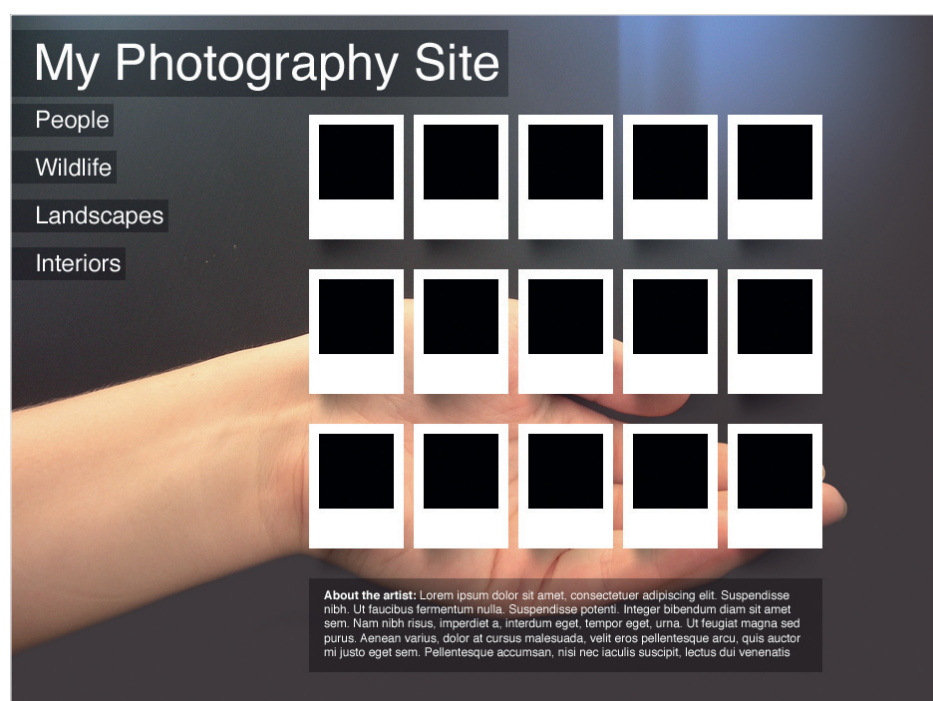


# /graphics/build a photo portfolio



**Part one** Use an online portfolio to showcase your best work. Elliot Jay Stocks shows you how to design a striking photography website for maximum impact



**What you'll build** In part one of our photography portfolio tutorial, you'll learn how to create the visuals for your online showcase, ready to turn it into a fully functioning website in part two. Find out how to edit your images in Photoshop to create effective backgrounds that have maximum impact – and maximum usability

**Knowledge needed** Intermediate Photoshop

**Requires** Photoshop

**Project time** 1 hour

There was a day when putting photos on a website was somewhat ill-advised, with users having to cope with abysmally slow download speeds and a generally poor viewing experience, thanks to the limited colour palette on old monitors. Not only that – uploading your photos meant having to host them yourself on a relatively slow server.

But those days are long gone. Not only do graphics files now feature prominently on the web, they're also readily available from online stock photography sites. There's never been a better time to combine photography and the web, be it for increased visual impact or building a good old-fashioned portfolio.

In this tutorial, we'll create a design for an online portfolio and achieve maximum impact by using very big, bold photography. This will be combined with a thumbnail system for browsing the portfolio, and you'll also learn how to keep text legible in spite of all this rich imagery. Using semi-transparent blocks, we'll strike a balance between usability and visual impact – a way of working that you can apply to almost any design project. We'll design the visuals in Photoshop, ready to turn them into a website in the next issue of .net. ●



## About the author

**Name** Elliot Jay Stocks

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**Areas of expertise** Design, CSS

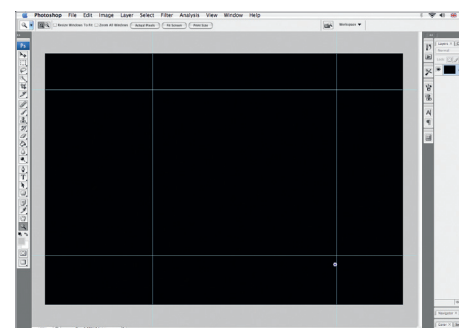
**Clients** Future of Web Design

**Which advert annoys you most?**

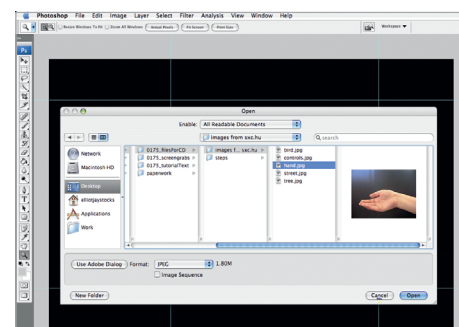
The toothpaste ads with the 'realistic' shaky camerawork

## Expert tip Straight or blended?

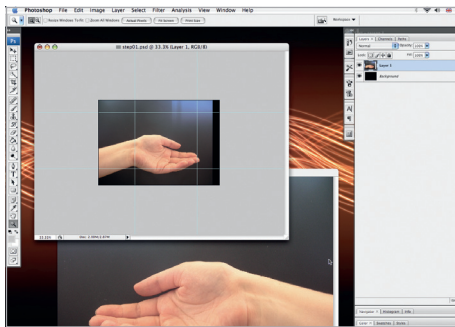
There's one major consideration when using photos as the background images on your site: do you leave a straight edge where the photo cuts off or edit it so that it fades into the background colour? Opting for a straight edge will save you time – as no editing is required – but on larger screens, users will see the point where the image cuts off. In this tutorial, we've opted for blended edges. It requires more work and makes selecting photos more difficult, but ultimately it ensures the best visual effect for all users, whether they have a large or small monitor.



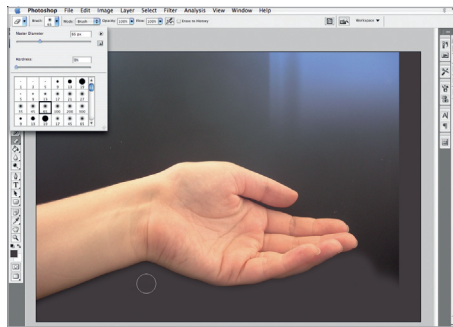
**START Make a canvas** Create a new document 1,000 pixels wide by 700 pixels high and hit Cmd+I/Ctrl+I to invert the canvas. Insert new vertical guides (View > New Guide) at 300 and 815 pixels and new horizontal guides at 100 and 564 pixels. It will look like **step01.psd** on the CD.



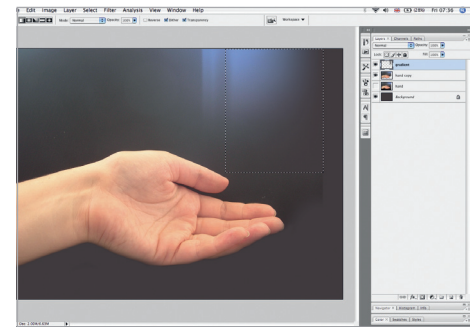
**2 Resize** Open the folder **images** from **sxc.hu** on the CD. Open **hand.jpg** in Photoshop, dragging it onto your canvas. Using **Free Transform** (Cmd+T/Ctrl+T), resize the layer so it fits inside the canvas. Go to **Edit > Transform > Flip Horizontal**. The arm appears from the left-hand side.



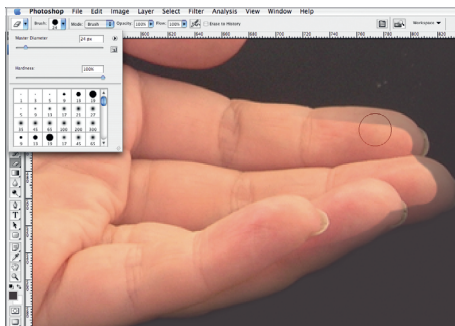
**3 Add the background** This photo has large areas of almost flat colour, which will make it easier to blend into a flat background colour. To establish which background colour to use, use the **Eyedropper** tool to sample one from just to the right of the fingers. We chose #43393a.



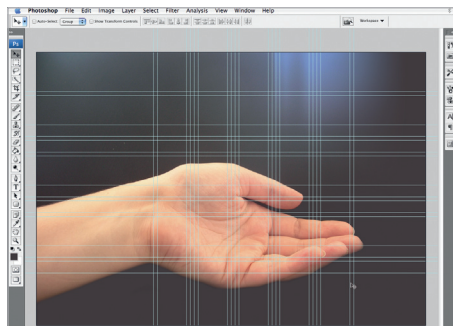
**4 Fade out** Blend the document with the background by the far-right and far-bottom corners. Start fading at the 815 pixels guide vertically and 564 pixels horizontally. Use a large, soft brush to erase the colours below the hand so the background shows through, varying the radius and opacity.



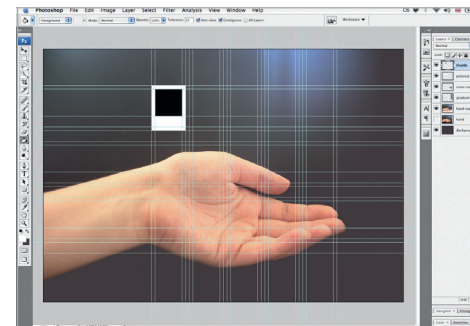
**5 Layer up** Create a new layer. Use the **Marquee** tool to make a rectangular selection from the right of the photo to about 300 pixels in. Select the **Gradient** tool and drag a gradient (holding **Shift**) from right to left. Deselect. Use **Free Transform** to extend the layer to the bottom of the canvas.



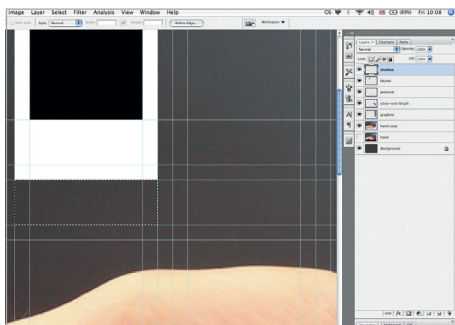
**6 Erase it** Our gradient has covered the fingertips, so use the **Eraser** tool (this time with a hard brush) to erase the gradient around the fingers. To remove any further dark patches above the fingers, paint the background colour on a new layer with a soft brush and erase where necessary.



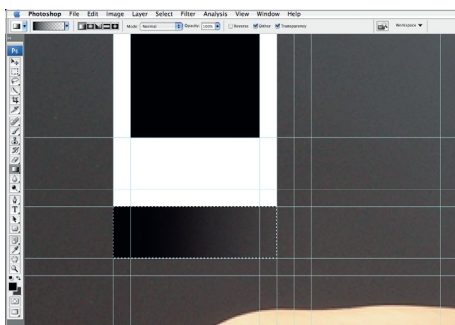
**7 Get guides** We now need to add guides, to slice up the main areas in which our thumbnails will appear, and include the gutters and margins. The measurements are precise, so open **step07.psd** from the CD to see them in place. Go to **View > Show > Guides** to see the guides.



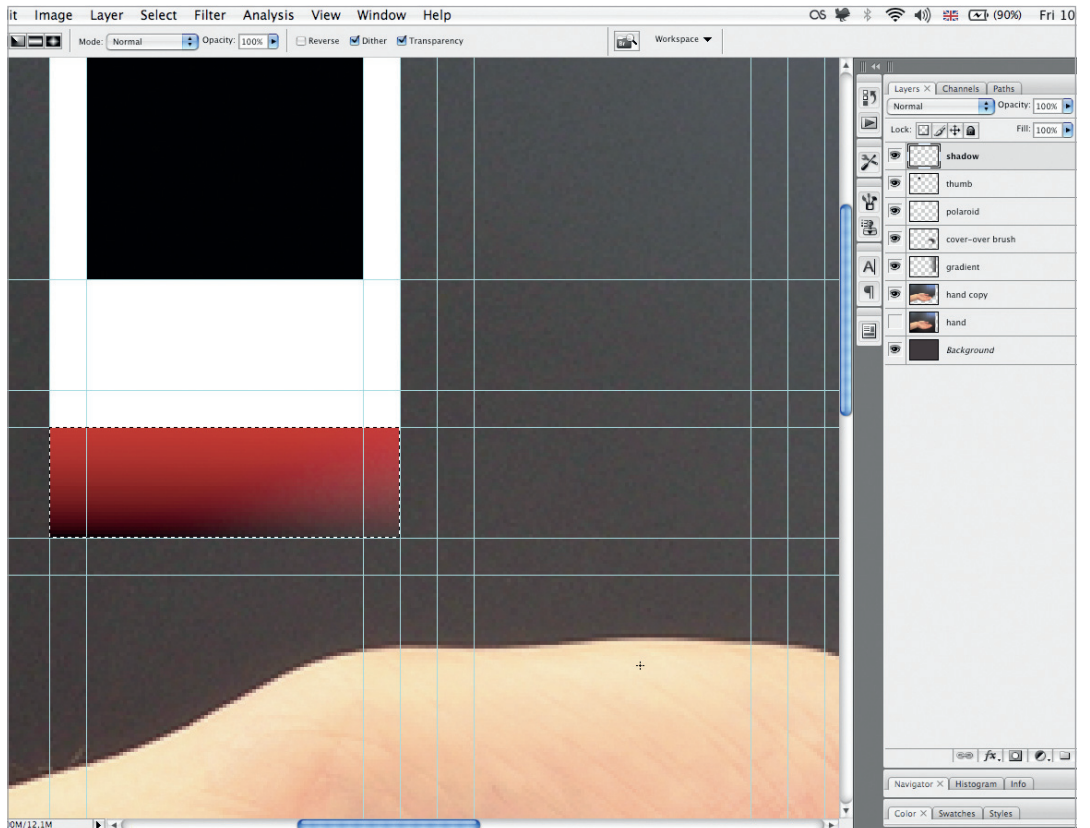
**8 Snap to** Create a new layer and call it **Polaroid**. Turn on **Snapping** (**View > Snap To > Guides**). Draw a rectangle with the **Marquee** tool and fill it with white. Now create another new layer and name it **Thumb**. Draw a square (75x75) marquee and fill it with black, as in **step08.psd**.



**9 Shadow layer** Underneath the white rectangle, make a **Marquee** selection according to the guides, reaching from the bottom of the rectangle to the top of the guide/rectangle below. Next, create a new layer and call it **Shadow**.

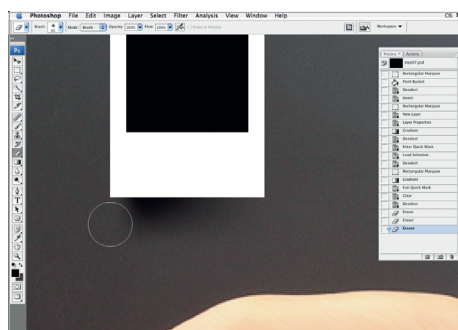


**10 Fill selection** Using the **Gradient** tool, select black as your fill colour and make sure that the other end of the gradient disappears to full transparency. Fill your selection from left to right, ensuring that you have the **Shadow** layer selected as you do so.



**11 Quick Mask** To remove the hard bottom edge of the fill, we'll use a **Quick Mask**. Hit **Q** to enter **Quick Mask** mode, select the same area as before and drag a gradient from the top to the bottom. Press **Q** again to exit **Quick Mask** mode and press the **Backspace** key. This will delete the area defined by the gradient, to create a gradual fade.

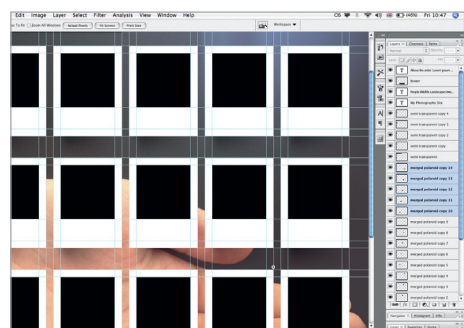




**12 Shadow** Hit Cmd+D/Ctrl+D to deselect the area and choose the **Eraser** tool from the toolbar. Using a soft brush with a radius of 35, gently erase the hard edge on the left. You now have a shadow that has slightly more intensity on the left. Take the layer's opacity to 50 per cent.



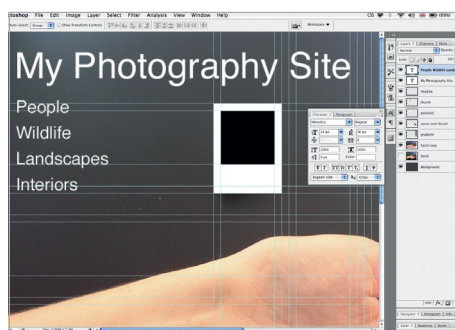
**15 About the artist** In a new layer, create a large, semi-transparent block near the bottom of your canvas and write in some dummy text about the artist. You can obtain Lorem Ipsum text from [www.lipsum.com](http://www.lipsum.com). Make sure the semi-transparent block aligns with your guides.



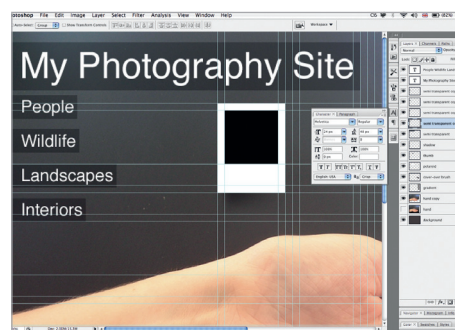
**16 Merge layers** In the Layers palette, select the three layers, Shadow, Thumb and Polaroid, by holding Shift. Right/Alt-click and select **Merge Layers**. Rename this later as **Merged Polaroid** and duplicate it 14 times. Now position each instance of this layer on the grid as shown.

### Expert tip Stock resources

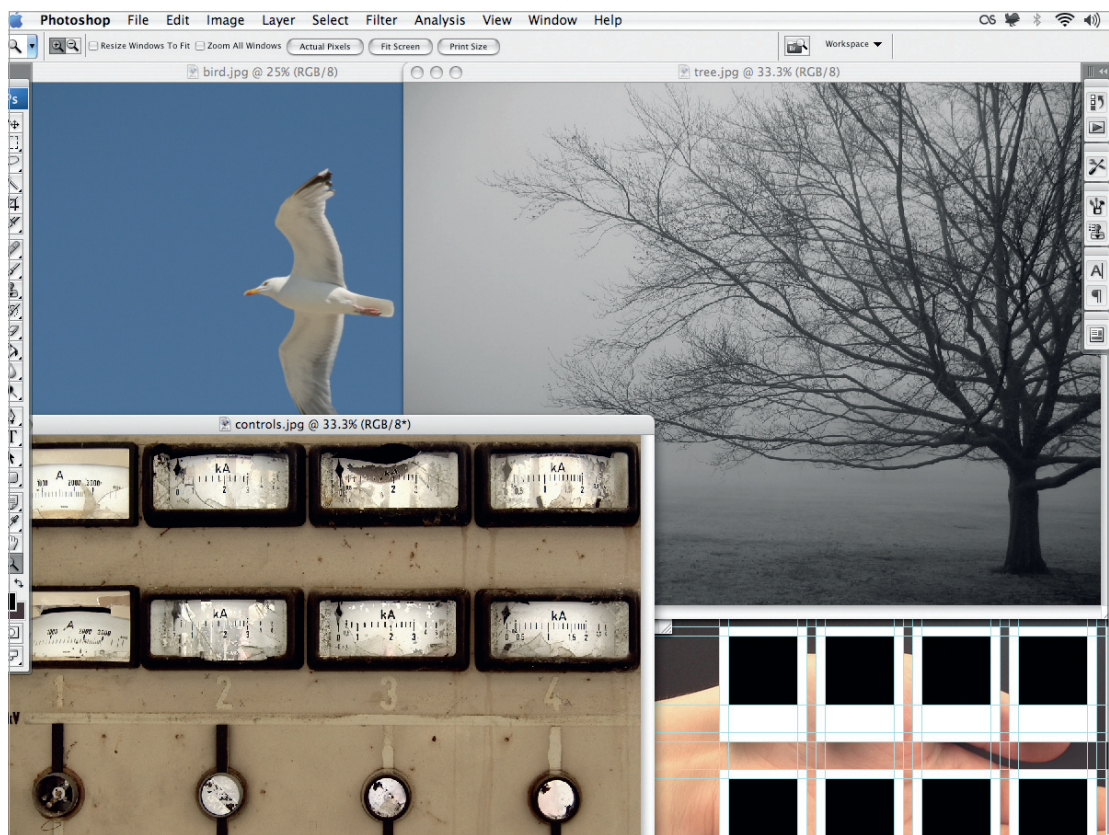
The photos we've used in this tutorial are all from stock.xchng ([www.sxc.hu](http://www.sxc.hu)), which is a great stock photography resource. Its main advantage over many other stock photo sites? It's free. The quality of the submissions is generally fairly high and, with an extensive library, there's always something suitable. Its sister site, stockxpert ([www.stockxpert.com](http://www.stockxpert.com)), is effectively a pro version that provides professional-grade images for a small cost. Both are worth checking out for stock photography on a budget – and there's always the excellent [www.istockphoto.com](http://www.istockphoto.com).



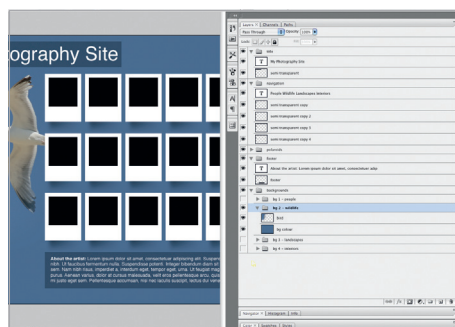
**13 Add text** In large text, write "My Photography Site" and place the text layer in the top left of the canvas. Underneath, on a new type layer, type "People", "Wildlife", "Landscapes" and "Interiors" in a smaller font. These will eventually become our page titles and navigation buttons.



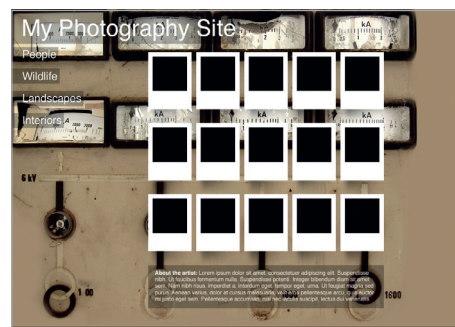
**14 Blocks** Create a new layer, **Semi Transparent**. Put it underneath the text layers. Draw around the title with the **Marquee** and fill it with solid black. Make the opacity 30 per cent. Duplicate the layer, resize and duplicate the new version so each word has a semi-transparent block behind it.



**17 Edit the images** Open the files called *bird.jpg*, *controls.jpg* and *tree.jpg*, as these photographs are going to serve as backgrounds on our other pages. Drag the photos onto your canvas and – as in steps 2 to 6 – edit each one so that it works as a background image. A combination of the **Eraser**, **Brush** and **Gradient** tools usually works best.



**18 Create a group** In the Layers palette, create a new group (by clicking on the folder icon at the bottom) and drag your new images into that layer. Double-click on the group to rename it **Background Images**. Follow the same procedure to ensure the neat grouping of all layers.



**FINISH Ready to go** Your file should resemble *step19.psd*. We've got a well-structured Photoshop file ready to prepare for the web. Our guides are so accurate that they'll tell us the measurements for our CSS file. Next issue, we'll convert this from PSD to functioning website.