

Focusing on the Eyes

The art of portrait retouching is certainly an 'art' – it takes a lot of practice to get good at it and it can be time consuming, too. There is software that can give a shortcut to good results (eg. Portrait Pro), but it is very easy to destroy the quality of your image by pushing the sliders too far.

For this handout we are going to focus solely on the eyes (pun intended!)

This will cover three main techniques

- 1) Brightening the eyes
- 2) Removing any red veins
- 3) Adding texture

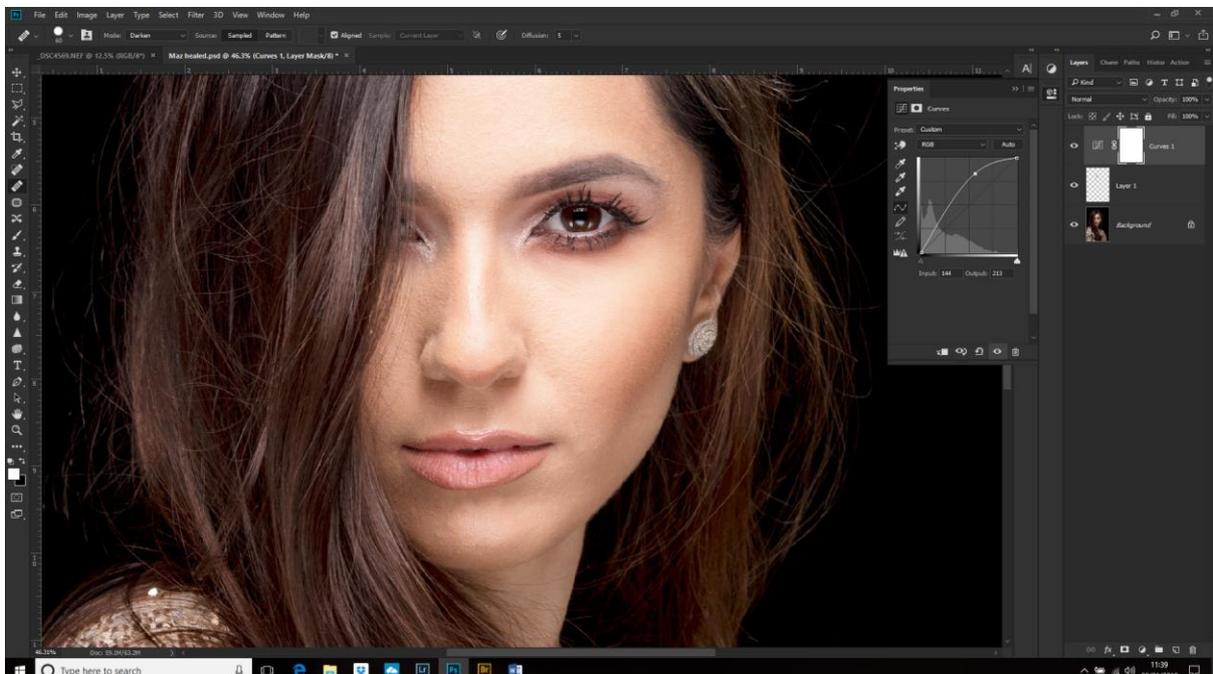
Brightening

We want to know how to brighten the eyes both globally (the eyes and surrounding area) and locally (just the iris/catchlights).

Open your image and carry out any blemish removal (hair across the face, spots and shiny skin). This pic is of local model Maz Ulvants.

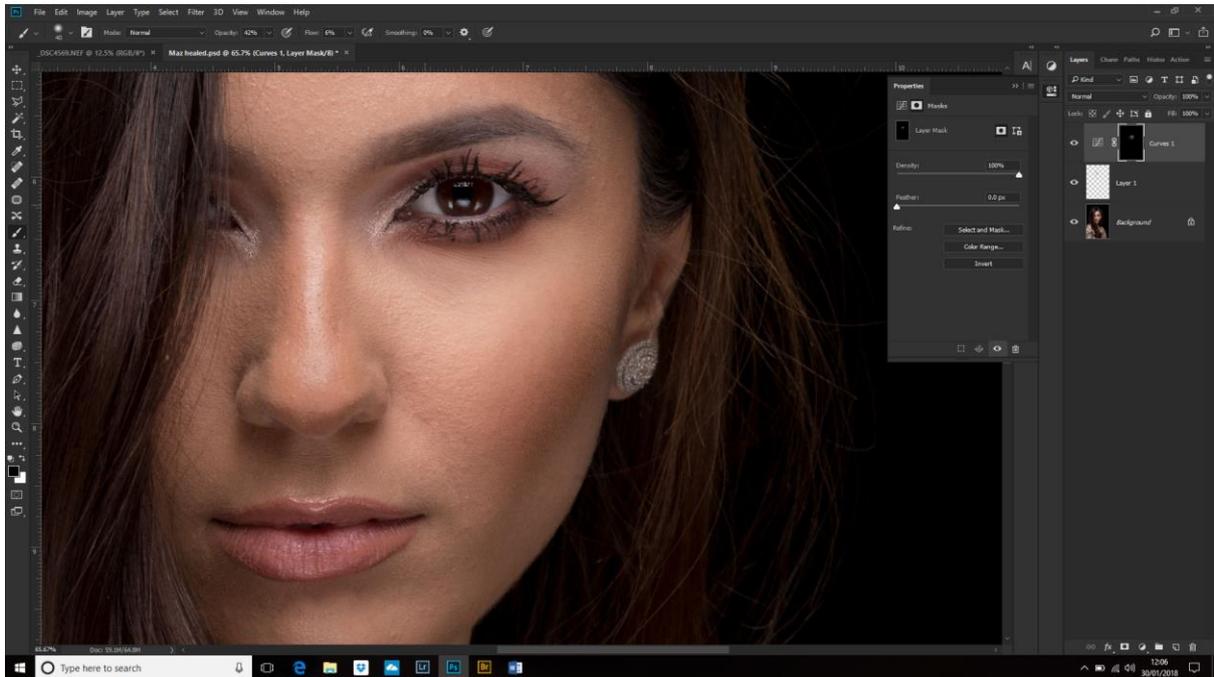
Zoom in on the eye area.

Make a Curves adjustment layer (half white/half black circle at the bottom of the layers palette). Drag the curve upwards like below to lighten mainly the highlights.

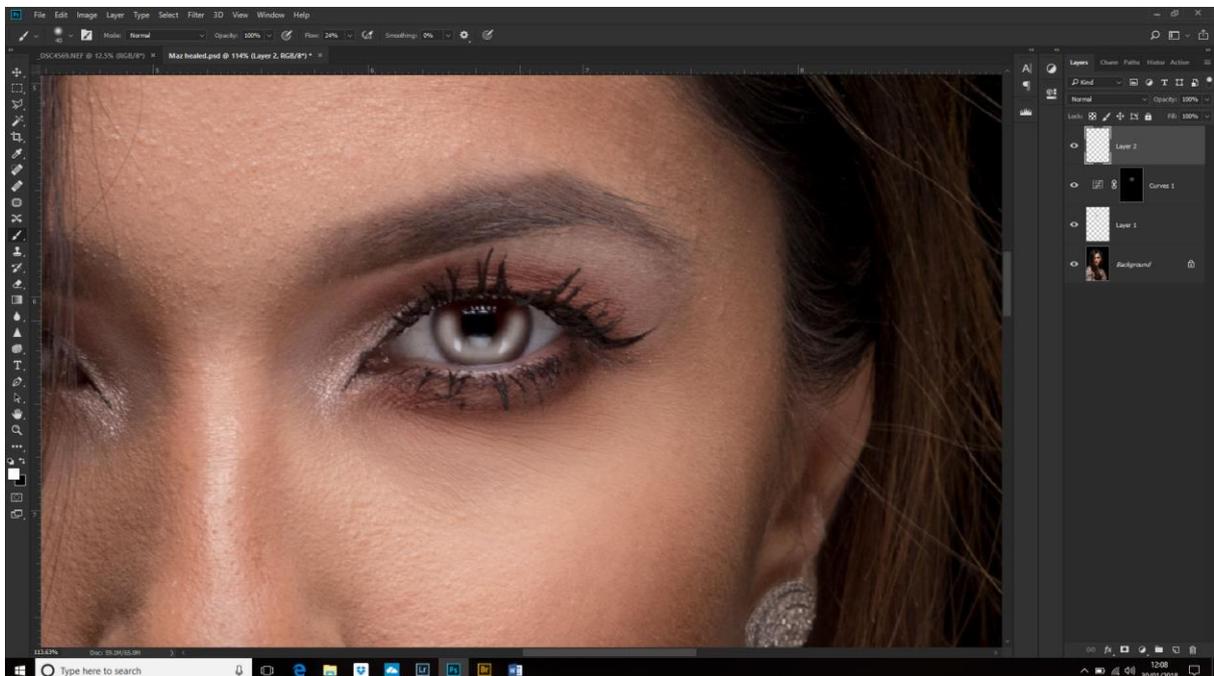


With this layer selected we now take away the effect by inverting the mask (Cntl+I) – the little white square should go black.

Select the brush tool and with a soft edged brush (opacity 50%, flow 6-10%) paint in the eye socket to lighten, then zoom in on the eye and paint a bit more on the whites of the eye to lighten further. The effect should be subtle and not obvious.



Make a new blank layer at the top of the stack (little page with upturned corner at the bottom of the layers palette). Choose a soft white brush (opacity 100%, flow about 25%) and paint the iris as below.



Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur and blur by about 5px to soften the edges. Change the blending mode to either Overlay or Soft Light (depending on your taste) and reduce the opacity of the layer until you are happy with the image. It is important not to lighten the edge of the iris and the pupil as this gives

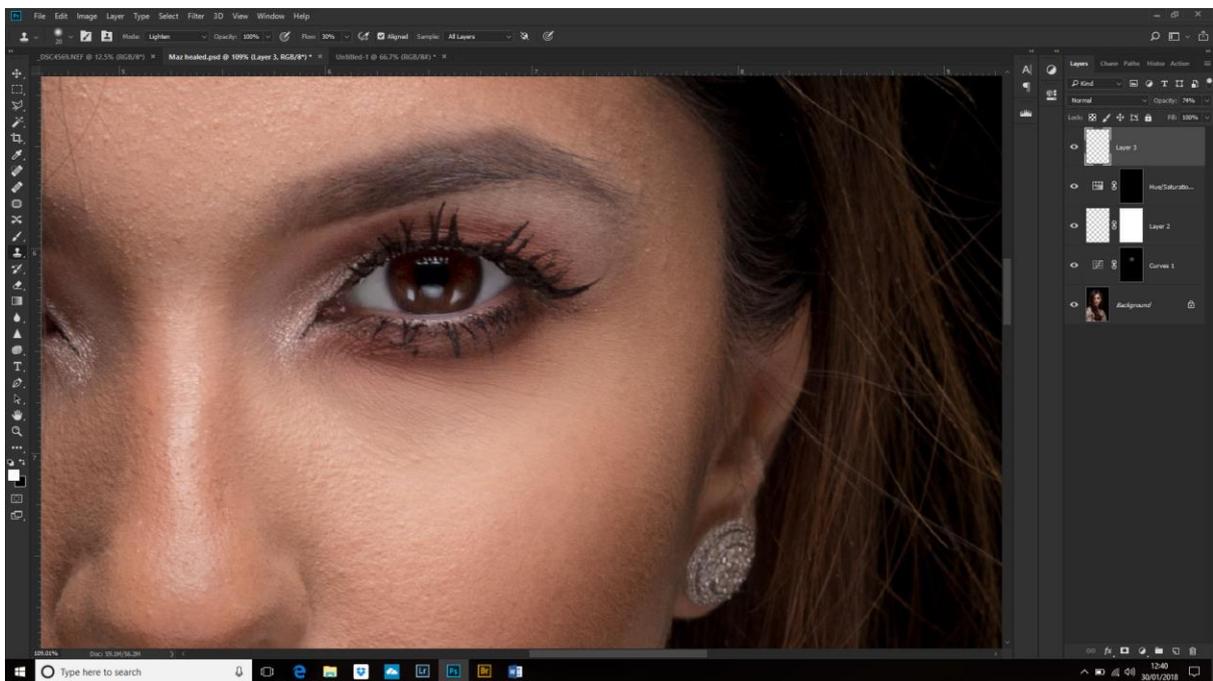
the eye dimension so add a mask and paint with black the very edge of the iris and the pupil to return it to its darker state.

Removing Veins

If there are a lot of red veins in the eyes then make a new Hue/Saturation/Lightness adjustment layer, change Master to Reds and drop the saturation down. Here I used -63. Invert the mask as before and paint with a white brush over the whites of the eye.

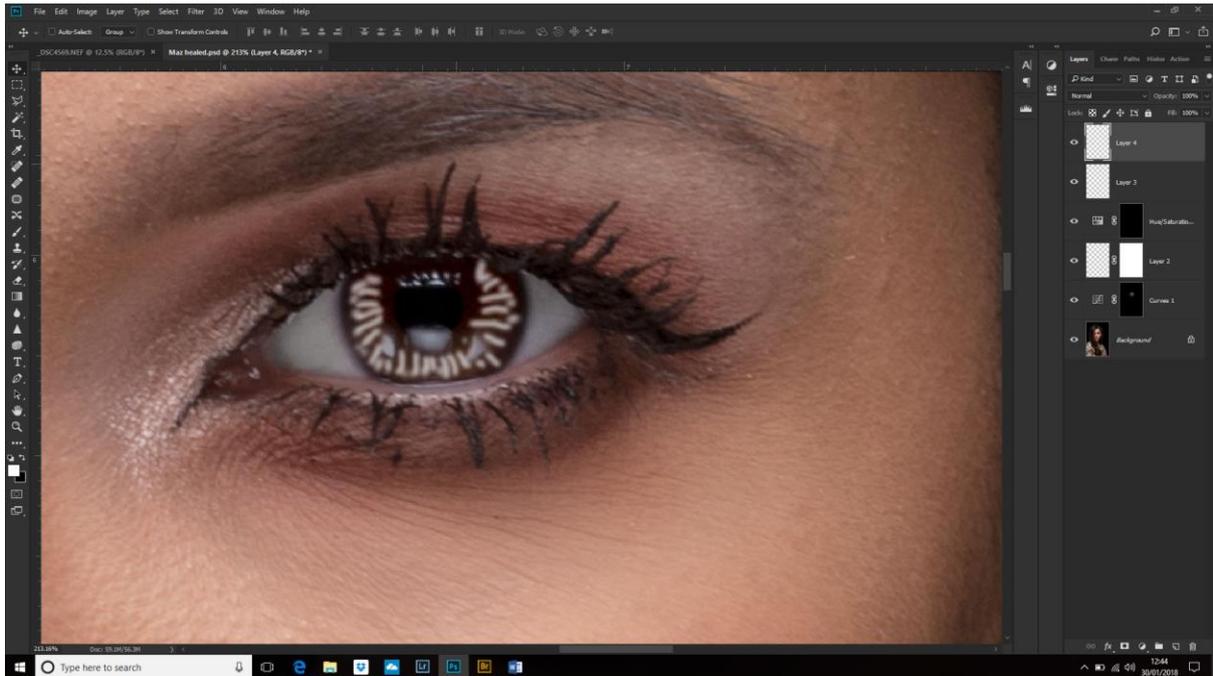
To remove the veins make a new layer at the top of the layers palette, select the clone stamp tool and change Source to All layers. Change the Mode to Lighten and with a flow about 30% hold down the Alt key to sample a point on the eye without veins then carefully paint away the veins. Lower the opacity of the layer if you want to make it look more natural.

Advanced – use Blend If to return some of the darker areas.



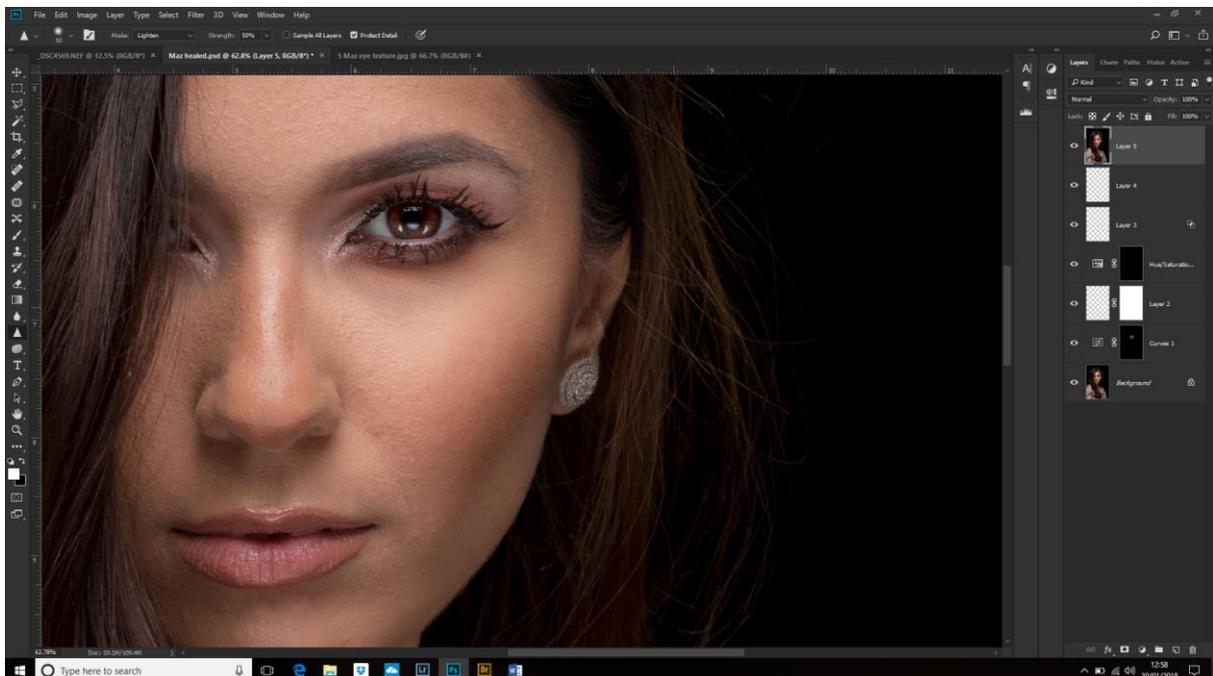
Adding Texture

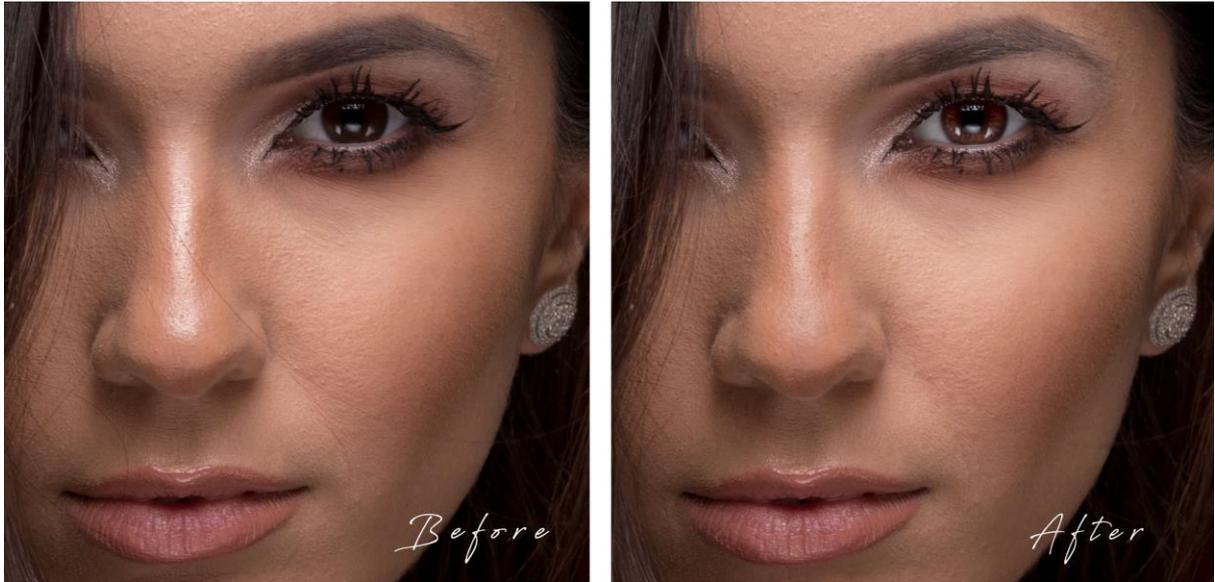
This is a little 'advanced' technique I'd carry out for dark eyes that have only a limited amount of detail. Make a new layer and choose a small white brush. Opacity 100%, flow 30% and paint little lines radiating out from the centre of the eye like those shown below.



Change the blending mode to Overlay. If you think the lines are too sharp, apply a Gaussian blur of 1px to reduce the effect and/or lower the opacity. Zoom out to make sure it looks natural.

I would finish off by adding a bit of sharpening to the lashes and eyebrows either with Smart Sharpen or simply running the Sharpen tool over these areas. This works best by first creating a Stamp layer where all the layers are combined into one layer at the top (shortcut Cntl+Shift+Alt+E) or hold down Alt and choose Merge Visible from the dropdown.





This leaves us ready to do a bit of skin smoothing – but that is for another time!

Done!