Fixing a Landscape

This demo shows how to save an over exposed sky by bracketing your shots and then exposure blending.

This outing down to Trow Rocks was an experiment for me – using a Nikon lens with an adaptor on a Sony camera and my new Christmas present to myself – a 100mm square filter kit with polariser and ND grad filter.

Even with a graduated filter on the difference in exposure between the sky and the foreground was more than 2 stops. Therefore, I took 3 bracketed shots with the intention of doing an HDR, each 2 stops apart, so I could retain detail in the sky and get detail in the dark foreground rocks, too. In the end I decided just to blend 2 images together.

Open the lighter image and do the RAW conversion for the foreground. Don't worry if you are losing detail in the sky.

Open the second image and do the RAW conversion this time for the sky only. The foreground will become really dark.

Start images:
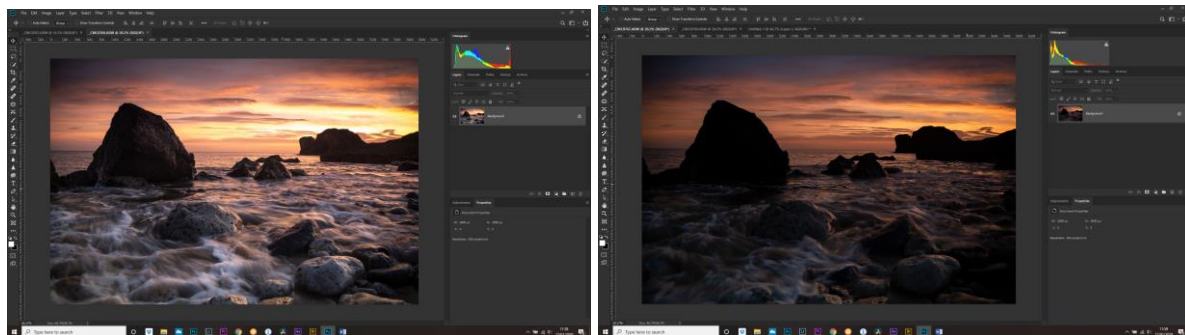
Drag the lighter image on top of the darker one – select the move tool (V), click on the lighter image and drag it up to the tab with the darker image. Pause – the image will change to the darker one and while still holding down the mouse hold down the shift key and drag the lighter image on top of the darker one and let go of the mouse. The images should overlap perfectly.

Now we want to mask out the overexposed parts of the top image. Make a mask by clicking on the little rectangle with a circle inside at the bottom of the layers palette.
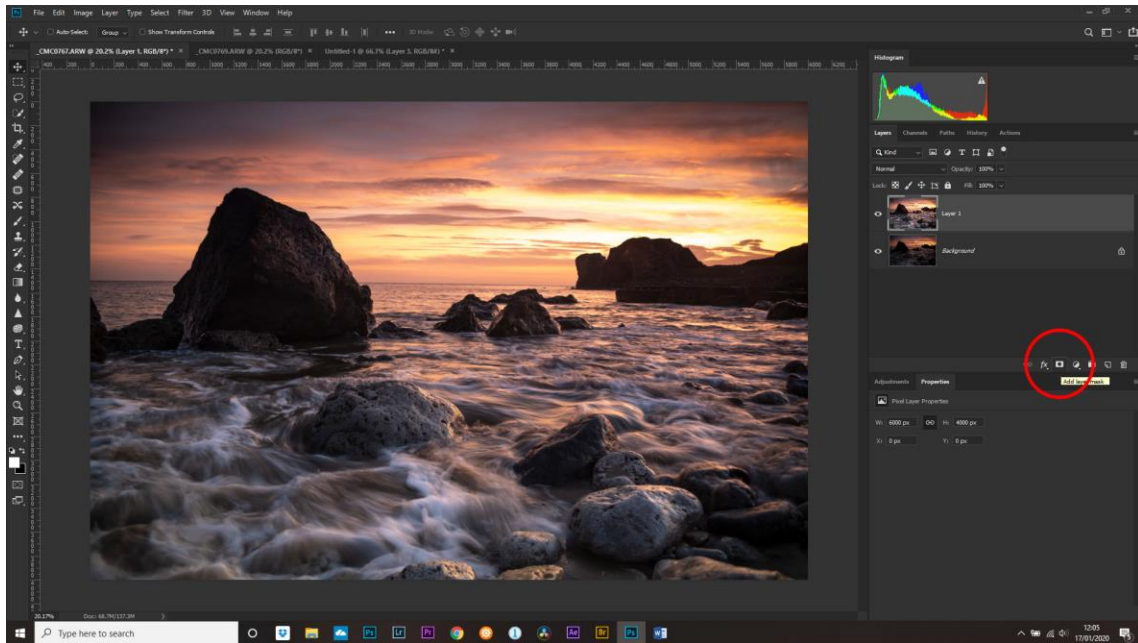
Select the gradient tool, make sure Linear and black to white is selected from the gradient editor and drag a line down from the top of the image. The shorter the line the smaller the feather and *visa versa*.
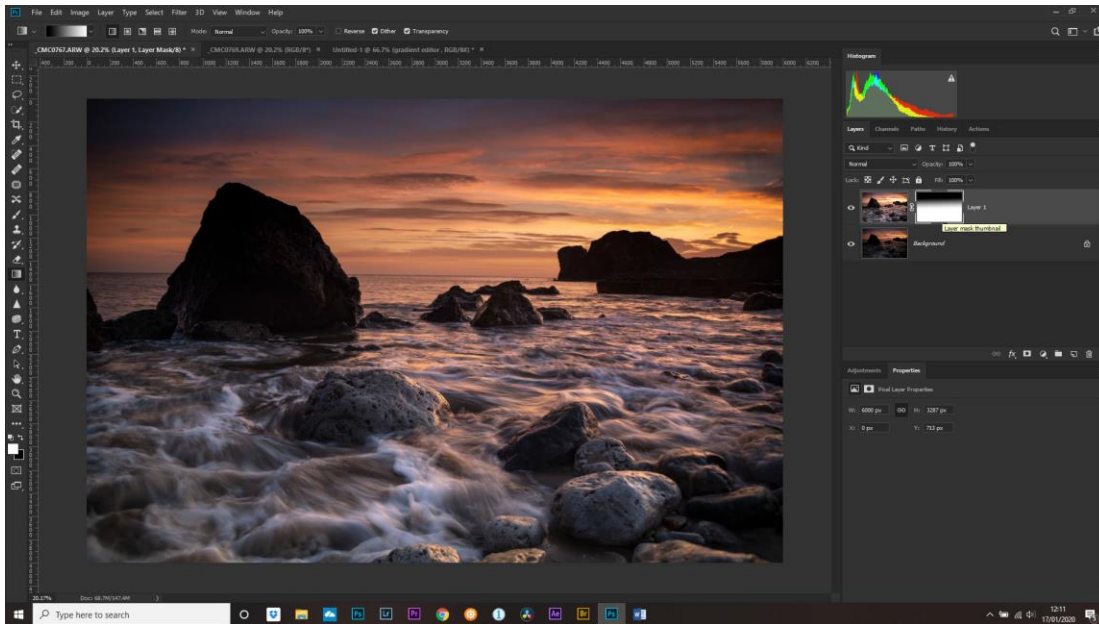
To refine, make sure the mask is selected (there should be a box around the mask in the layers palette, as above) and use a brush (white at approx. 30% opacity) and paint any rocks that are sticking into the sky region to lighten them and bring back the detail. If you go over the edge, change to a black brush and paint to remove this. Don't go too near the edges or you may start seeing 'halos'.
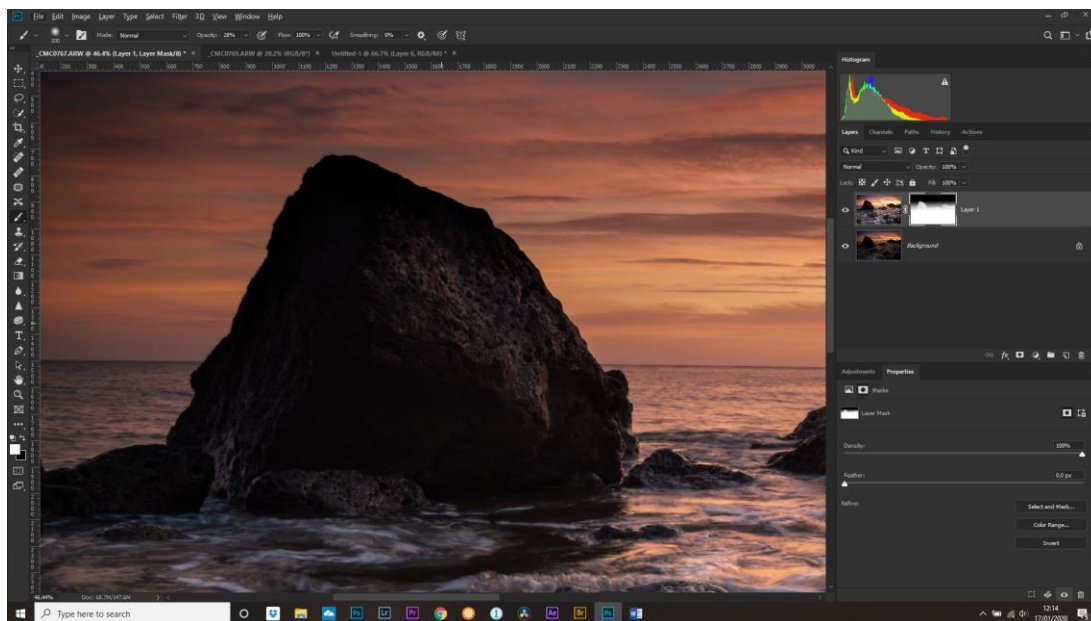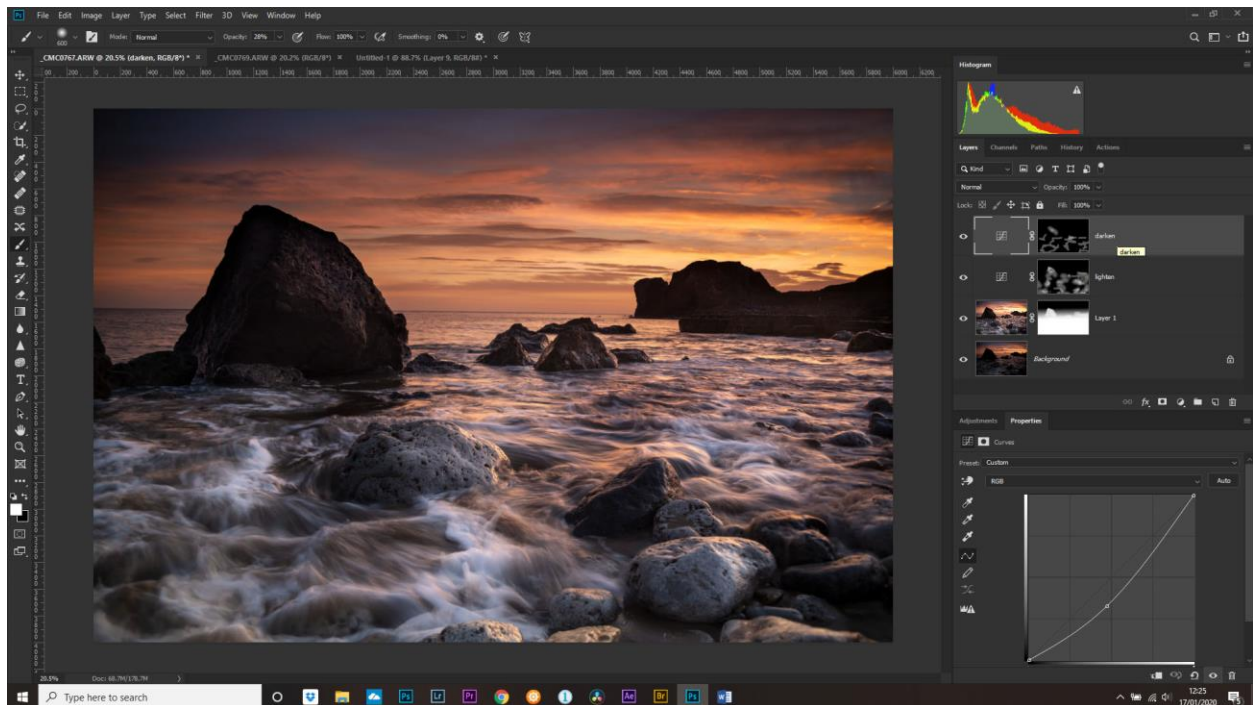

I finished by selectively dodging and burning using a curves layer. Make a curves adjustment layer (little half black, half white circle at the bottom of the layers palette) and drag the curves upwards to lighten the whole image.

Turn the mask black to hide the adjustments (Cntl+I) and paint with a white brush on approximately 20% opacity to add highlights to rocks and waves.

Do the same for burning (darkening) selectively, but this time drag the curve downwards.

Done!