

High Pass Sharpening without the Guesswork

Like many of you, I have been using High Pass sharpening for many years and the usual workflow is

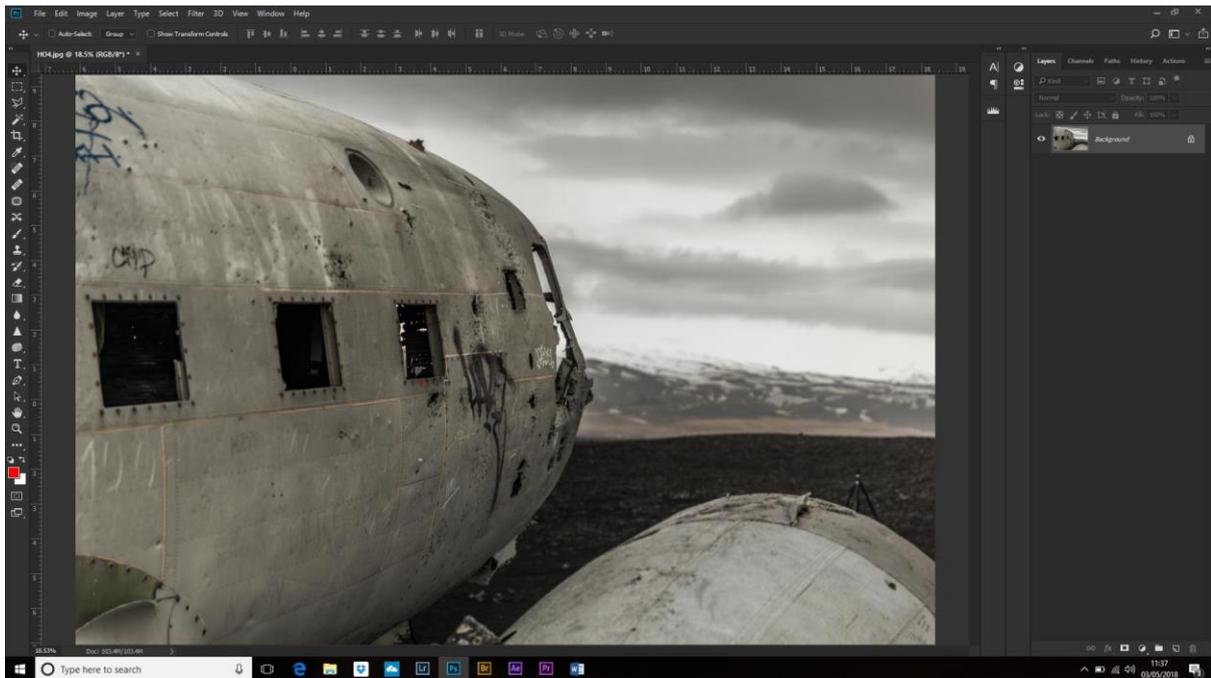
- i) Make a copy of the layer and zoom in to 100%
- ii) Filter>Other>High Pass and move the radius until the edge detail gets sharper without halos.
- iii) Change the blending mode to Overlay (medium), Soft Light (subtle) or Hard Light (strong effect)
- iv) Reduce the opacity to suit
- v) Optional – desaturate this layer to avoid any colour artifacts.

The amount of sharpening can be a bit ‘hit-and-miss’ and relies on a bit of guesswork/experience.

Wouldn't it be great if we could see in real time how moving the radius slider is effecting the image?

We can, just by changing the order in which we do the High Pass.

Open your image.



Zoom to 100% (double click the zoom tool) and move to the main part of the image (usually eyes with a portrait).

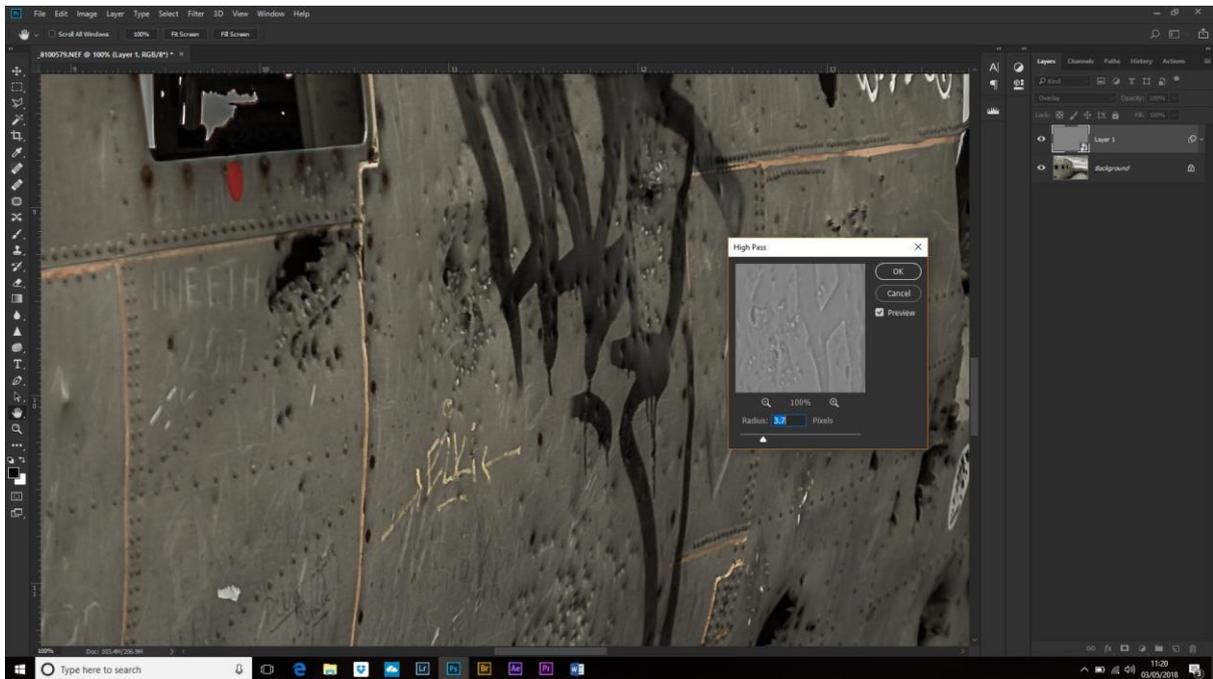
Make a copy of the background layer (Cntrl+J).

Remove the colour from this layer (Image>Adjustments>Desaturate or shortcut Cntrl+Shift+U) as we don't want to sharpen any colour noise.

We are now going to apply a blur filter later on, so if you want to make it fully non-destructive where we can change the settings later, convert this layer to a Smart Object (right click on layer in the layers palette and choose Convert to Smart Object).

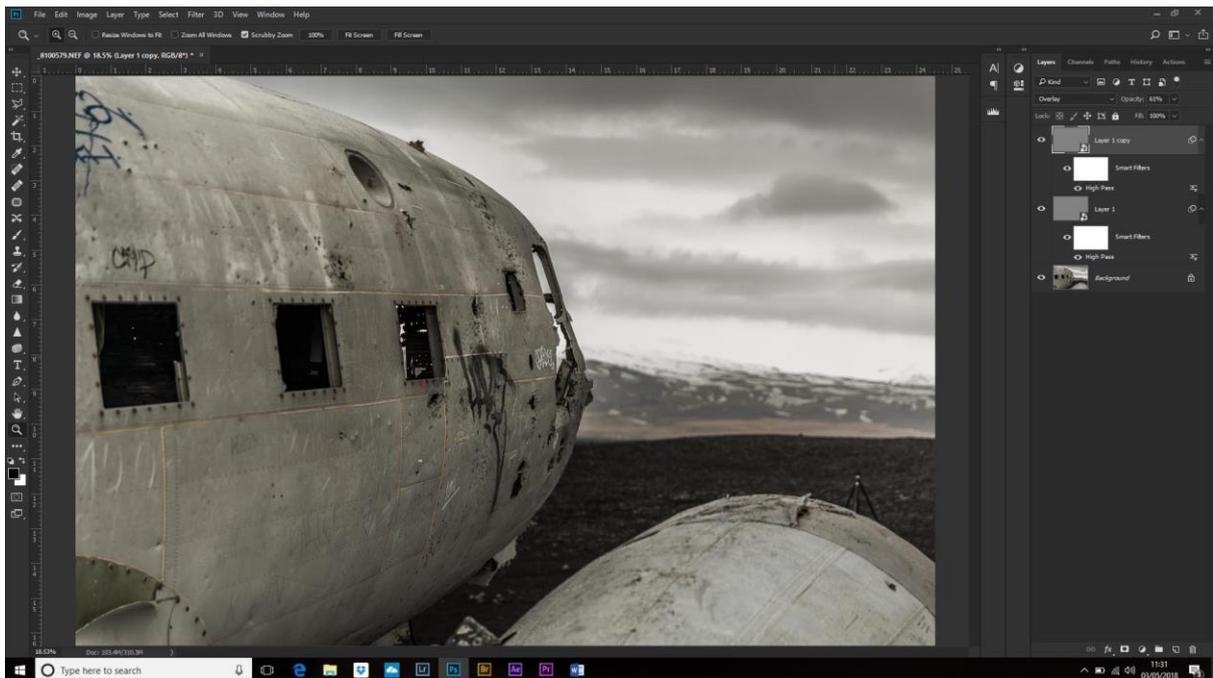
Change the blending mode to Overlay.

Now Filter>Other>High Pass and move the radius slider to get the right amount of sharpening. It is best to keep this value low (1-4px) to avoid halos.

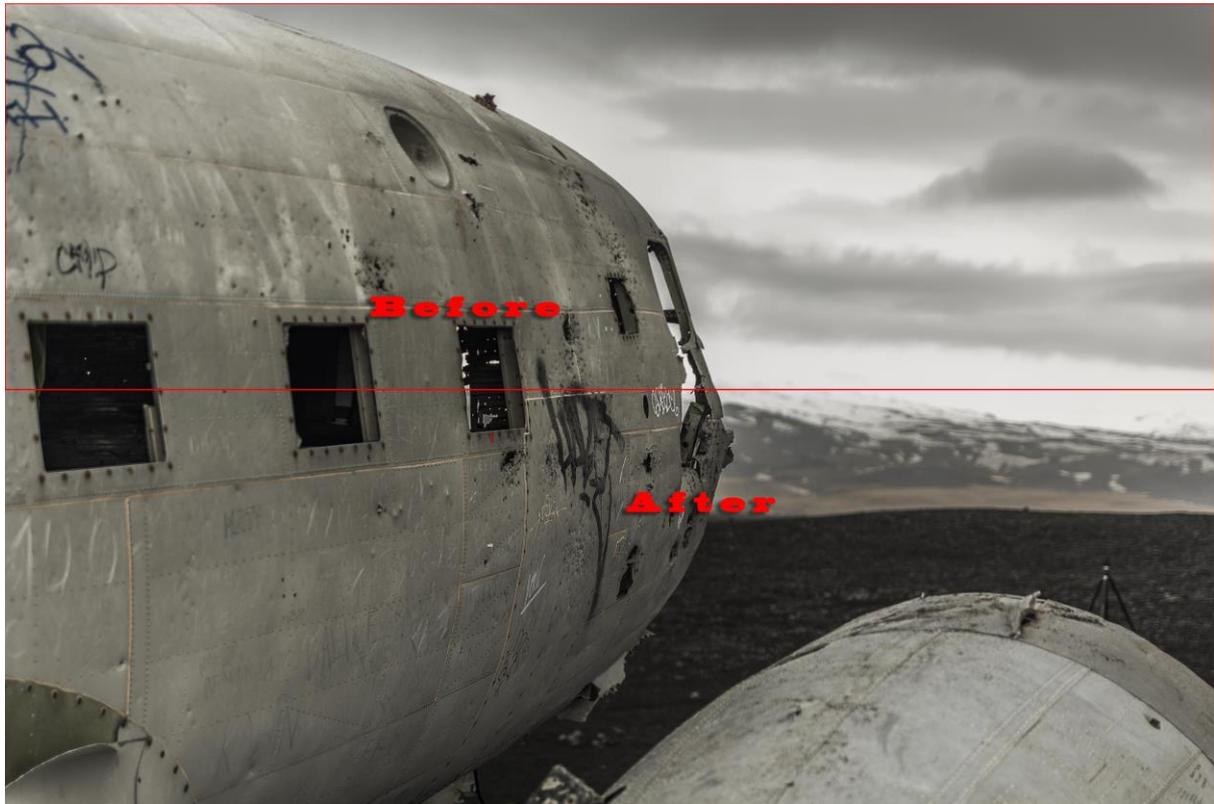


If the image requires more sharpening you can duplicate this layer and change the opacity to suit.

NB. The one thing to think about when it comes to sharpening is to always do this last.



Resize the image BEFORE sharpening as a larger print will require a different amount of sharpening to a small web image.



Done!