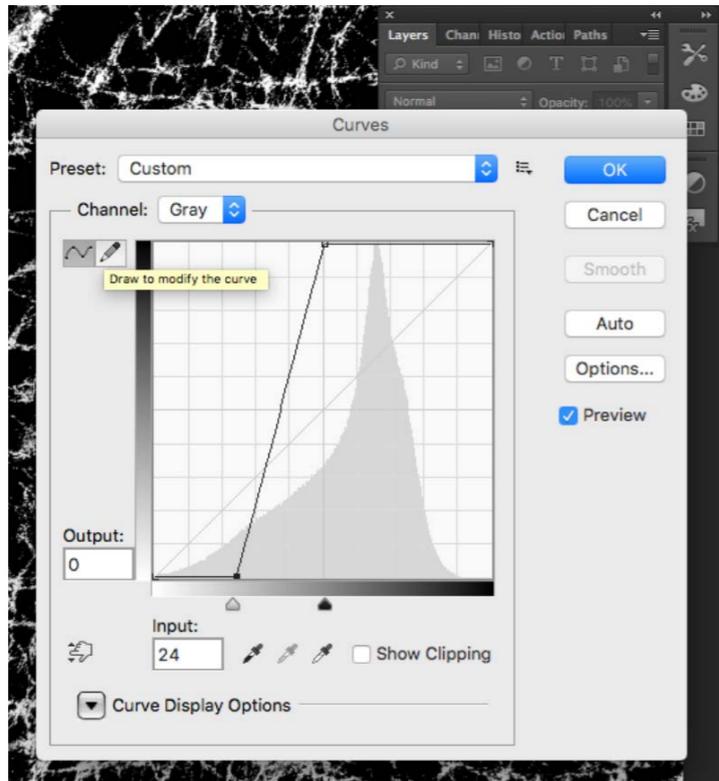
Once you get it to where you like it, take a photo of it with your phone. Drop that file into Photoshop. It might look like this.

See all of those crinkly lines? Those are gold.



The next step is to take that and run a Curves command on the file to deepen any dark areas to black.

This will blow out the light areas so they show up as white.



Now, let's learn how to use this in a file to make a distressed look. It's easy. First, we'll need a graphic to use.

Distressed textures add that vintage old look to anything. One thing to remember is that you don't want bold vivid colors. Better, is a softer hue to keep that aged look. For this lesson, I created a simple text file like you've used in your shop a million times probably.

I typed out two words, "Cold Beer" in a block font, and converted the type to a Smart Object so we can play around with it. I'm purposely keeping this simple to show how this texture can be applied.

Briefly, I made a new Layer to give the text an outline, and gave it a 10 point stroke. The oval and the text were selected and colored different shades of blue.

For a lot of shops, this is as far as many designs go with the creativity. Just some type on top of a background.

Nothing wrong with that.

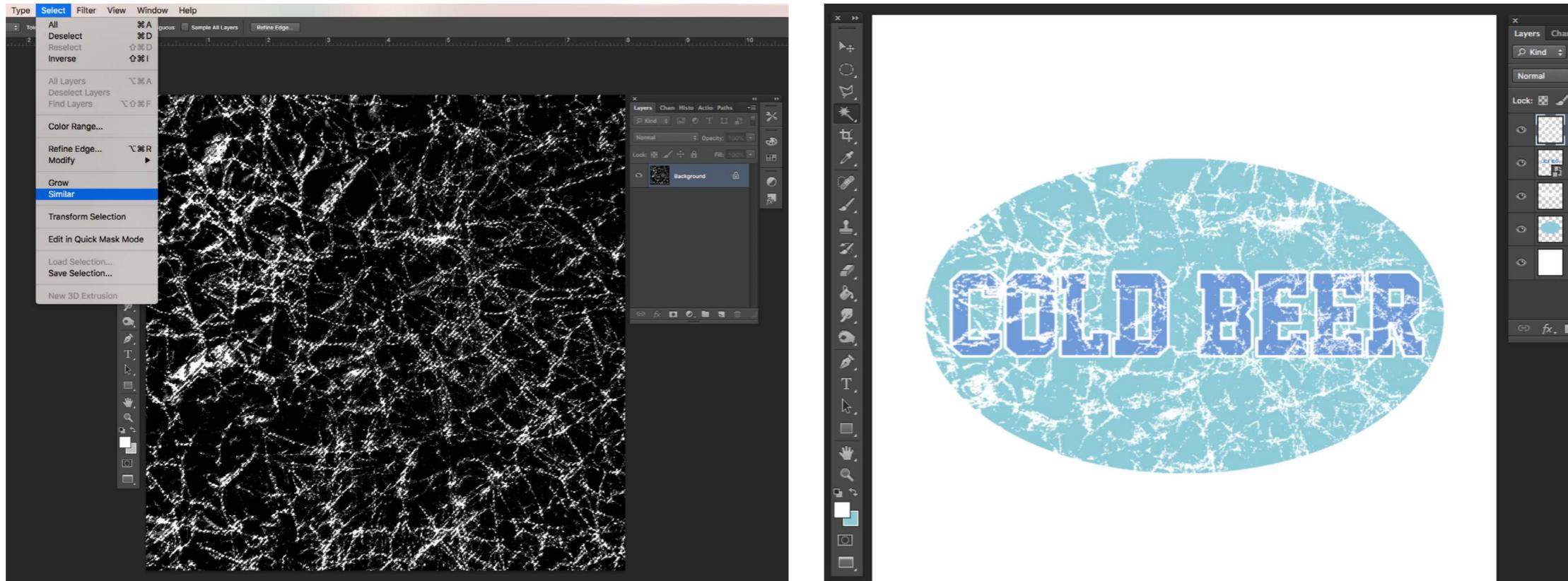
But the goal in this chapter is to teach you how to push some creativity using a texture to give the design some much needed flavor and pizzazz.

Remember that Crinkly Paper texture we were playing around with earlier?

That's going to be the perfect texture for this example graphic.



We'll open the Crinkly Paper texture and using the Magic Wand tool, select any white area on the file. This grabs the hue we want. Then, you want to select all areas that are similar to that white area selected. Simply go to the Menu Bar and choose "Select > Similar" to grab all of the white areas on this file. Then copy that selection and go back to our Cold Beer file. Paste the selection onto the file.



Hey, that looks better already!

But it is a little too harsh for my design tastes. I want something a little more subtle. This is easy to control.

On the new layer we added when we pasted the texture to the file, we want to lower the opacity of the layer so that some of the color underneath shows through. This is going to use that texture to modulate the tones in the file, and give the correct amount of "aging" for the file that we want.

Above the stack of Layers on your Layer window is the Layer Opacity Slider. With the correct Layer selected, I simply dial in the degree of opacity I want. For this example, I settle on 60%.

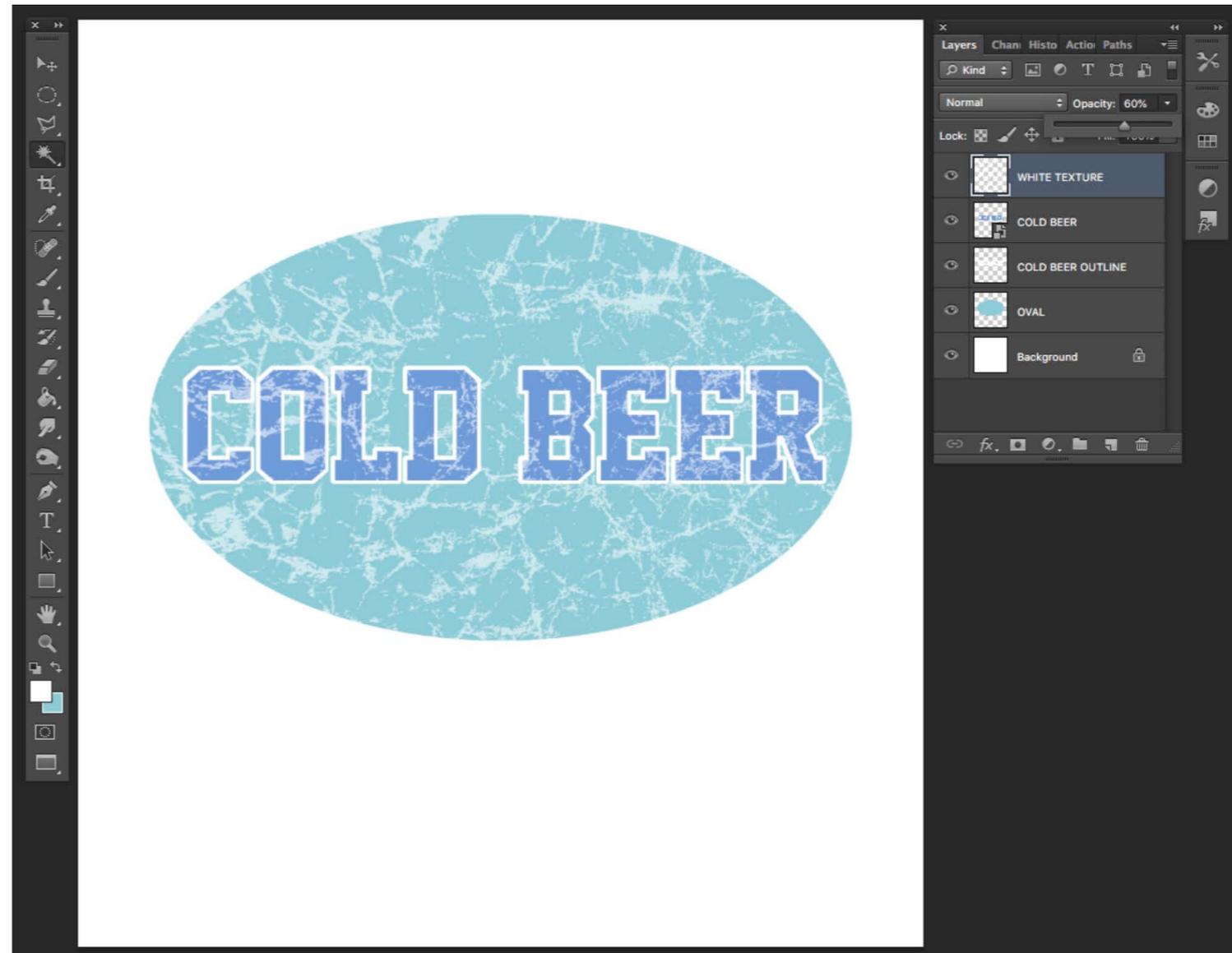


I think we have a winner. Doesn't that look more visually appealing than the original two-color design?

Once you have a stock folder of these textures, you'll find that you can use them to help give any image some needed visual interest.

Remember, this is still going to print as a two spot color design. The lighter shades will print as a halftone.

Separating the file would happen like we did with the word BBQ in Chapter 6.



## 8

# SIMULATED PROCESS SEPS

Ah, the secret. While there are plenty of really wonderful tools to automate the work of separating spot colors in Photoshop, I thought it might be fun to include the method I've been using for over twenty years. This is the "old school" way, and to me the way to do it with the most control.

Automation is fine, and there is nothing wrong with clicking a button and waiting for the results to come back. However, in my way of thinking I like to build the file from the ground up with the idea of how I'm going to be separating the file later. Should the colors mix on press? Where will the flash occur to steady the colors on the shirt? How is the print order going to influence the final result?

In the last remaining chapters I want to walk you through a step by step way of thinking about simulated process seps. If you have completed the lessons from Chapters 1-7, you have a good notion of how to use Layers and ultimately Channels to create the plates you'll need for each screen.

This frankly, is a very complicated process. You can have the done an amazing job with your seps, but ultimately fail if you can't keep a decent halftone on your screens, or have tremendous dot gain on press. There are thousands of things that can impact the final print.

To call out a baseline of what you need in your shop to be able to print Simulated Process I would start with a few things. First, your screens need to be better than average. It's called "screen-printing" for a reason. But I've been in too many shops where the importance of having good screens is neglected.

At a minimum, you should have your screen tension above 20 N/cm. Use a tension meter. You can not calibrate your screens with your fingertips or thumping them like a watermelon.

Also, coat your screens well with emulsion and shoot for having a nice even coat. The stencil you apply to the screen matters, as this is how your image that you are going to create is transferred to the screen.

After imaging, be careful with how you wash out your screens. Many shops place them in a dip tank with clear water for a few minutes before spraying. This loosens up the emulsion that is going to be removed, plus any toner or wax you may have with your exposure unit (if you are running computer to screen).

As an artist in your shop you should really know where the floor for the halftone percentage is going to be with your screens. Can you get down to 2-3% dot? Do you drop off a cliff at 15%? This matters as those small halftone dots make up the areas in the detail in your designs. Craftsmanship counts.

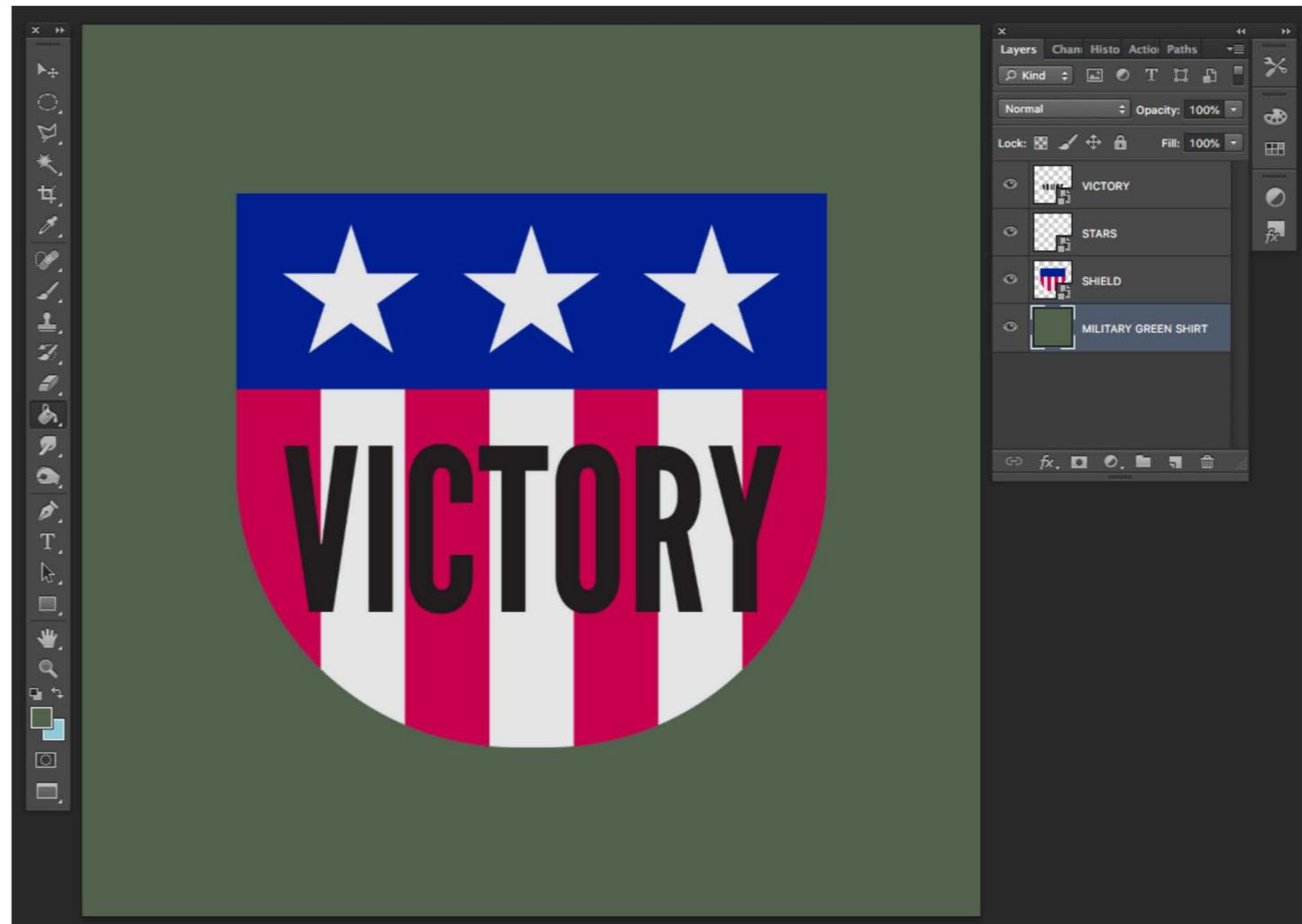
## Getting Started

So let's get started with our example art file. To the right is a basic idea that we are going to add some texture to, and then separate it into spot colors in Channels like we did earlier.

However, I'm not going to show all of the art creation steps, as you can do that on your own. The shield, stars, and type were created in a different program and dropped into Photoshop. For me, that works faster. Each item is its own Layer.

I also made the background color the shirt color, and for this project it will be a Military Green shirt.

Each following chapter will work on a



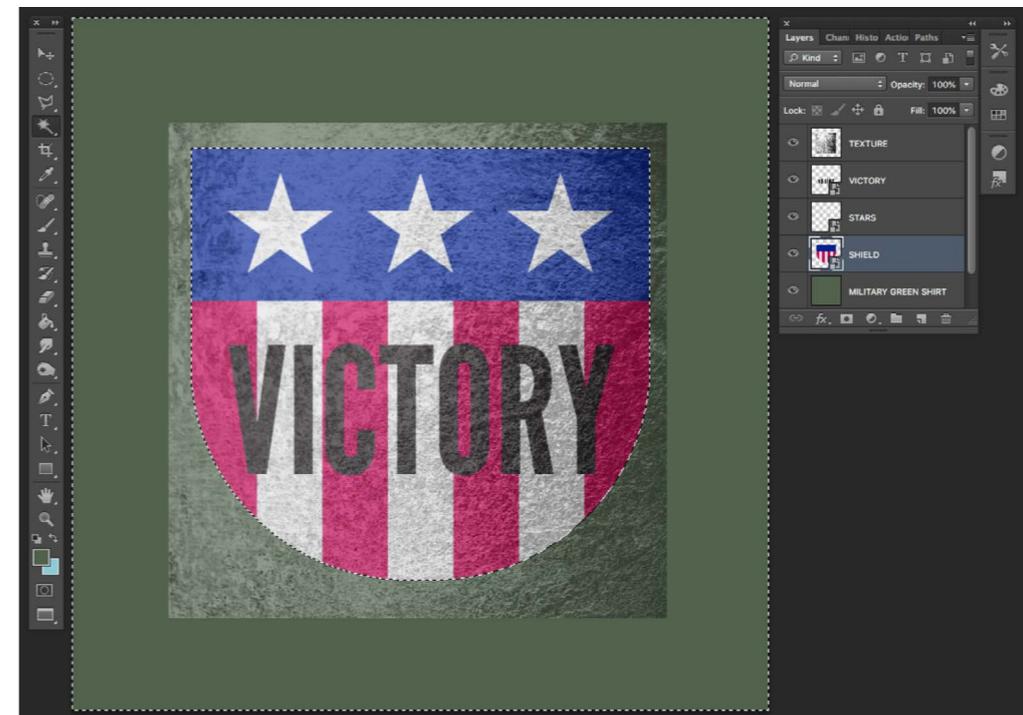
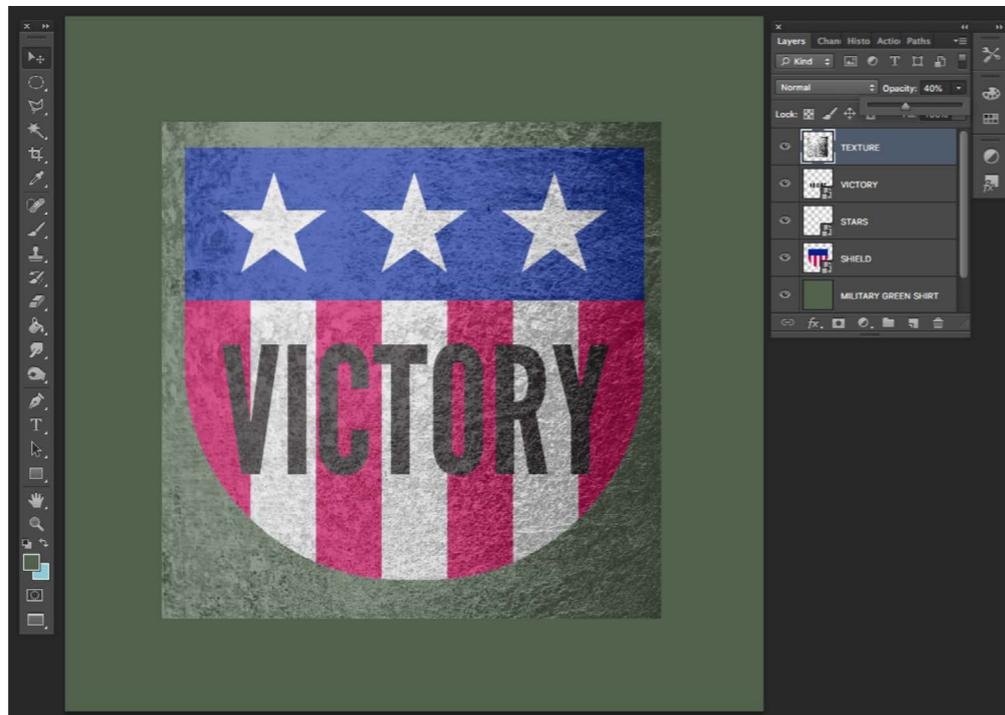
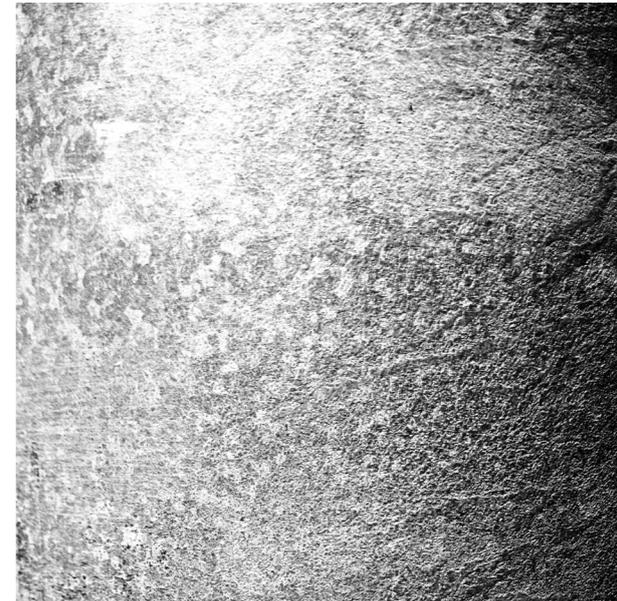
specific part of this design. You will also have access to the file, so you can play around with it too.

Let's start by adding a texture to the shield background. For this, I want to use a file I saved that has an interesting rough pattern. This is that same street sign texture that we used earlier. The image was posterized and saved as a grayscale.

I like this one because it has a good tonal range from light to dark. When added to my Victory design background it is going to give it some life.

I open my texture file and simply Select All and Copy to get the image to use. Then I Paste it into my Victory file. I size it to fit so it's larger than the shield area.

Now, simply adjust the opacity of the Texture Layer to how you like it. Then, select the bottom shield Layer, and with the Magic Wand tool click on the background area to select everything around the shield. Click back to the Texture Layer and click Delete to remove any texture that is hanging over the shield area.



In a few easy steps, it already looks more interesting.

We are hardly finished yet though. For this example, we want to add some visual interest to the background, and also a distressed texture to make this into a vintage design on that Military Green t-shirt.

On the next step, let's add texture behind the shield to give it a little more dimension.

Getting some tone between the shirt ground color and the main design helps with that.



## BACKGROUND TEXTURE

# 9

For the next step we want to find an interesting pattern that is going to add some visual interest to the design. For this example, this is going to print on the shirt in one ink color, Black. I say this now because I find it helps you think about how you are going to separate your file as you build it. The choices get easier.

When you take pictures with your phone, everything is in a rectangular shape. For our purposes, we don't want that. We want random.

So one of the tools we will be using is the Erase tool, as we will be eliminating a lot of the Texture we are importing.

The Texture pattern I've chosen is one you probably walk by everyday. This is a close up of a window screen. It has a regular horizontal and vertical weave, but with irregular patterns too. It's going to be a good fit for what we want to do.

However, it's not quite perfect yet. Now we get to discuss my absolute favorite tool in Photoshop, the Unsharp Mask command.

For screen-printers, this is a life-saver for bringing out detail and making your designs "pop" on the shirt. You can find this under, Filter > Sharpen > Unsharp Mask.

In Unsharp Mask, there are a few slider controls that allow you to adjust the image with as much fidelity as you need. For our example Texture though, we really want to hammer it and bump up the contrast between the light and dark areas.

Check it out below.

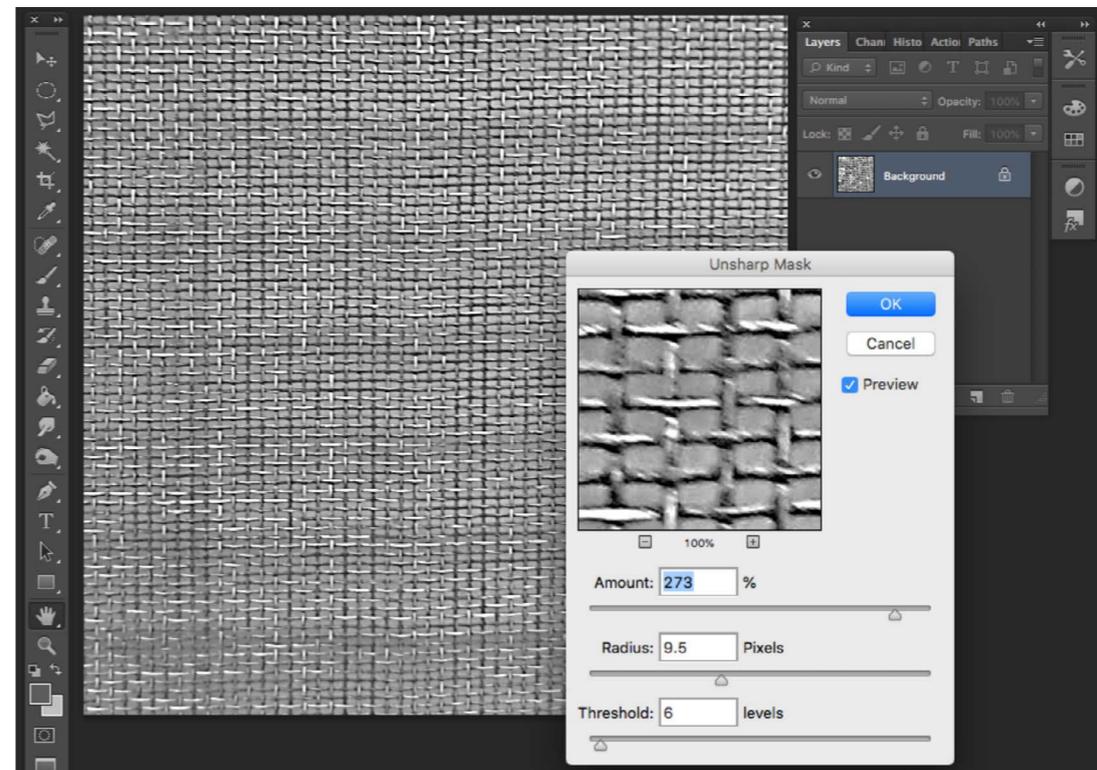
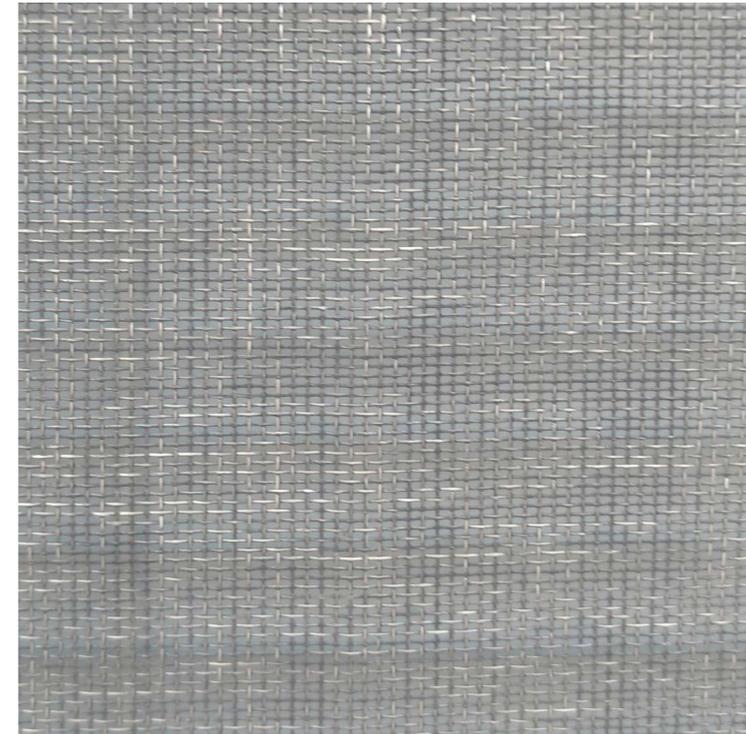
Notice the difference? This is simple command that can vastly improve your image without a lot of fuss.

If you are doing anything with detail such as hair, fur, metallic highlights, wood grain, rust, or any specific areas you need to punch up...Unsharp Mask will be your friend.

Do yourself a favor and experiment on your own with this great tool and see for yourself.

So, after the Unsharp Mask step we want to eliminate the midrange tones in the Texture so we are only left with the grain of the pattern.

I like using Curves for this. Go to Image > Adjustments > Curves, or type in Command M.



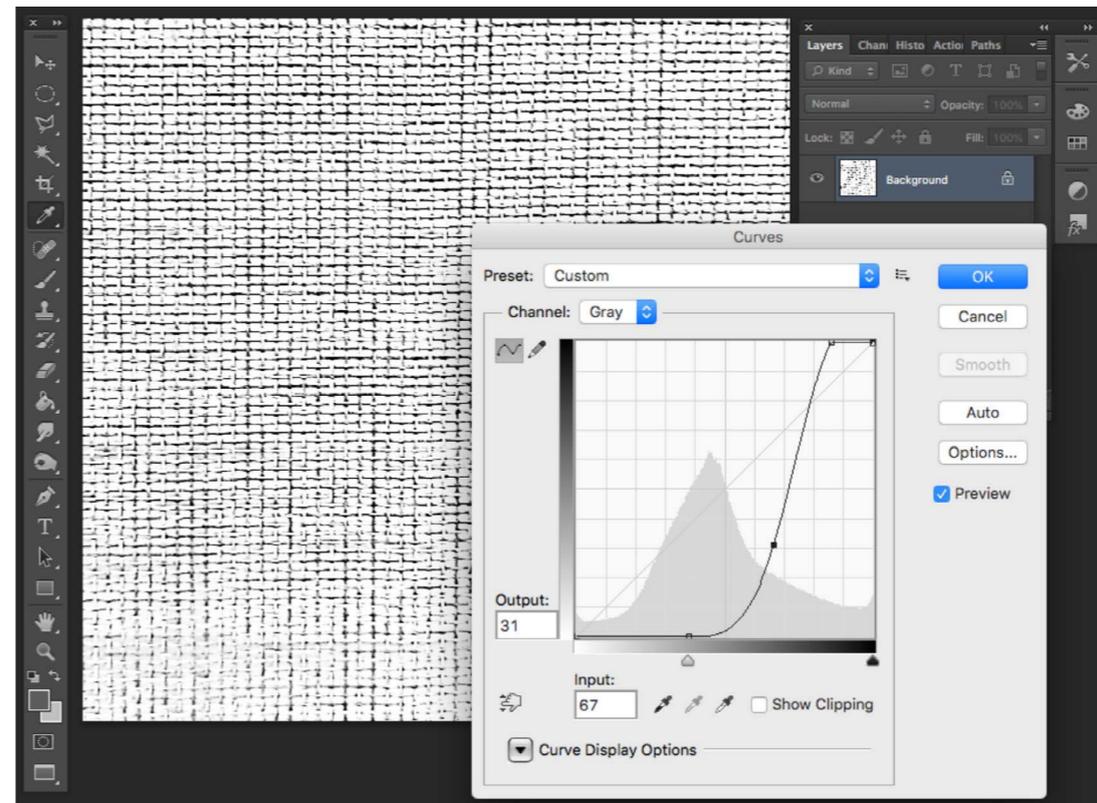
As you can see to the right, with a few short clicks, we can eliminate all of the midrange gray tones in the Texture image.

Many graphic designers like using Levels instead of Curves, but I've found that I have more control with Curves. It is a personal preference thing probably.

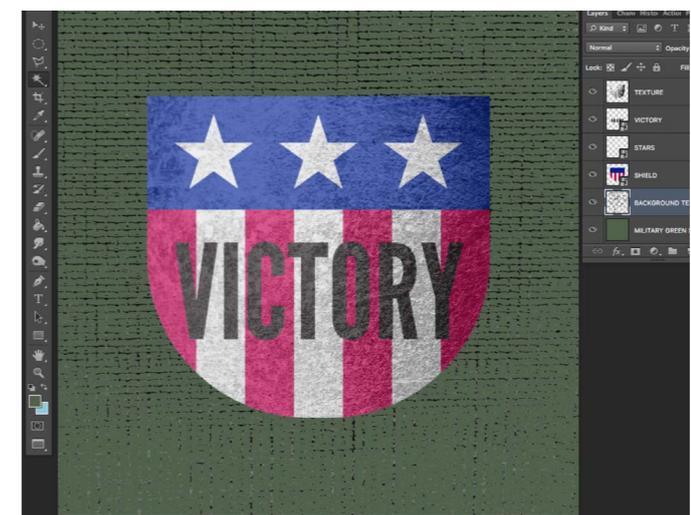
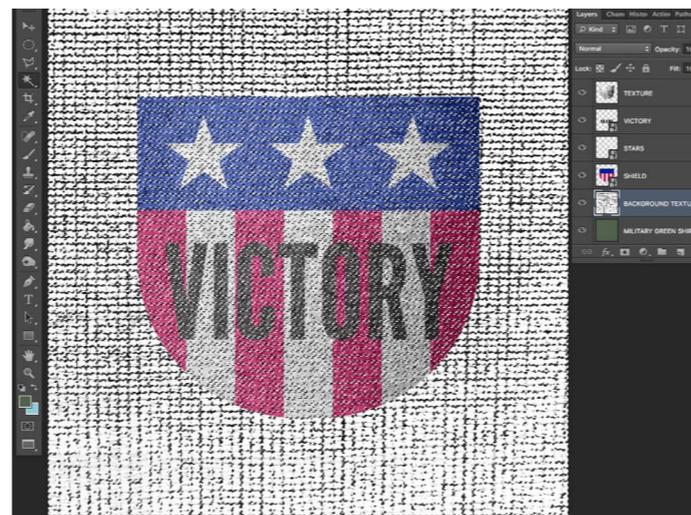
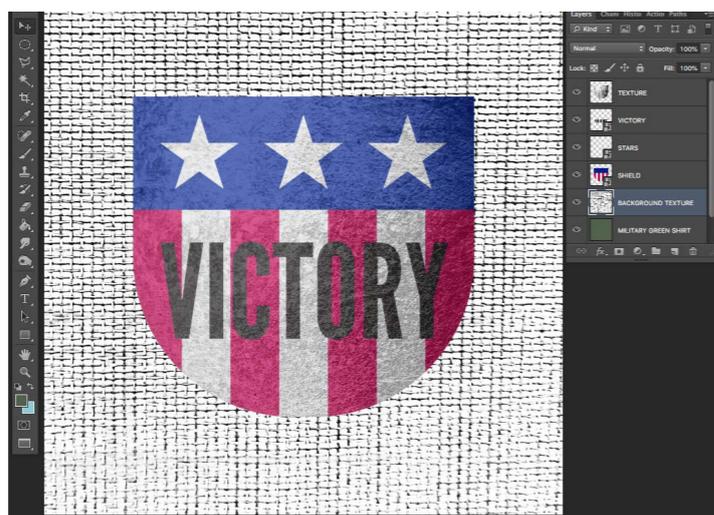
So compare the original image and our new Texture image that is now ready for use in our design.

Once you do this a few times you will start seeing the potential in the texture patterns that are constantly all around you.

So now that our background source Texture is ready, it's time to bring it into our file and use it. Like before, grab the file by Selecting All and Copying the file.



We'll bring it into our art file and scale it so it is the same size as the background layer. Next, the white areas will need to be deleted. Like before, we use the Magic Wand tool to select those, and then hit Delete. What's left is the basic Texture for us to use.



Using the Erase tool, with the Opacity and Flow settings at 48%, and the Erase brush at 200 pixels, gently start eliminating the detail from the texture until it forms a background Texture that you are satisfied with.

What we want is a texture that ties the graphic to the shirt a little bit. This is going to print with black ink, and will be a subtle part of the design.

These type of details are not “throwaway”. I think they add some real spark to any design.

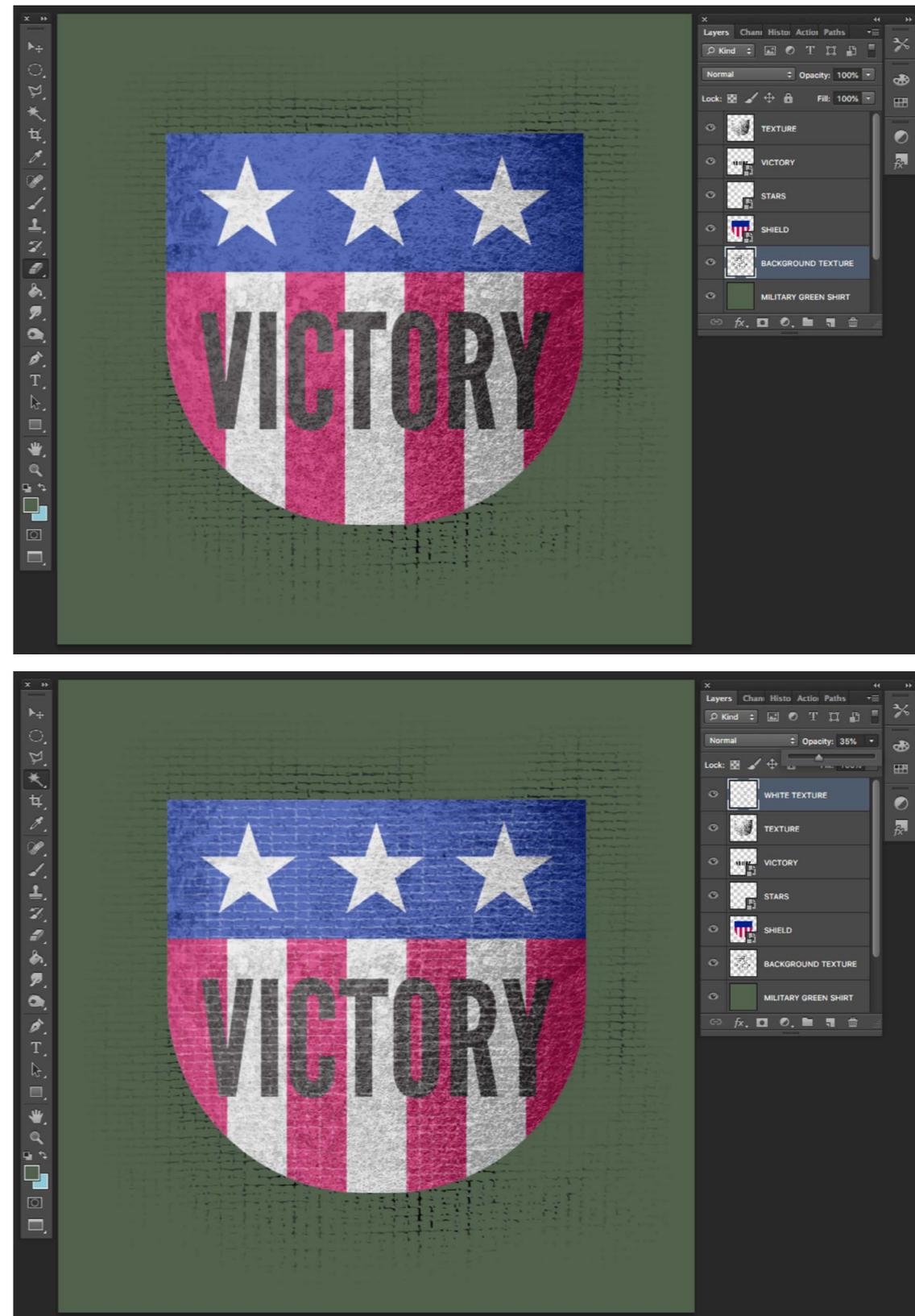
But since we have that awesome background Texture, let’s use it in the design to help tie everything together even more.

Duplicate the Background Texture Layer and resort it so it is the top Layer in your stack. You then can invert the black texture to white by choosing Command “I” for invert.

Like we did previously with the original Shield Texture, select the Shield Layer and using the Magic Wand tool select anywhere in the outside of the shield. This grabs the area around the shield. Click back to the new White Texture and hit Delete. This removes the unnecessary white areas in the background.

Then, using the Opacity Slider, this gets dialed down to 35% for a more refined look.

What’s great about this is that the background texture on the shirt color is now tied into the design a bit, so this makes it a cohesive look.



# SIMPLE VINTAGE TEXTURE

# 10

So our design looks too nice. We need to give it some age and patina and the easiest way is with using a Texture. For this example we want to remove random areas in the design to make the image look older, and give the appearance that parts of the print have flaked off.

For this I'm going to use an image I took of a side of a telephone pole. That's right. A telephone pole. What I liked about this was not only the vertical wood grain, but the weird patterns of the old bark. Blown out like we've done before, this will give us the perfect way to mask off some areas for removal with our Eraser tool.



I built the grayscale image like we've shown before. Then I copied and pasted the Texture file into the main Photoshop art file. Because I want this to be more of a random look, the Texture was enlarged considerably. I moved the image around a little until I liked how the wood grain hit different parts of the main art file. An easy way to do this is just dial back the opacity of the image so it's a little transparent.

Once it's perfectly arranged, I eliminate the white areas just like I've done before. All we want is the black, random wood grain texture to use as the basis for our Eraser Tool mask. All of the art Layers that we are going to manipulate are Merged. Then, using the Magic Wand tool the black areas in the Texture are selected. This selects only the areas we want to play around with and leaves the others that need to remain pristine.

Our goal now is to use the Eraser Tool to carefully remove bits and pieces from the design by erasing the information from the art Layer.

This isn't done at full strength, and in fact, I have the settings at 9% Opacity and 48% Flow with a 120 pixel size brush.

I like to work the edges first. These are chipped away much like an ice sculpture.

Irregular and random bits are removed completely, but others are just dialed back.

Next, I work my way inward along the long wood grain areas, bringing the tones down slowly.

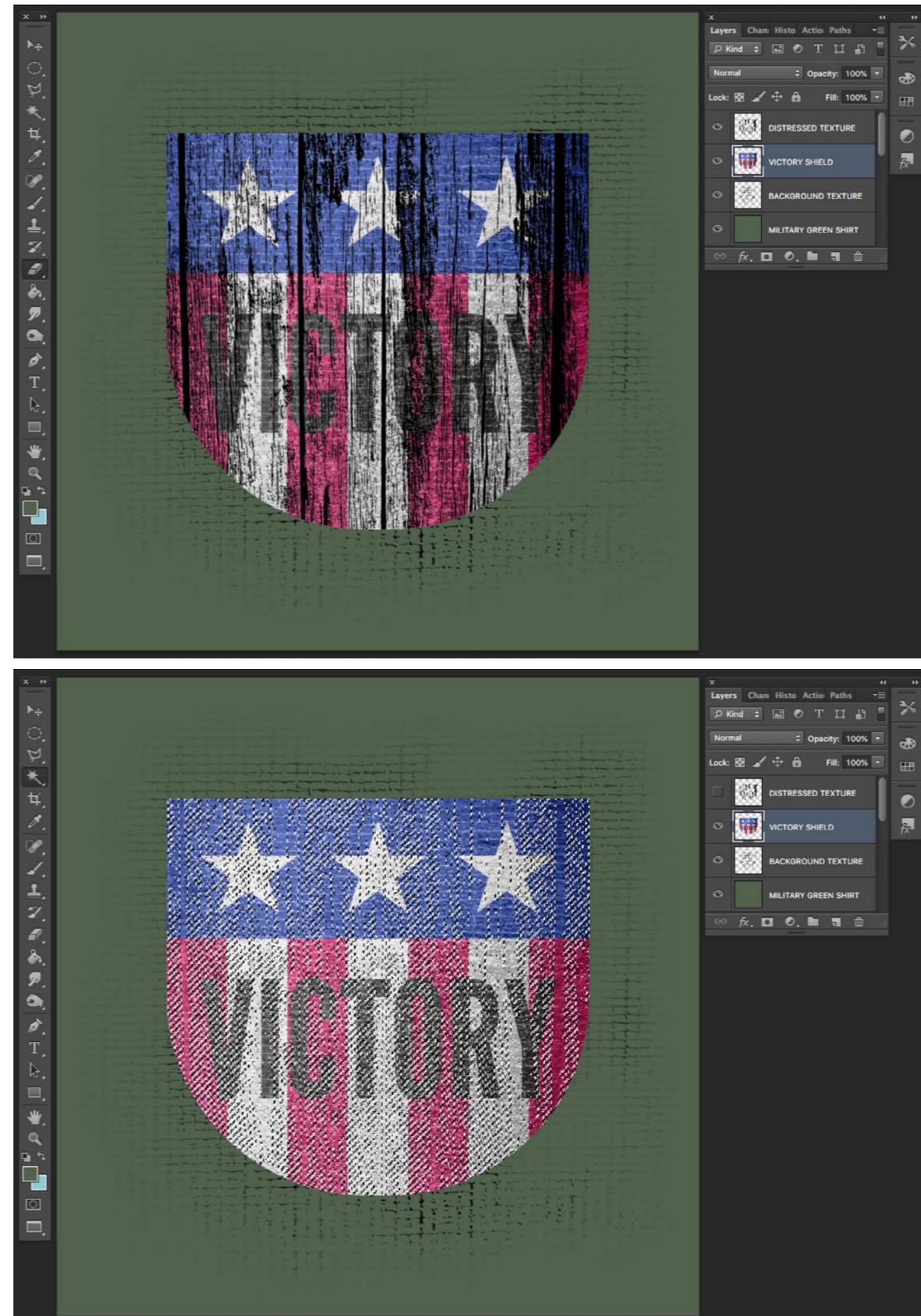
I hit some areas harder and remove everything completely. Others are barely touched.

At the end, the brush size is increased to 700 pixels and all areas are hit a time or two to make a difference and build a pattern.

Because the Opacity strength is only 9%, this doesn't completely eliminate the color, but it does modify it.

At the end of the process is our finished result. We've used three textures that I grabbed with the camera in my phone to impact a design idea.

Compare on the next page from the original to the finished image. After that, we'll separate the design into spot colors.





# SEPARATING THE FILE

Earlier in the eBook we separated a design file into spot colors. This chapter is going to do something similar, but we are going to add the creation of an underbase plate to the mix. To make this much, much easier we are going to be working primarily the LAB color mode again.

Trust me, once you start using LAB as the basis for your underbase plates you will never do it any other way. It's easy and quick.

For a quick definition of the LAB Color Mode, let's review.

Both of the Color Modes that you are probably familiar with, CMYK and RGB are based on how color is being used. CMYK is how four-color process files are built as the image is broken into four channels, Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, and Black. RGB files are built for digital devices like your phone and your computer monitor. Instead of four channels like CMYK, RGB files only use three, Red, Green, and Blue. What makes LAB unique is that it is based on how humans see color. The L Channel is the Lightness Channel, which is contrast. The A and B Channels describe the color.

We are going to take advantage of the Lightness Channel as it is usually an almost perfect underbase screen.

First, let's get the file switched over to LAB. Up at the top in the menu bar, go to Image > Mode > LAB color. When you make the switch, the file will look onscreen exactly the same. When you switch over, you may be asked to Rasterize any Smart Objects (go ahead, it's ok) or to Merge any Layers (do not do this). You simply want to change the working color space.

Also, to get set up to separate our plates easier, I usually create two new background colors that I can toggle on and off. One is white and the other is black. We'll need those during the separating process, so go ahead and create those.

To start separating the file, turn off the Military Green Layer, and turn on the newly created Black Background Layer.

We are going to create our Underbase Screen first, using the Lightness Channel and we only want the main image and none of the black areas in the design.

This is a very quick and easy way of doing it.

Next, switch over from Layers to Channels.

In Channels, start by creating a t-shirt color channel so you can see the ink tones for each screen you are building. At the bottom of the Channel Palette, click the “Create New Channel” button.

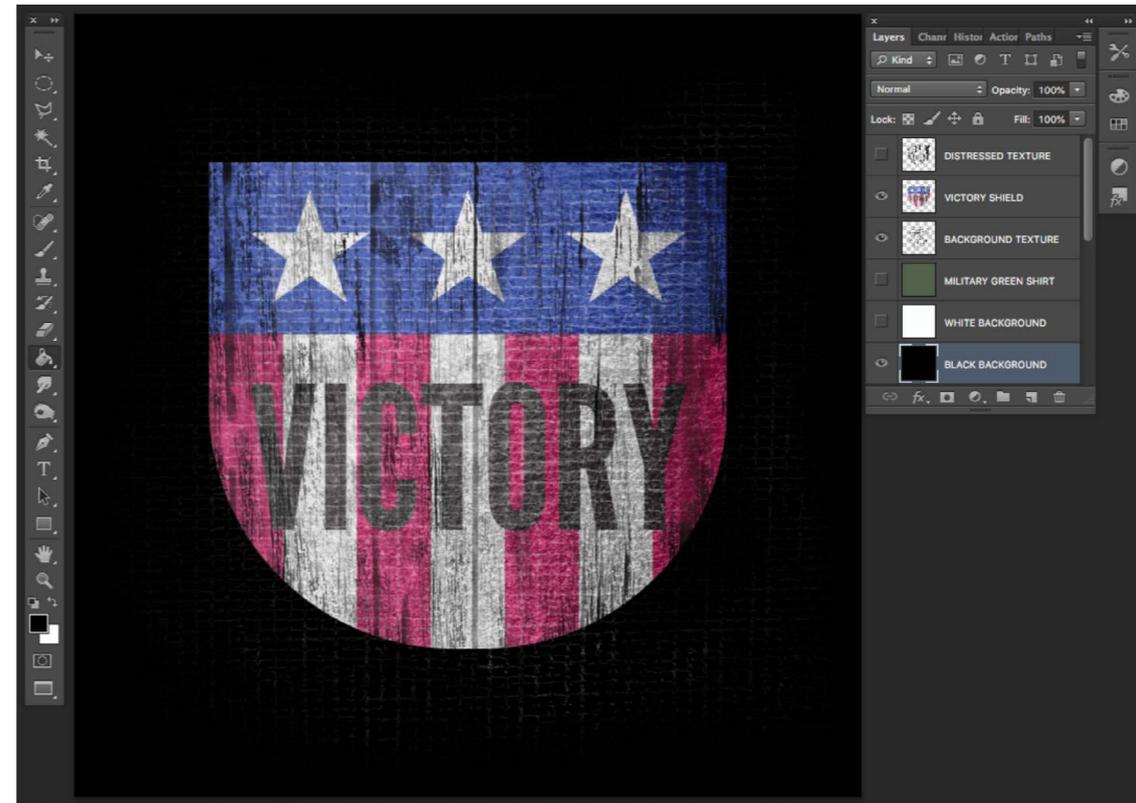
A new Channel named Alpha 1 will appear. Click Command “I” to invert the totally white channel to black.

Double click on the black thumbnail on the Channel Palette to bring up the Channel Options dialog box. Here’s where you will build the shirt color.

Click the toggle name to “Spot Color” to designate a color. Double click the thumbnail area to bring up the Color Libraries and Color Picker dialog box. You can either enter a Pantone color that most closely resembles the Military Green color, or use the Picker to grab one that you think matches best. For our purposes I’m using a Pantone color and make it PMS 7498.

Make the solidity 100%, and click OK. So far this will appear to be black still, but that’s because we haven’t made other channels yet. Don’t worry.

Next, we want to make the White Ink Underbase Screen. As all of the other ink colors will drop on top of this, it’s the most important screen.



Select the Lightness Channel and drag it down to the Create New Channel button. This will duplicate the Lightness Channel and insert it underneath our Military Green Channel automatically. Rename the file. Then click Command “I” to invert the file.

Like we did with the Military Green Shirt Channel, double-click the thumbnail to bring up the Channel Options dialog box. Select Spot Color, and then click the Color thumbnail underneath.

Click the Picker tool and choose white from the color wheel. Make the Solidity 100% and then click OK.

Congratulations, you just made the easiest Underbase White plate ever.

Sometimes this plate will need to be tweaked a bit to compensate for dot gain. As you will see in a bit, I wait until last to do any adjustments to the plates.

This by the way, is handled through the Apply Image command. We can add or remove information to any of these plates using that step.

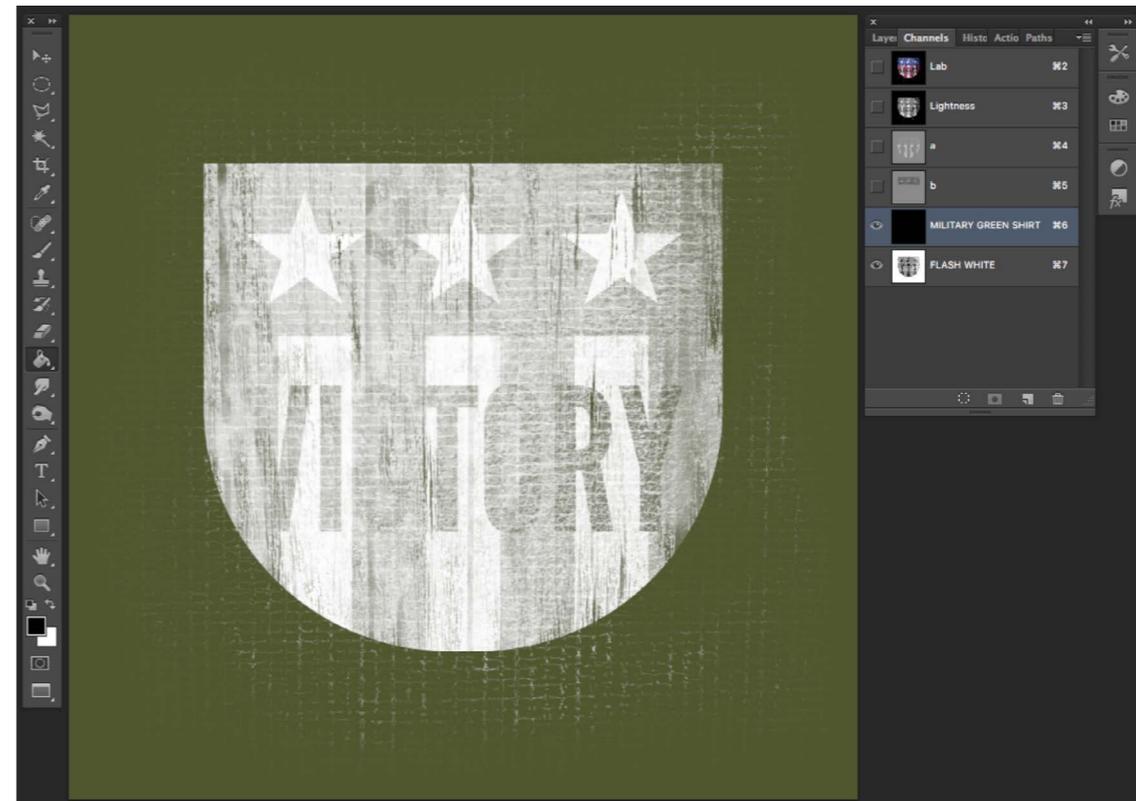
More on that later.

So for now, let’s start adding the colors we’ll use for this file to the Channel set up.

Deselect the Channels and click on the LAB full color image at the top of the Channel Palette. Then, switch back to Layers from Channels.

Turn off the Black Background Layer and turn on the White Background Layer. This will allow the selection of the colors with the Color Range tool easier.

To get started, at the top menu bar go to Select > Color Range. When using this tool, try to imagine limiting the colors used to as few



as possible. When separating sometimes it is easier to create a color Channel and then use the Apply Image command to add something to another plate to “fake” that color instead of having an entire screen dedicated to it.

For this project we are going to start with pulling a Light Gray color from the image.

In Color Range, make sure you have a few things selected so you can see what you are doing easily. Under the thumbnail in the Color Range dialog box, make sure “Selection” is toggled, as well as “Invert”. Also, under the “Selection Preview” dropdown, click “Grayscale”.

This will give you an actual size image of what you are grabbing with the Fuzziness Slider. This tool helps grab the color you have selected with the Eyedropper tool.

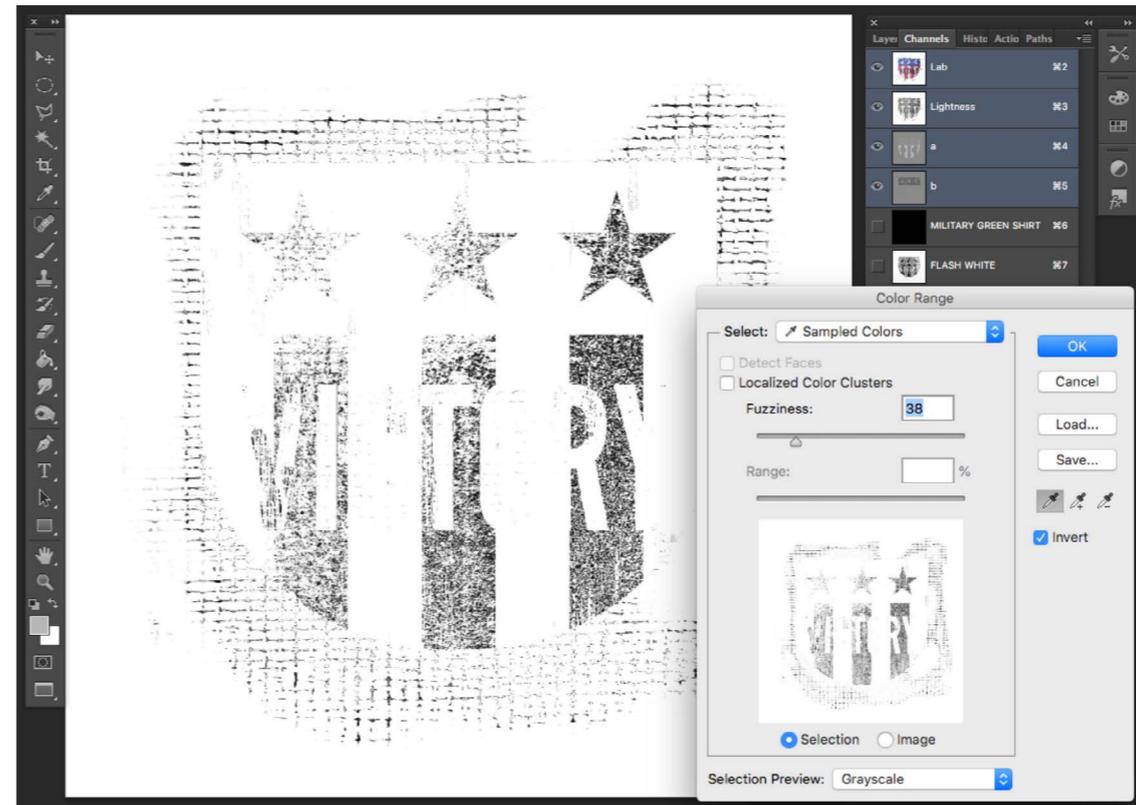
Slide the Fuzziness scale back and forth until you are satisfied that you have exactly what you want. Spending a few moments here can save you some editing time later.

Also, if you think you may have not grabbed the color from the correct area, it's better to reselect and start over than trying to make changes later.

Similar to how we finalized the color for the underbase, we will go through those same steps for this spot color gray. Double-click the small thumbnail on the Gray Channel and open the Channel Options dialog box.

Click the small color box and the Color Libraries / Picker box comes up. Click into the Libraries and choose a Pantone color that you want to use.

For now, we are going to use PMS 420 Gray. Rename the Channel to PMS 420, and change the solidity to 95%. Click OK.



Not a bad start.

We may have to adjust the PMS 420 gray texture areas outside of the shield later, but let's wait to see how this looks before doing any of that tweaking.

Sometimes it is nice to have some color intermingling in the file on top of each other. It creates a richer look to the print.

Our next lightest color is the light blue in the image.

Therefore, we simply repeat the Color Range steps and grab that light blue from the image.

Using the same steps, we pick out PMS 2727 light blue for that hue.

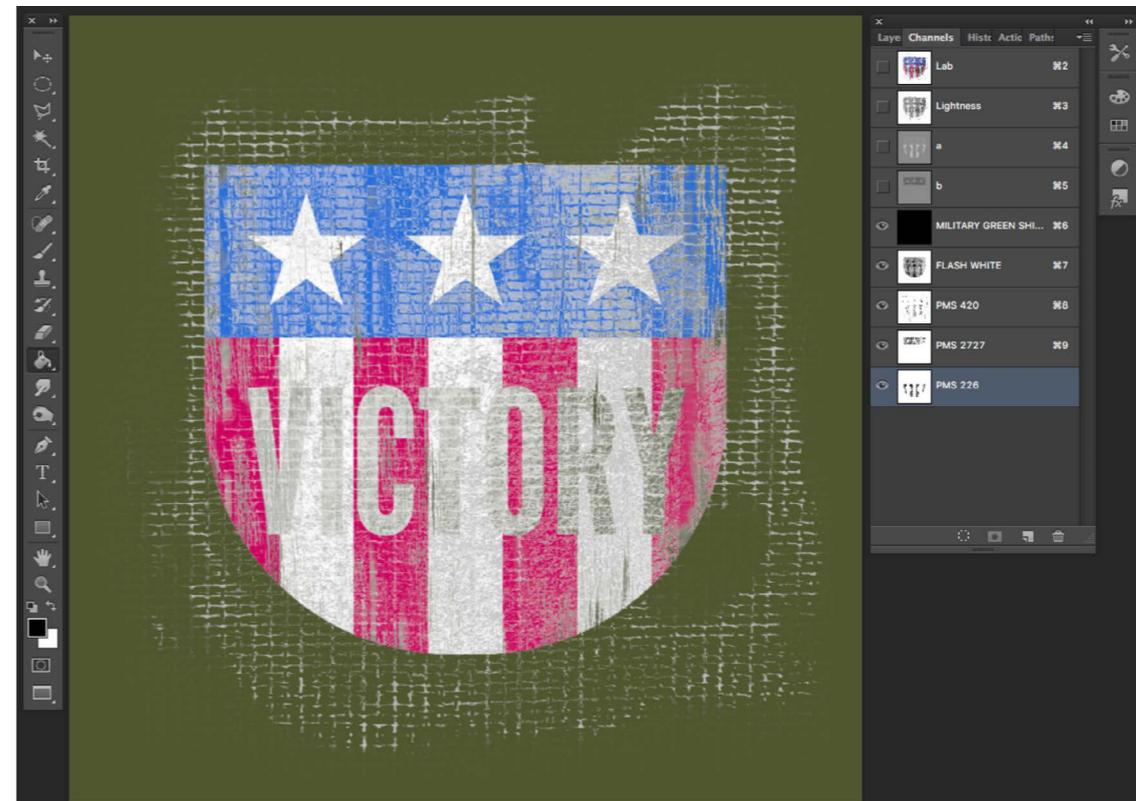
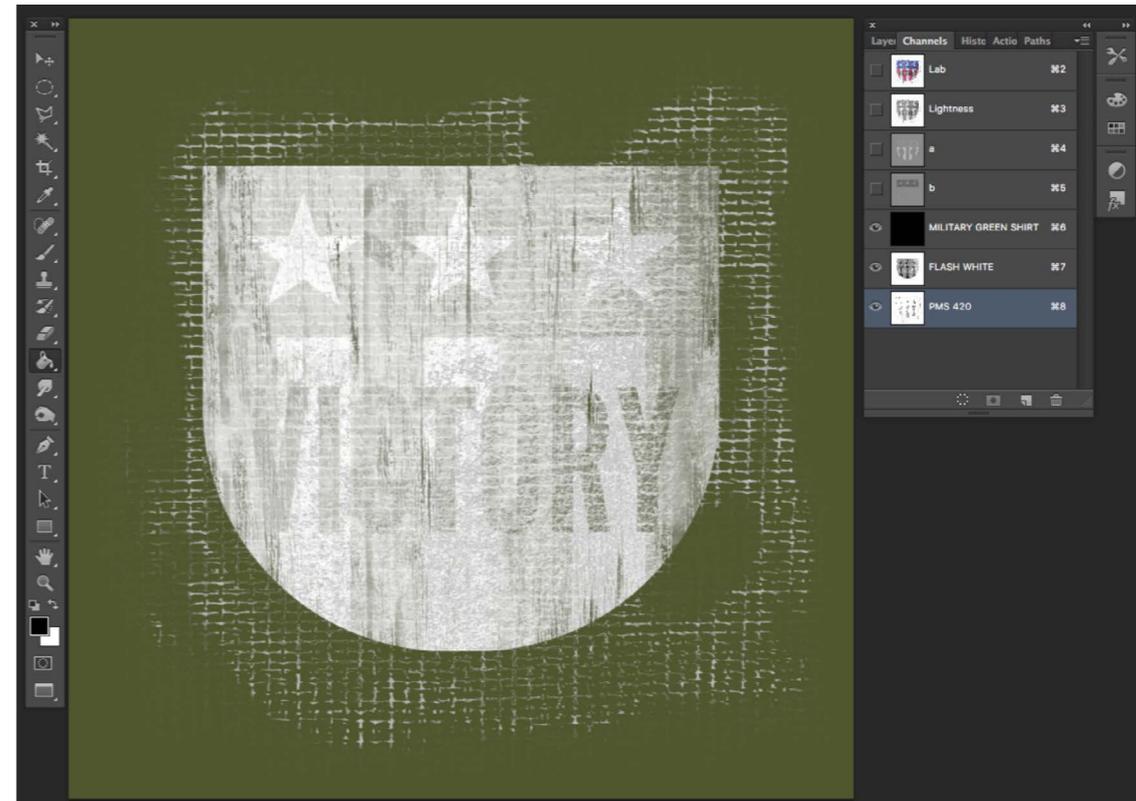
Then, we again use the same steps to grab the lighter red in the design. For that, we are going to use PMS 226.

As you can see in the image on the right, the separation file is shaping up.

We haven't handled any image tweaking yet. So far, we are only grabbing colors that we might use for the final seps. If anything isn't quite right, we can still tweak something.

The idea here is that we are working macro to micro, so don't get hung up if something isn't quite perfect yet.

Let's get some more colors!



Repeating the same steps we add more colors to the separated file.

I also added a Wet White plate the same way, but switched the background color from white to black so the Color Range Tool could grab the correct white areas easier.

So basically this is our foundation for the seps. We are going to now tweak a few of these plates and really dial in the seps.

Here's where you look at the results with a critical eye and make some judgement calls on what you want the final print result to look like.

In this example, the texture outside of the shield is purposely a little harsh. I want to show you how to easily change that and use the information on that plate to change another plate in the separation file.



## TWEAKING THE SEPS

# 12

In this chapter, we will be reviewing how to manipulate a few things on the plates to finalize the art so the image looks like you want. We will do that with a few easy to use tools in Photoshop, and then after that we'll finally separate the file into spot color channels that you can use to print.

Let's start this step by making the change we need for the that background texture. First, we'll need to isolate the PMS 420 plate by selecting it and dragging it down on top of the Create New Channel button to clone it.

Then we select and delete the image that is inside of the shield, leaving only the background texture on the outside of the shield.

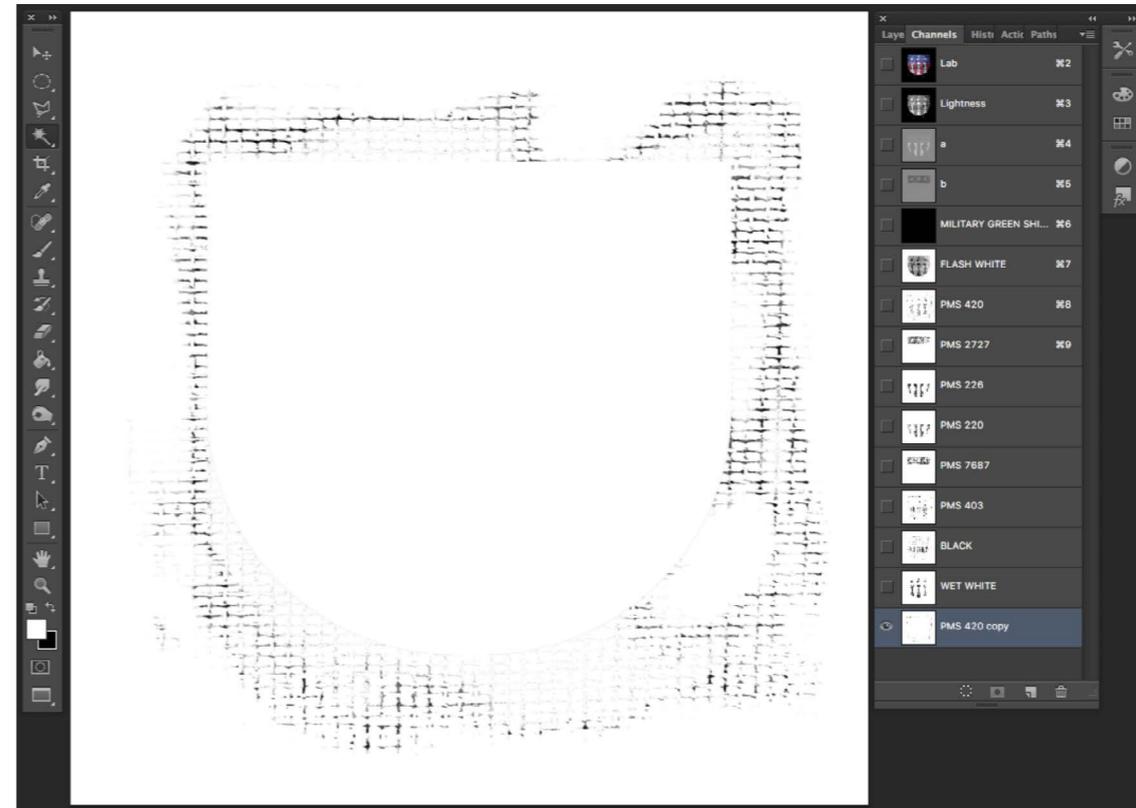
This is going to give us the basis to manipulate many of the other screens to great effect.

Let's start with eliminating these tones on the original PMS 420 plate using the Apply Image command. Our PMS 420 copy plate, shown on the bottom here will be the mask we use for this.

To get going, go to Image > Apply Image to bring up the dialog box that we'll use to manipulate the file.

It's going to seem awkward at first, but once you realize the instant control you have on each Channel, you'll realize that this is much faster that manually editing it.

The trick is to isolate the areas that you want to use to apply to each channel. We've done that with the PMS 420 copy plate shown here.



This technique takes some practice to get used to using, so don't get discouraged. Let's get started with the Apply Image technique by selecting the PMS 420 plate.

By selecting the PMS 420 plate first, this tells Photoshop that this plate is the target for manipulation. What you choose in the Apply Image dialog box affects this target Channel.

For this file, we want to eliminate the texture around the shield. We could probably use the Paintbrush tool or the Eraser tool, but as you will see, this technique is much faster.

In the Apply Image dialog box, choose Divide in the Blending dropdown. For this example, 100% is used for the Opacity. In another example, I show you how the Opacity control here can help you with tone.

After we click OK, the texture we didn't want on this plate disappears.

How long would that have taken you if you had to do it manually with another tool?

Using the Apply Image technique helps you manipulate your plates quickly.

Now, let's take that same idea and instead of deleting information from a plate, let's add it to a plate with the same Apply Image step.

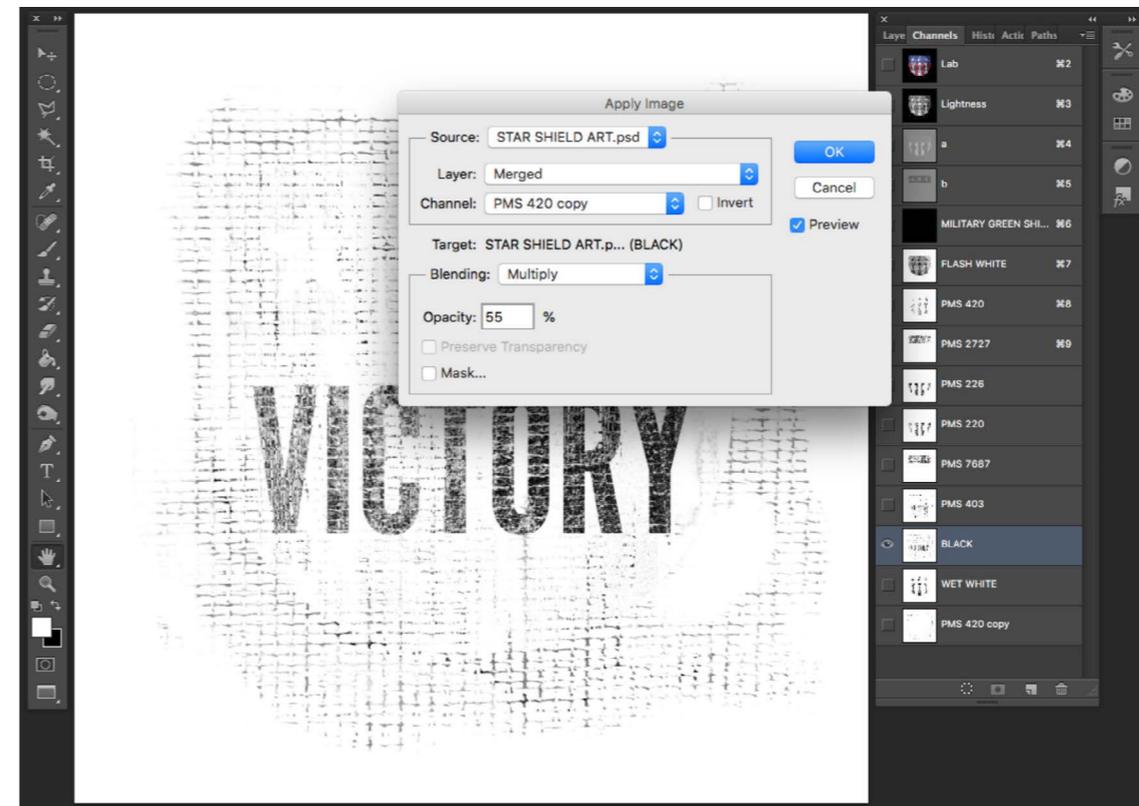
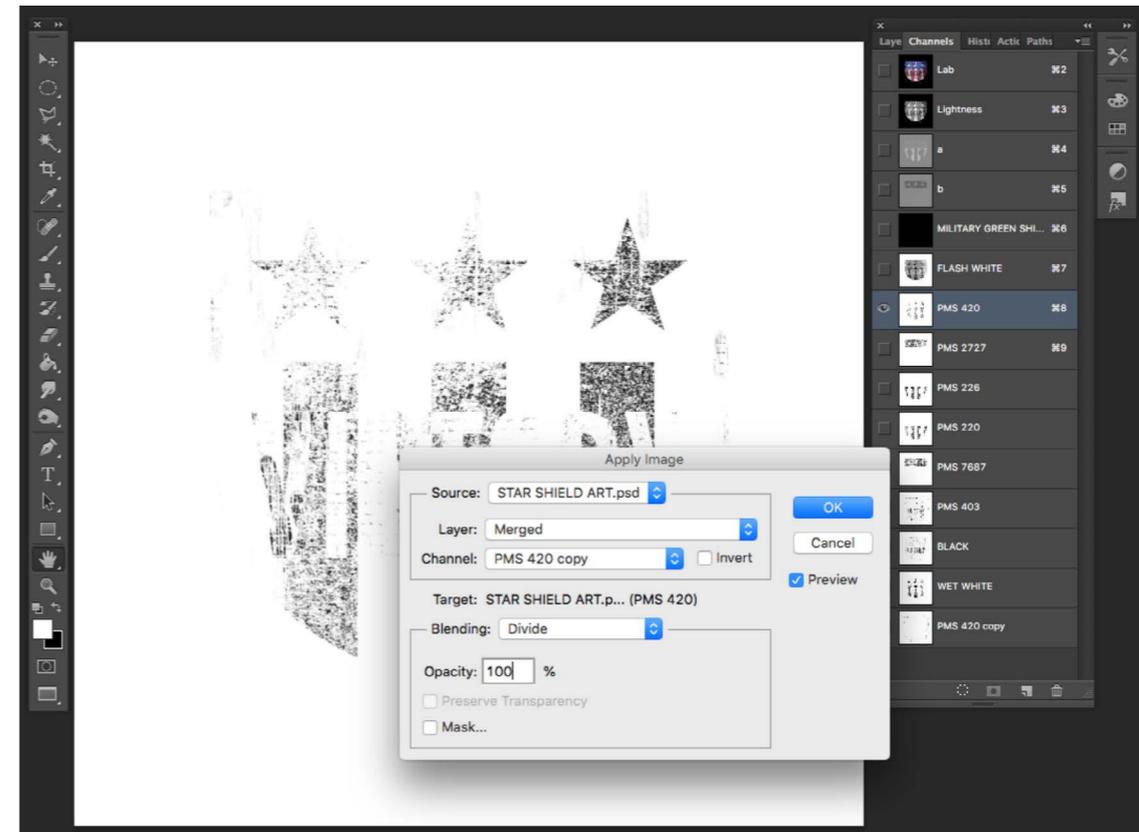
For this step, we'll select the Black plate and add the information from the PMS 420 copy plate to it to increase the texture information around the shield in the design.

To do this, everything works exactly the same way, but instead of Divide in the Blending pulldown, we select Multiply.

Note: be sure you have the Black Channel selected.

This time though we don't want to add the information at 100%, as that might look too harsh. Therefore we add it at 55%.

For any of our plates that need this texture edited we will



repeat these steps until the seps look exactly like we want them to look.

Next one of the things I like to do is to make sure that when there are two colors in the design that are working together, I use the Apply Image command to throw a lighter percentage halftone of the darkest color under the lighter color.

In our example, I would use the darker red to put some tone underneath the lighter red. The same goes with the light blue and the darker blue. Using the Apply Image command gives these plates a little firmer foundation for the blend that will happen on press with the ink.

After editing all of the plates, here's our current version. This would print as a nine color spot design on the Military Green shirt. However, looking through some of these plates, I think I can whittle that down a bit.

I like the light gray of the PMS 420 plate, but I believe I can use a halftone of the PMS 403 gray and get the same result. This would eliminate one spot color from the mix.

I use the Apply Image command and apply 20% of the PMS 420 plate to the PMS 403 plate.

The results are on the right. This eliminates a spot color from the total, so now this is an eight color design.

And with that, we're finished building the separation files!

The next step is to get this design approved by the client.



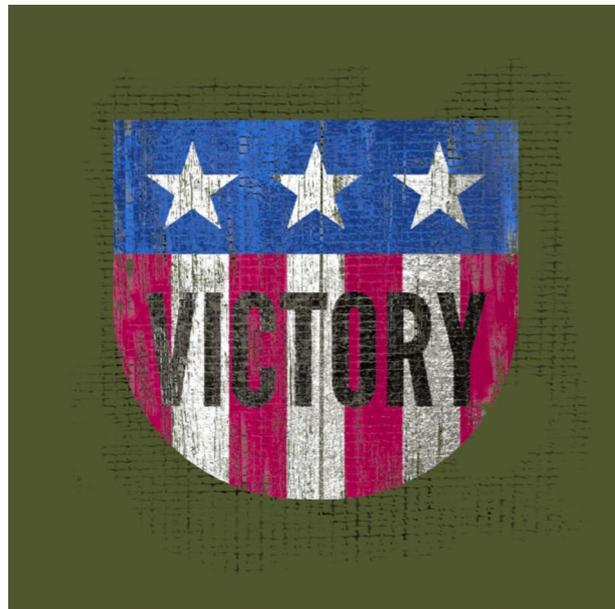
## 13

# APPROVAL PROCESS

So now you have this incredible piece of art...what do you do with it?

First, I would get it approved by your customer. Don't send them a flattened demo of your original art. You want to send them what the art looks like after you have created these seps.

All you need to do is take a screen capture of the file and then crop it down. This works great because you are showing them how the actual plates will look on the t-shirt color for the order. If you have multiple shirt colors, it's easy to change the color in that Shirt Color Channel and take another screenshot.



If you have never taken a screenshot before, on a Mac you simply press Command + Shift 3. You'll hear a camera clicking noise and the file is saved on your desktop. On a PC just click the PrintScreen key on your keyboard.

You can use this file and apply it to a shirt mock up, your shop's approval forms, or anything you wish.

# SPLITTING CHANNELS

# 14

Congratulations! Your client loved the art and now it is time to get that sucker printed. This chapter will take you through the process of Splitting the Channels and saving them for use.

Note: As every shop uses a different printing and RIP system, I will not be giving instructions on that. There are too many variables. You will be printing these plates like you normally would print any halftone screen color. I will make a note of some details on set up though.

In Photoshop, each of these color plates is stacked up like a deli sandwich, one on top of another. You absolute need to make a note before you do anything else of the Spot Ink Color names and the print order. On the Channel palette, the print order has the first screen to print nearer the top, and the last screen to print at the bottom.

For our file we would print these plates in this order: Underbase White, PMS 2727, PMS 226, PMS 220, PMS 7687, PMS 403, Black, and Wet White. I would probably only flash after the underbase plate, as we want these tones to mix on the shirt.

Also, in this eBook I'm using Pantone color designates to give the image more control with color. If your shop only uses stock colors

that's ok. Remember you can select and name your color in the Channel Color Options dialog box anything that is appropriate to you.

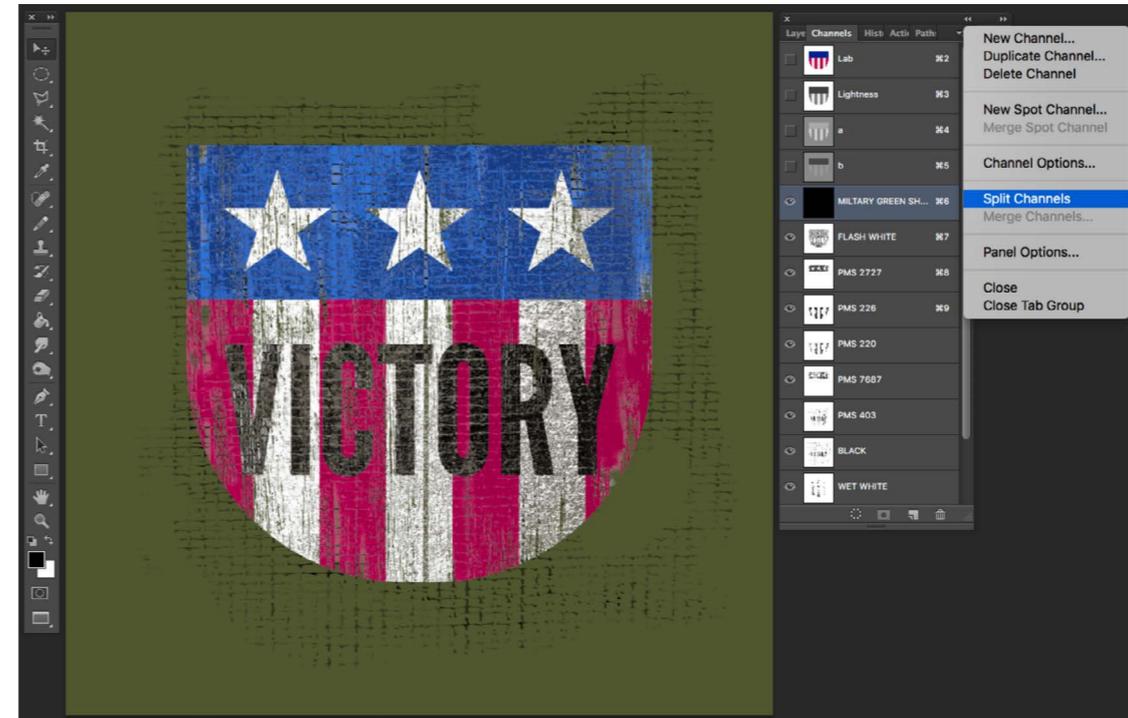
To split the Channels you first have to flatten the file. I always Save the file and then rename it with "Final", as sometimes you might need to go change something later and you'll need access to a built Layer. If you have been burned by a client before after approval you can appreciate this step.

Make sure you have Renamed and Flattened your Layers for your file.

In the upper right hand corner of the Channel Palette is a button with four horizontal lines. Click that and some options appear to manipulate your Channels. Scroll down and then choose Split Channels.

This automatically splits the channels for you and stacks them up like a deck of cards.

If you have any working Channels that are not plates you will be using to print t-shirts with, just delete them. We are only concerned with the plates we have created and named for use.



Best practice for saving these new files will be to create a new folder and name it with the job name. If you are using Art Design numbers in your shop, add that to the name. For me, I simply created a new folder called "Star Shield Seps".

As I'm saving each of these plates into that folder, I want to rename them instead of using the default name generated by Photoshop. Again, if your shop uses a design number for jobs I would include it with the name.

For each plate name, I want to use the name of the design plus the ink color. For example, "Star Shield Wet White".

Each plate is saved as a .tif file, which allows you to bring them into other output programs to send to your printer system. For simulated process seps, I have always used elliptical halftone dots, with at least a 50 line size. 63.4 is a halftone angle that has

worked for me successfully in the past.

In choosing screens, don't forget the "rule of four", which means that you need to choose a mesh count that is at least equal to or higher than the line count multiplied by four. If we use a 50 lpi dot, we need to use at least a 200 mesh screen.

Save and rename all of your plates into your Seps folder for this job.

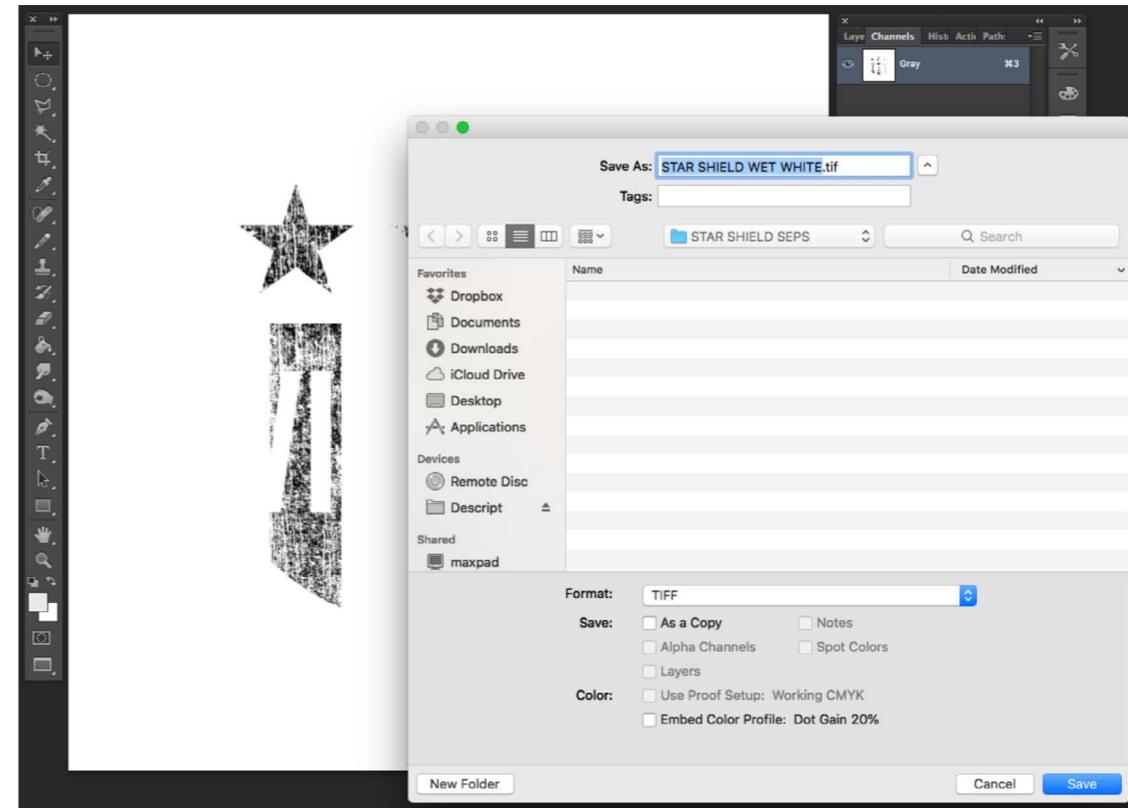
Be consistent with how you name files, and have all artists in your shop do it the same way.

I would also make sure that all of your art is being saved on your server or backed up.

Recreating files like this from scratch again is virtually impossible.

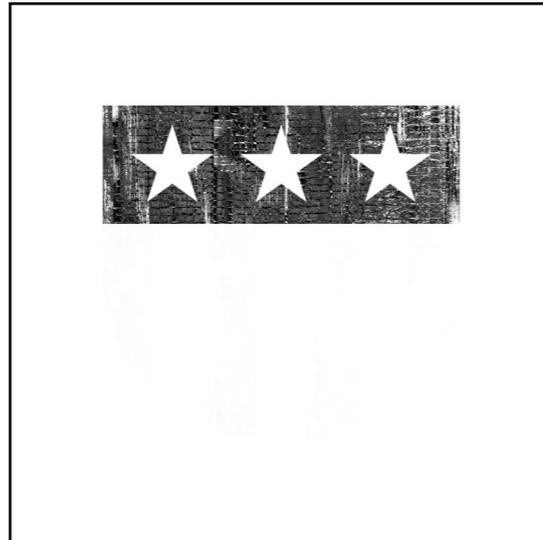
You don't want that nightmare.

See all of the final plates on the next page.

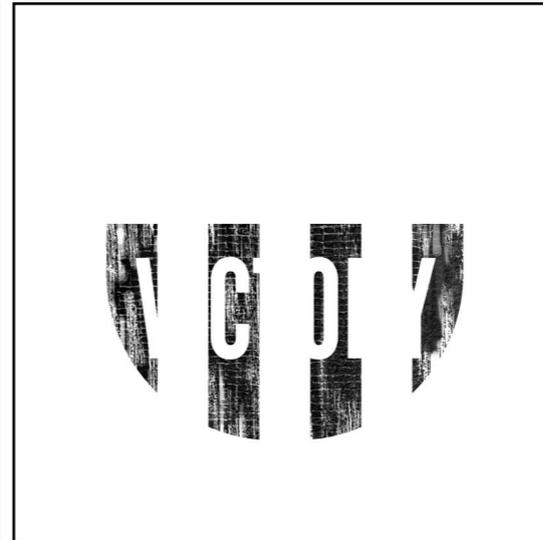




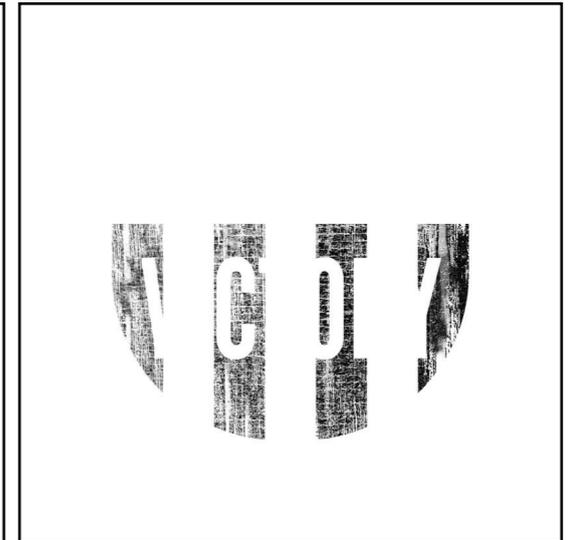
Underbase White



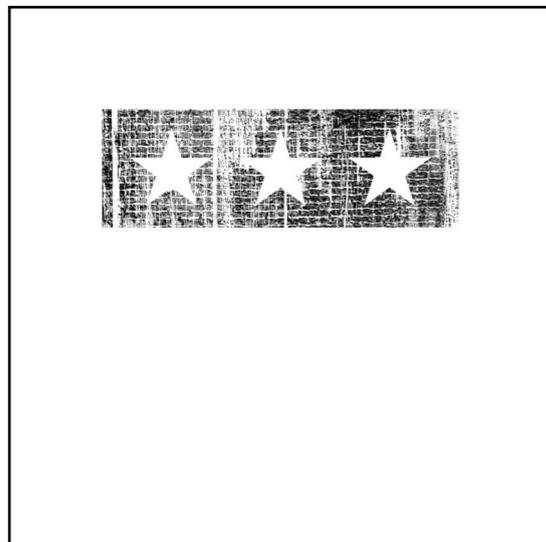
PMS 2727



PMS 226



PMS 220



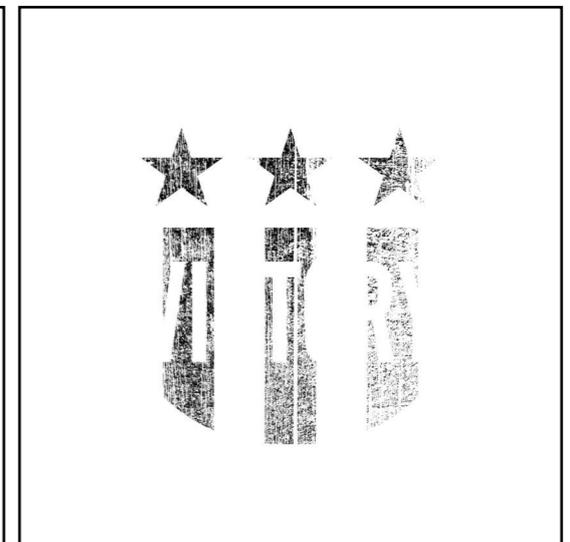
PMS 7687



PMS 403



Black



Wet White

# Sample File Index

## **Photography Examples**

-Download the Files

**Converted Files to Grayscale** - I've run the photography examples through some action commands to create some different looks. There are five sets for each photo. These are not in the book chapters, but I'm including them so you can play around with them.

-Download the Files

## **Chapter 3 - Darken with Texture**

-Download the Files

## **Chapter 4 - Funky Color Texture**

-Download the Files

## **Chapter 5 - Background Texture**

-Download the Files

## **Chapter 6 - Using Channels**

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## **Chapter 7 - Distressed Textures**

-Download the Files

## **Chapters 8 - 13 - Simulated Process Seps**

-Download the Files

## **Chapter 14 - Simulated Process Sep Plates**

-Download the Files

# THANKS!

Thank you for reading this eBook. I hope that you found the contents helpful for your shop. But don't stop at just reading the book. The key to making lasting change is implementing new ideas.

Not everything may go correctly the first time. Or the second. Keep plugging away and tweaking things. Try to get 1% better everyday.

If you need help along the way, that's what I do. Reach out and contact me and let's work together to solve your problems!



**Got a burning question or problem that you need help with?**

Feel free to email me at [marshall@marshallatkinson.com](mailto:marshall@marshallatkinson.com)