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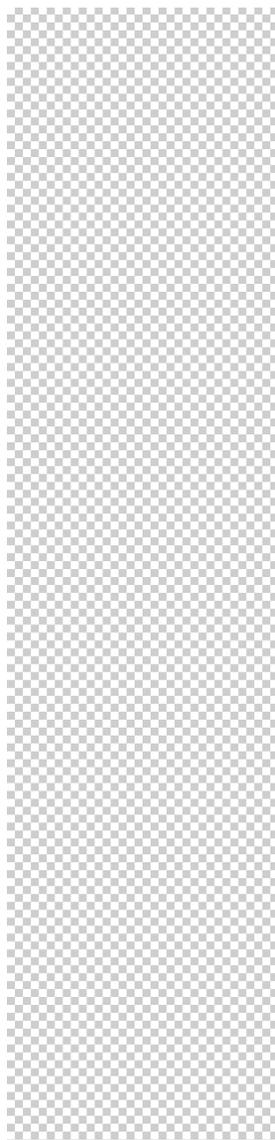
LAYER

No / 02

*LEARN EVERY LAYER OF A PSD
& THE ARTIST WHO CREATED IT*

***KATE
WOODMAN***





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**PRO EDU
LAYER MASK MAG**

Thanks for downloading LAYER! It's my hope that this publication can explore the anatomy of an image and the artists' who created them.

Often times I find myself wanting to see an artist' PSD and see what steps they took to get there. What organization did they have? How did they label their files? What methods and in what order did they execute them in? LAYER will explore this.

As visual artists, we are curious. We want to know how. More importantly we need to know WHY other artists are working the way they are. Welcome to LAYER!

This magazine features one artist every issue so we can see behind the curtain into their process. I hope you find value in what these artists share. If you can, make sure to go give their social media handles a like and thank them for sharing their process!

Cheers,

Gary Martin
Founder PRO EDU

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BIO



KATE WOODMAN

Born in Darmstadt, Germany, Kate Woodman was brought up in Connecticut and currently calls Portland, Oregon home. A structural engineer by training, Kate developed her love of photography in 2011 while investigating earthquake damage in New Zealand. What began as a compulsion to document the environment expanded into a fascination for narrative storytelling, with a conceptual twist. Her engineering background serves her well in her photography, provoking a sense of balance and attention to detail and engendering a creative approach to the technical challenges of creating an image. Kate is a PROEDU instructor and teaches workshops around the world focusing on color theory and storytelling.



Q&A



How would you describe your photography style?

I'd like to consider myself a conceptual narrative photographer. My interests lie in creating stories—whether than be in a photo series or single image format. I love adding an environmental context to my images and placing character into a location that facilitates a story. My aesthetic is colorful and cinematic, and my goal is to merge the beautiful with the thought provoking.

Who are your clients typically?

My client list ranges from small fashion boutiques, skin & hair care lines, and editorial publications to large commercial clients in the hospitality, entertainment and healthcare industries.

Whose work or what artists have influenced you most in life?

I try not to let myself become too stylistically influenced by other photographers, but I have always loved the work of Rodney Smith. Every image he took was the perfect blend of whimsy and timelessness, with everything in the frame in its perfect place.

My list of inspiration is long so it's hard to select just a few, but I'd have to say I was introduced to the works of Joey L and Erik Almas at the beginning of my career, and both of these photographers have been played an incredibly impactful role in my growth as a photographer. Joey's devoted commitment to his personal work and his ability to translate that into a thriving commercial career is hugely aspirational. Erik's delicate balance of versatility while maintaining a cohesive aesthetic has given me hope that, even in this field that's constantly telling you to specialize, my broad photographic interests could be an asset rather than a deterrent.

What is the most rewarding part of being a photographer?

Before I discovered photography, there was nothing in my life I felt truly passionate about. I had hobbies and things I did to keep me occupied but when I discovered photography, it was like this compulsion—something I had to do. Even if I never got paid a dime for it, I think I would still have to do it. But the fact that I can channel my creativity into a career is something I will never take for granted.

What's your advice for someone who wants to do what you do?

For those aspiring to becoming a conceptual or storytelling photographer, my advice is to open your brain to inspiration from everywhere and anywhere and document that inspiration in a journal or list somewhere—and then shoot! As much as is humanly possible, just shoot and keep shooting, experimenting with something new and different each time to help you grow.

Where do you see the industry heading?

I wish I had a crystal ball to be able to predict the future,

but my best guess is that we're going to start seeing a lot more collaboration in the future between all different types of creatives. There is so much talent out there that it's easy to drown out in the crowd so I wouldn't be surprised if those talents pooled together to create something better than the sum of their parts.

What do you want to say with your photographs and how do you get your photographs to do that?

My goal with my images is to find a balance between telling the viewer a story and letting them invent their own narrative. The key to this is to create ambiguity and layers that can be interpreted in different ways. Part of why I think



I like to work with environments is that it's easy to add details and elements in a more complex scene that may not be immediately identifiable and require the viewer to linger or revisit in order to notice. At the end of the day, in this world of perpetual scrolling and sensory overload, if I can get someone to stop and sit with my image for 10 seconds, I consider this a success.

What is your least favorite part of your job?

Probably not surprisingly, it's marketing! I have a million ideas and finite time on this world and I want to spend it all creating instead of selling myself. Some people thrive on the hustle but I guess I'm more of an artist than a business







woman at heart. Sadly it's a necessity so I'll continue to send out those promos!

Do you have a favorite tool in photoshop? If so what is it? IF not what is the tool you use most and why?

One of my favorite tools in Photoshop is the Apply Image tool which essentially creates a quick luminosity mask and lets me apply an adjustment to an image based on its luminosity values. It's sort of a quick dumbed down version of a midtone luminosity mask.

What does the perfect shoot entail and why?

For me the perfect shoot consists of a killer concept, a location that has a lot of vintage character, and my ride or die team mates by my side that not only do amazing work but also revel in the creative process as much as I do. There's something magical about a shoot where everyone is as excited about creating as you are and that collective high that you all get usually results in my best work.

If there was something you could change in Photoshop what would it be and why?

I'd really love if Photoshop had a better algorithm for stitching images together that needed straight lines. Maybe a tool where you could draw or select your own guides that you could align your straight edges to. Tilt shift lenses are great but they don't always work for the type of work I'm shooting so some kind of more advanced Photoshop capability to facilitate this would be amazing.

What advice do you have for people trying to get into photography?

Photography is like any other thing you learn—you have to be willing to put in the time and effort to see results. Constantly trying to learn and then practice what you learn is going to be what gives you the fastest results. Don't worry about trying to achieve your style, that will come naturally with time—and it'll come faster the more you practice your craft. Don't be afraid to put your work out there and be open to critique, but don't be discouraged if you're not where you want to be. Keep at it and you'll get there.

KATEWOODMAN.PSD

Coming up with concepts for photo shoots is something that probably takes up the majority of my brain power. I'm inspired by everything from cinematography to literature, modern art to random photos on someone's Facebook page. While ideas are constantly flowing however, it's not always easy to translate that into an image that effectively conveys the concept while being aesthetically pleasing. It's often a bit of a fluid process and requires a little experimentation.

The Process

Step 1: The Concept

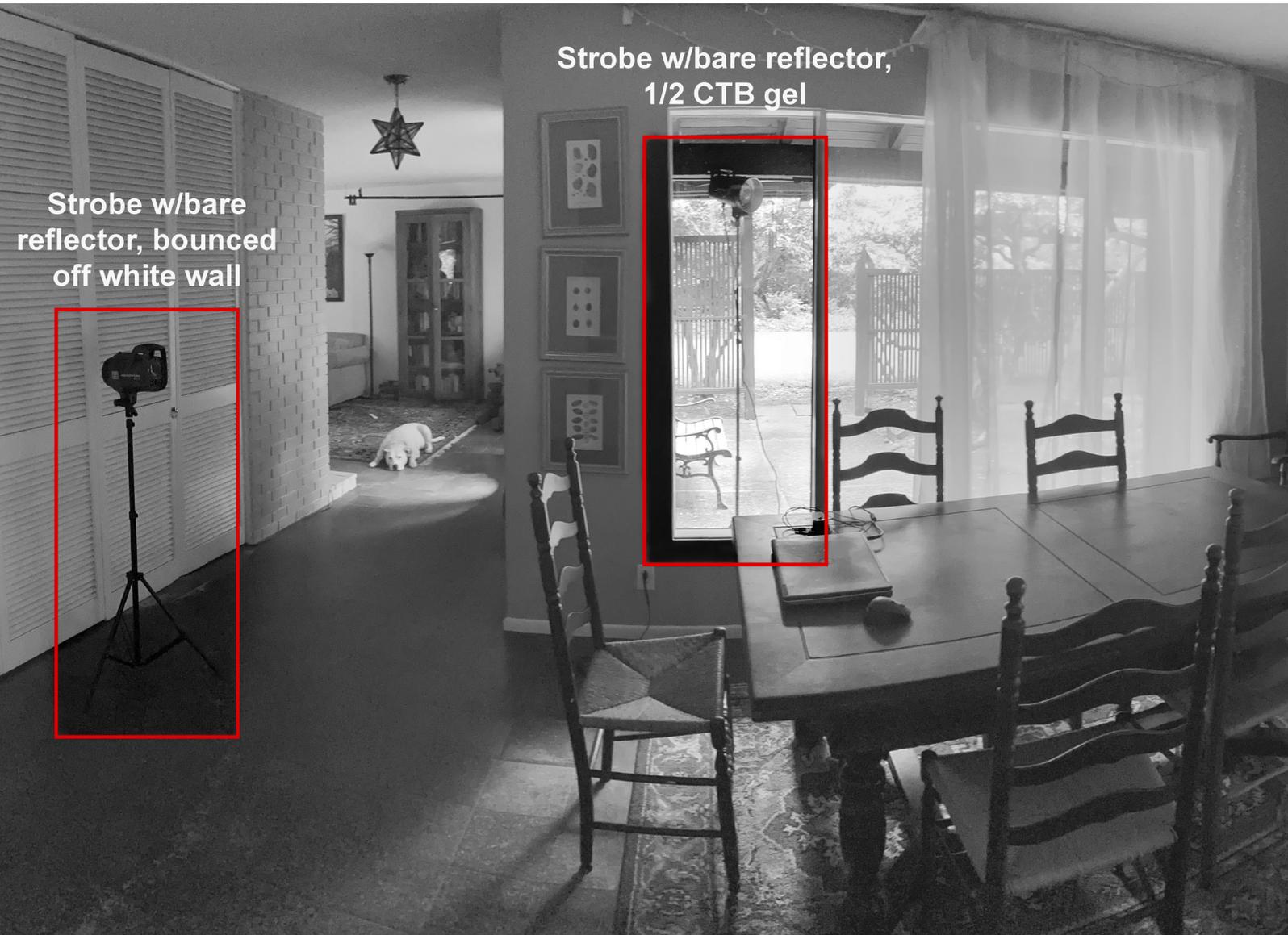
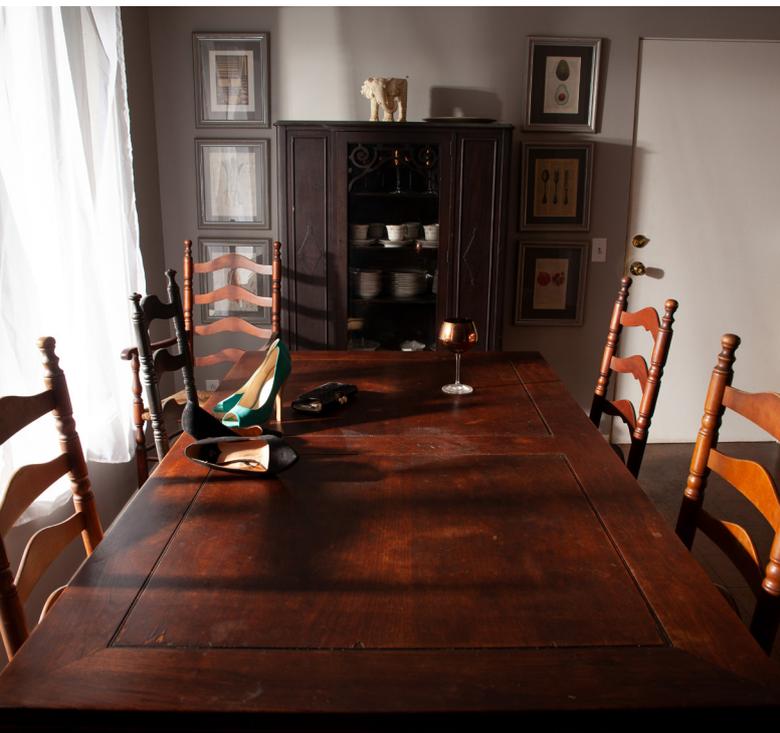
Most of my personal shoots start with a basic theme or concept. The idea here was simple: I wanted to juxtapose a refined and beautiful woman eating cheap food in the messiest way possible.

Once you have your basic concept in mind, the next step is to build the visual. For a personal shoot like this, I'm often relying on my own resources. While it was possible to source a luxury dining room for the shot, I opted to work in my own dining room—a space I was more familiar with and could customize to suit my needs. It also provided a more intimate and informal setting, drawing the attention more toward the subject rather than the space.

To drive home the feeling of formality and decadence, I felt a night time ambiance would be fitting. This meant cool tones, moody lighting and some touches of orange to add some interesting color contrast.







Strobe w/bare reflector, bounced off white wall

Strobe w/bare reflector, 1/2 CTB gel

Step 2: The Team

Once the concept and location were established, it was time to rally the troops. I like to keep my crew small and tight knit, working with people I trust in their craft, so they can bring my creative vision to life without micromanagement. For this shoot my crew consisted of an hmua for hair and makeup, a stylist for wardrobe, and myself on photo, set and prop styling duty.

For this shoot I wanted a timeless elegant look for the subject so we went for a classic updo, red lip and nails and a sleek sequin gown in orange to draw the focus to her. I had some blue pumps on hand (which ended up on the table) and set out the table using my “fine china” and silverware.

Step 3: The Lighting

Though this was shot in the middle of the day, I wanted to go for that night time feel and opted for a direct light source with bare reflector and 1/2 CTB placed just outside the window to mimic a moonlight feel. The hard light added some interesting contrast and shadow details to really draw attention to all the elements on the table, and it also added some interesting architectural shapes on the wall behind her for some added depth.

In addition to the key light, I bounced another light with a reflector off of a white wall directly behind me and opposite the subject for some fill, and had my stylist hold a white foam board camera right of the subject to fill in some of the shadows.

Lastly I placed another 1/2 CTB gelled light with reflector outside of the garage door, pointing directly into the door to create a glow around the edge of the slightly ajar door. This was actually done after the shoot was complete to bring in an additional mysterious narrative element.

Step 4: The Execution

Here’s where the fun begins. I always have a general idea of what the end result is going to be going into a shoot, but I like to think of it more as an improv skit vs. a rigid screenplay. As you can see in the image below(?), this was the original idea I started with—our subject eating Spaghettios straight out of the can, surrounded by empty place settings.

While it was a decent starting point, for me it just didn’t have the gravity I felt it could, and the compression made the spaghetti get lost in the mix. Moving my frame tighter would eliminate all the set styling, so I decided to pull back my frame instead. We tried a couple of different poses and expressions, from her crawling across the table to her picking spaghetti up in her hands. At some point my dog made an impromptu visit for some spaghetti snacks, so we decided to roll with it.

Once we got our hero shot, we made sure to clear the set to capture any back plates without models, light stands or distractions. Because I had been backed up to a wall on my tripod, I made sure to grab a few shots around the periphery of my hero frame in case I wanted to expand my scene; this allows me not only more flexibility in my composition but also allows me to “cheat” my resolution and print at a larger scale if I choose to.

Step 5: The Editt

For me each time I step into Photoshop it’s a bit of a new adventure—I never quite know where I’ll end up. Some images require a lot of manipulation, while others need a much lighter hand. However, my workflow remains pretty consistent regardless of the image.



WORKFLOW



Image organization.

Before I even think about editing, I organize my files. Images get dumped into a folder on a harddrive and uploaded into a new Capture One catalog. I sort through my images within 24 hours of shooting (while still fresh in my brain) and star anything viable with one star, and anything that really jumps out at me with 2 stars. I've done this enough times to go with my gut here—and usually it doesn't lead me astray! Once this is done I'll usually come back through my one star images shortly after and make a second cull. This process gets repeated until I've got my hero shot and any ancillary images I need (plates, etc.)

RAW adjustments.

Generally when working with strobes I like to dial my light in enough that I don't need to make too many adjustments to the RAW files. I shoot with a Canon 5d MIV which has pretty great dynamic range, but in instances where I can't fully control contrast, I may make

some minor tweaks to exposure, highlights and shadows to bring back as much detail as I can in the image. In the case of this image, in addition to adding a bit more contrast and pulling down exposure, I also adjusted the white balance to a cooler tone for that night time look. I try to not get too heavy handed with color during the RAW processing and leave more of the grading for Photoshop where I can act more nondestructively.

My preferred RAW editor is Capture One, because of the much higher quality color rendering capabilities—however, for some panoramic shots I'll use Lightroom for its stitching feature, which tends to be faster and more reliable than the built in Photoshop stitching tool.

When I'm done with my RAW adjustments, I select the "Edit With" option in C1, and open my files as TIFFS at 300dpi and 16 bit resolution. I'm working on an AdobeRGB compatible monitor so this is the color space I live in while editing.

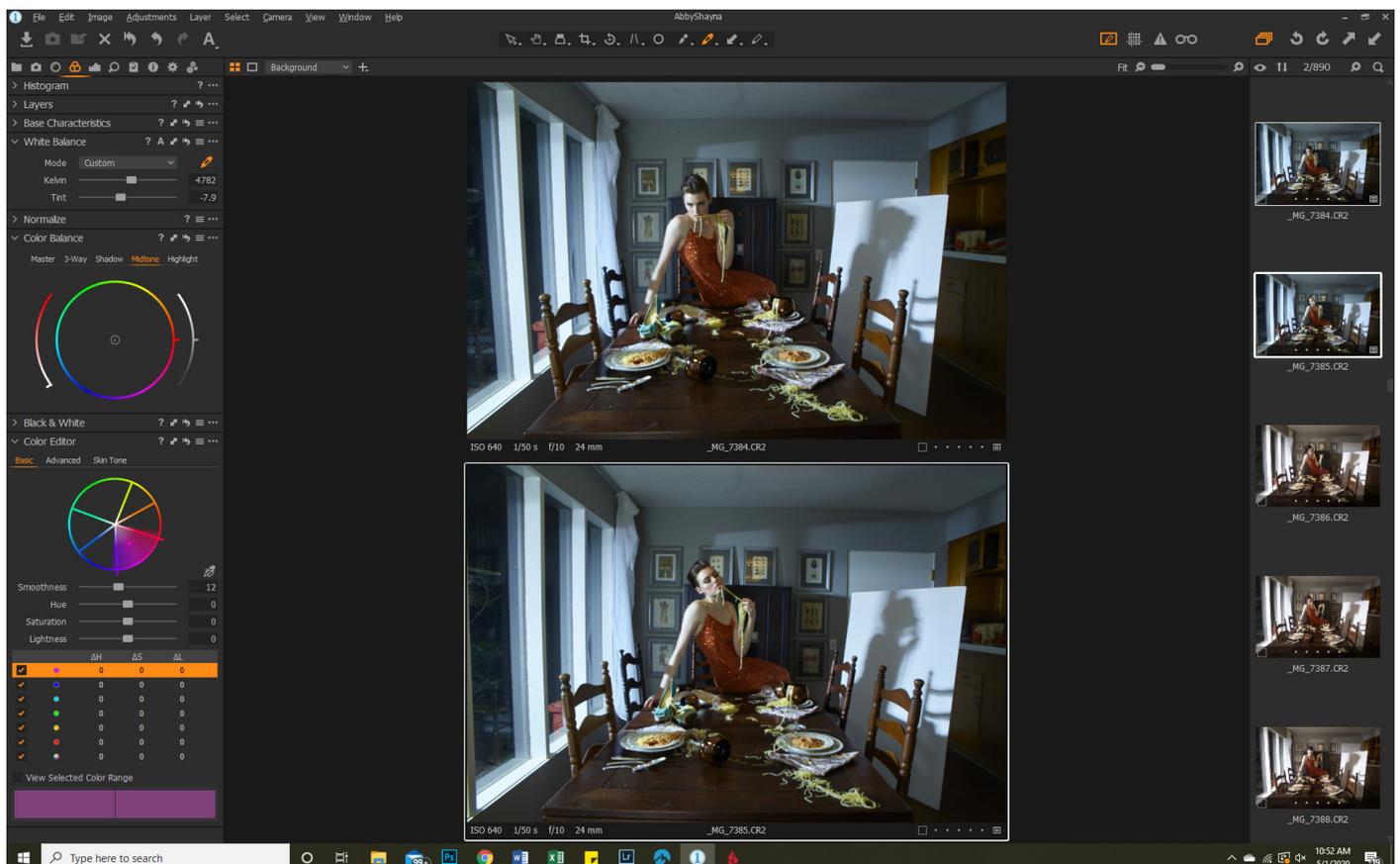
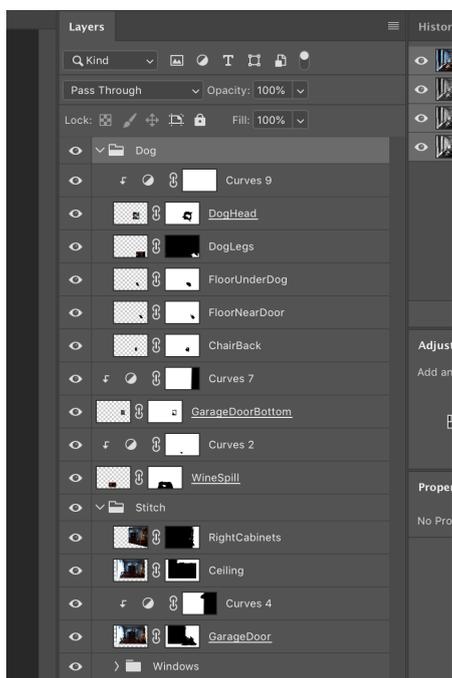
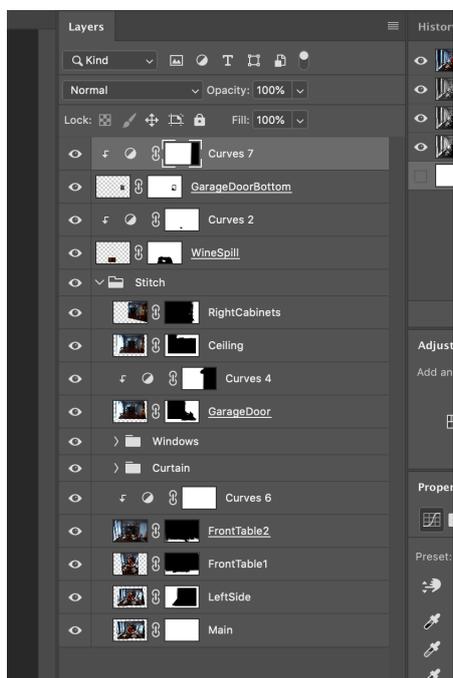
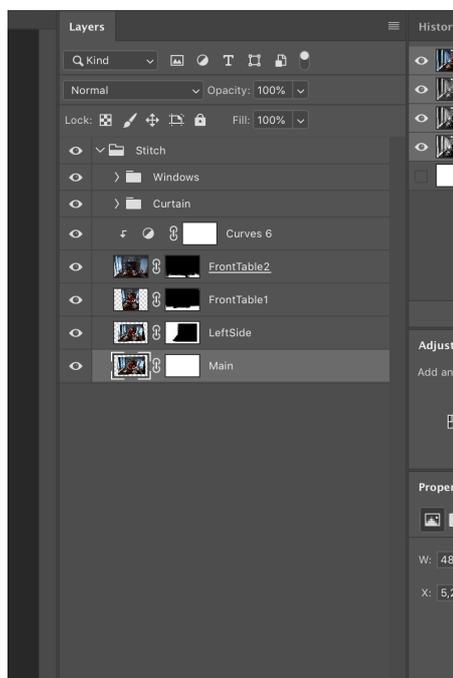
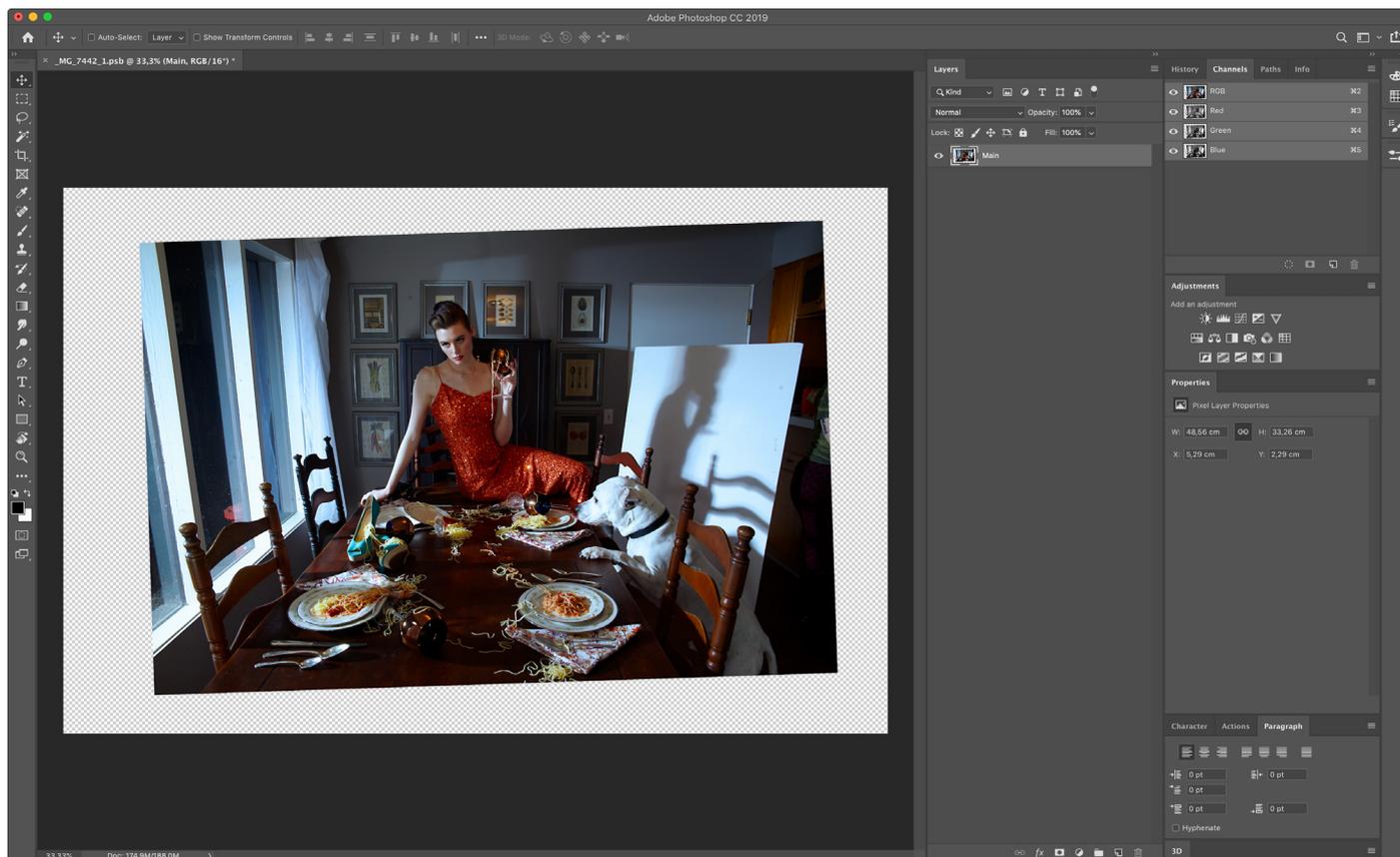


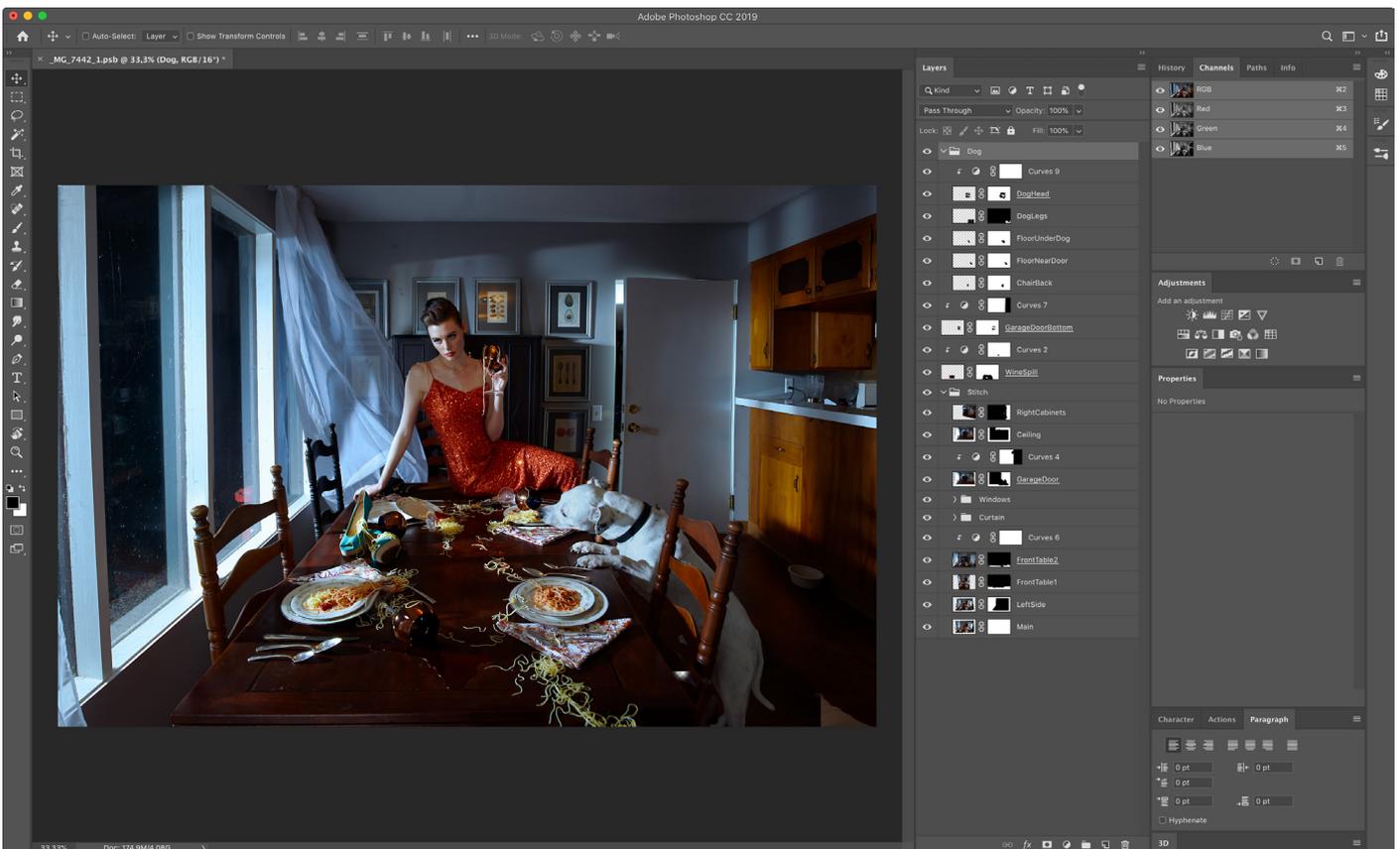
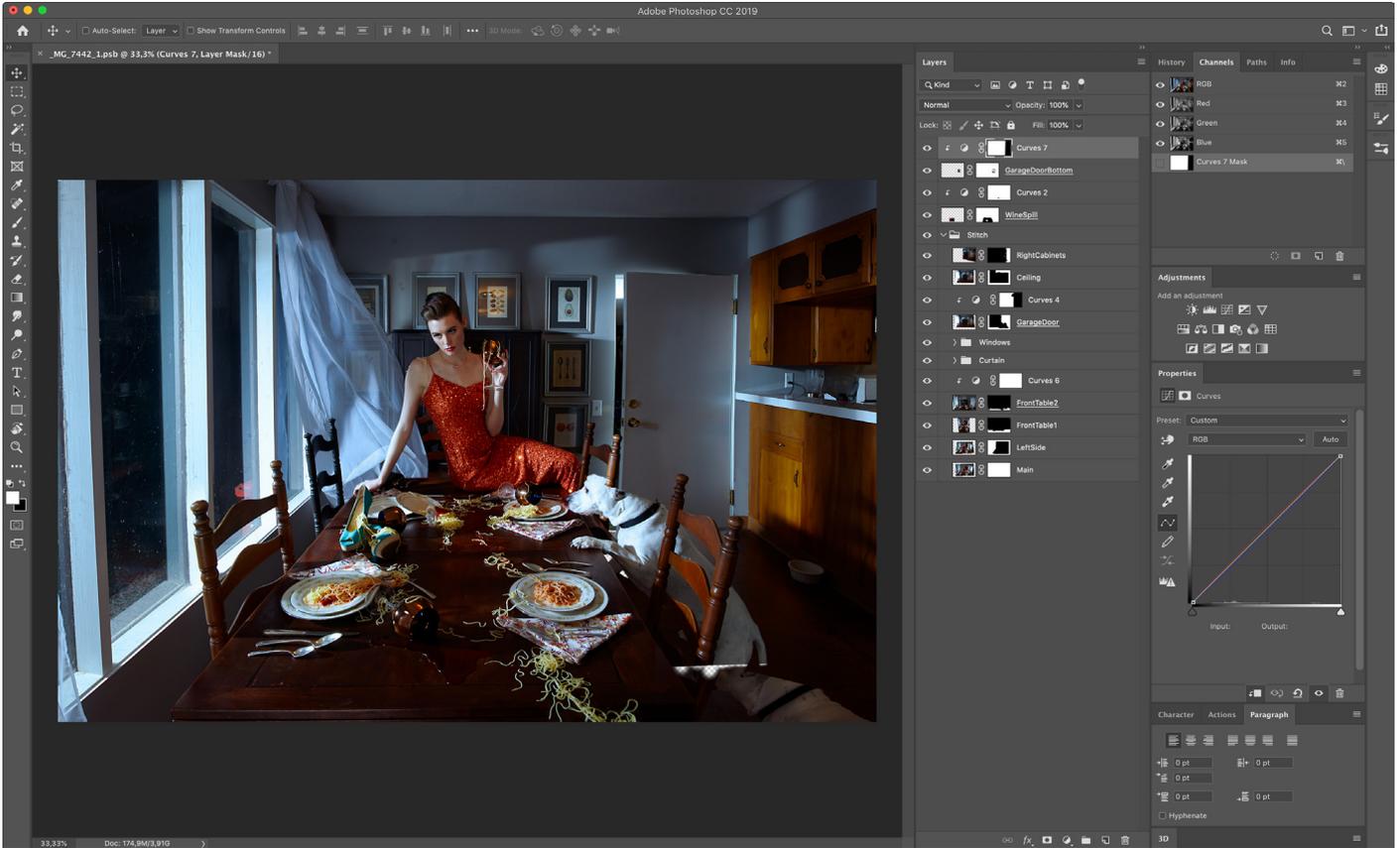
Image stitching.

For more organic images like landscapes that don't have a lot of straight lines, I'll use the PS or LR stitching tool to streamline this process—however for architectural images where I need straight parallel lines, I typically tackle this manually. I'll do this by expanding my canvas, stacking all images into a single file, using the transformation tool to adjust layers and match perspective, and masking the images for a seamless blend. This gives me better control of my shots and allows me to select my center focal point to build off of. I generally try to keep transitions between images soft at the edges by using larger soft brushes to

paint my mask—however sometimes the architecture of the image will allow convenient natural break points (i.e. along a door/wall/ceiling seam). For hard edges like this, I'll use the magnetic or polygonal lasso tool to make my masking selection.

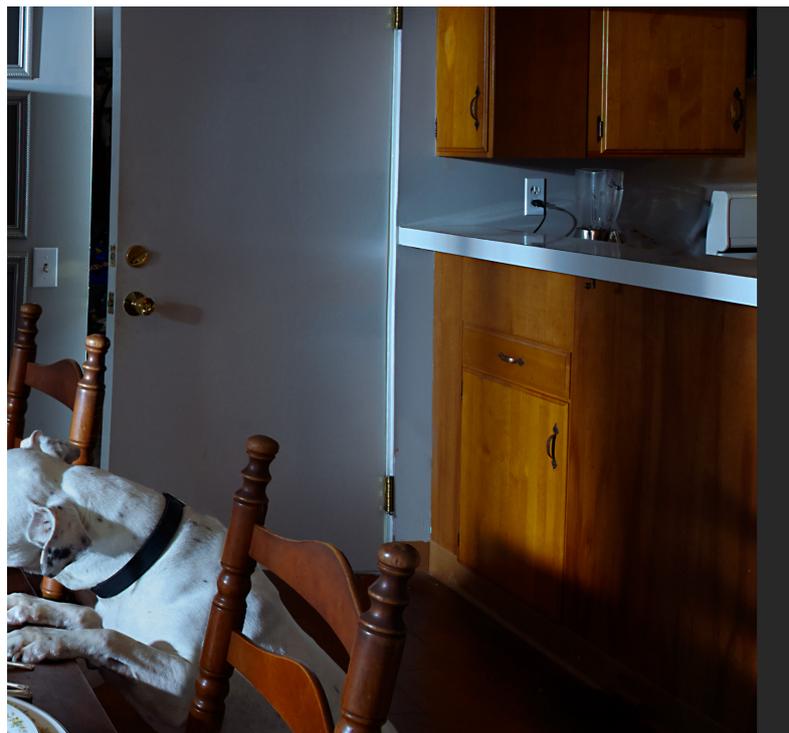
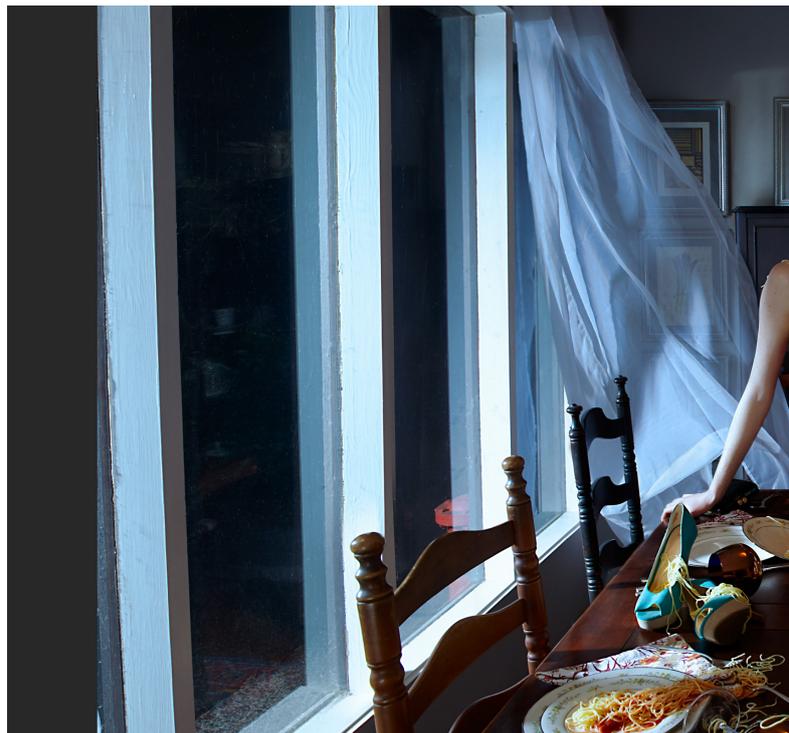
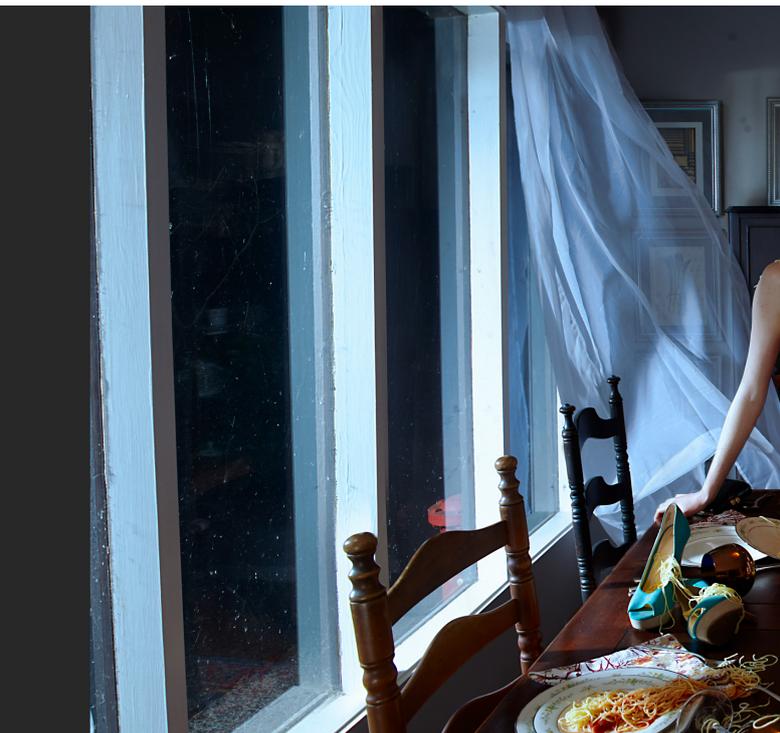
For this image, I ended up expanding the frame in all directions to give a sense of space/depth and to achieve those vertical and horizontal architectural lines. This allowed me to create a natural frame around the subject with the back wall, with the diagonal lines all converging on her as the center point.





Cleanup.

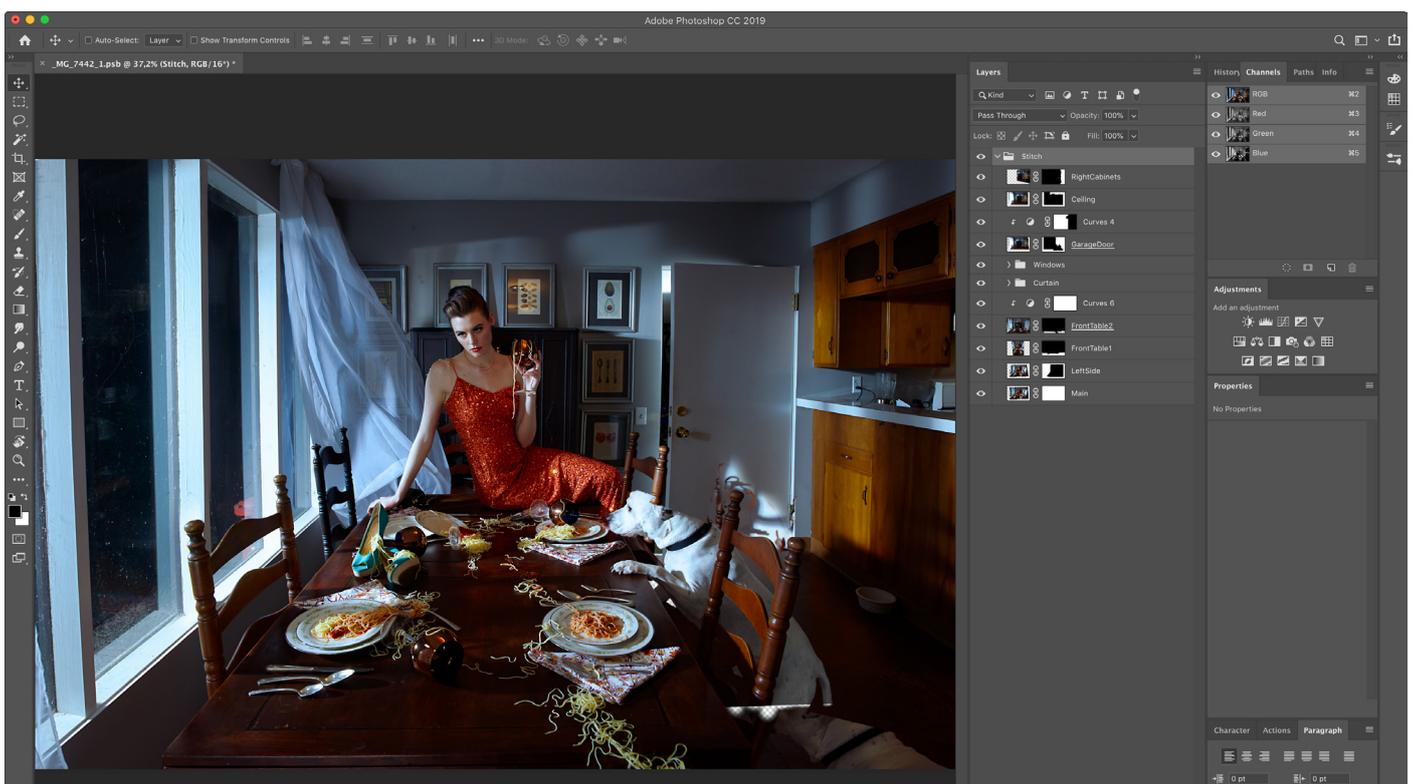
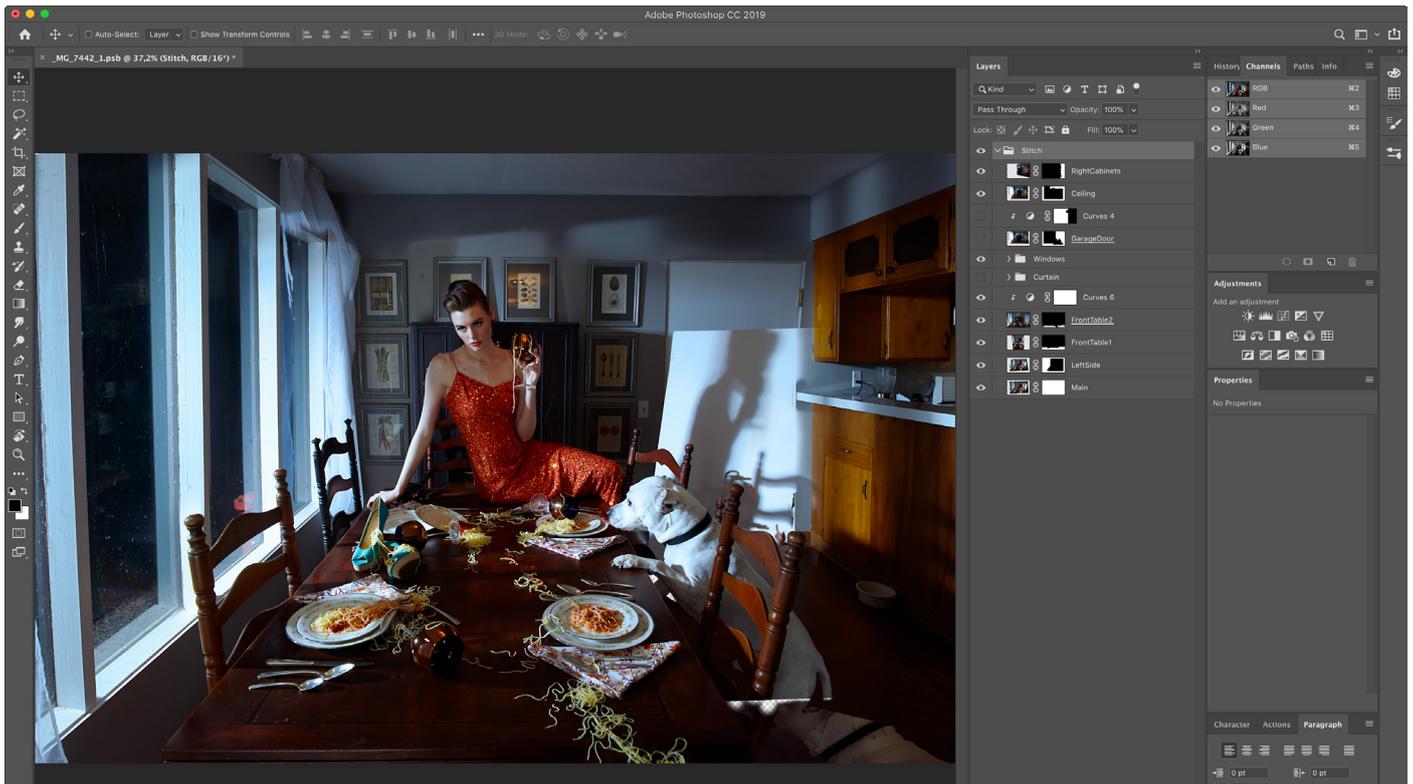
Once my image has been stitched together, it's time to start the cleanup. On a blank layer, I'll use the spot healing brush for small details or the clone stamp for bigger areas to clean up any discontinuities from the image stitch, and remove any general distractions, such as dirt, wrinkles, etc. For this shot, the bulk of the cleanup was on the window which had a fair amount of dust and dirt that the hard lighting emphasized. I also removed some of the brighter elements from the kitchen counter that drew the eye's focus, as well as the dog bowl, which felt redundant given the dog in the frame.



The Devil is in the Details.

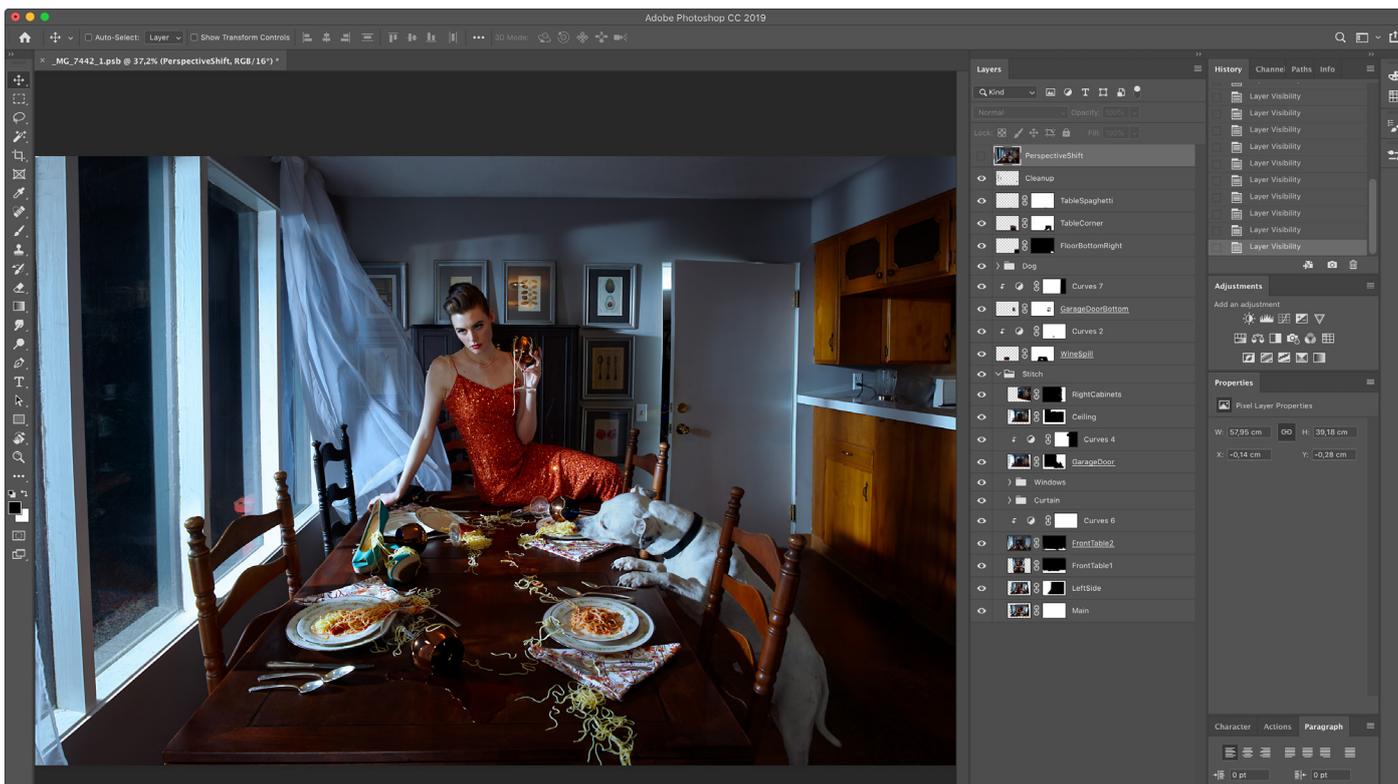
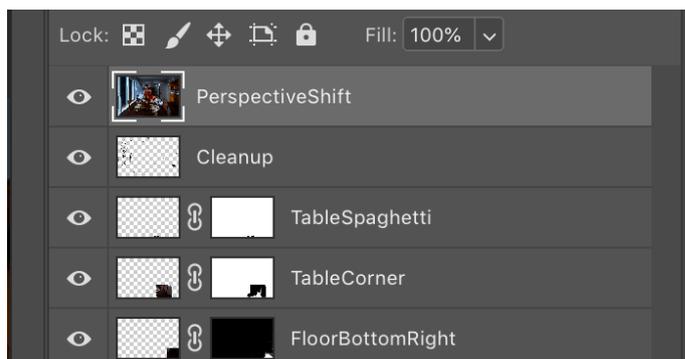
The last thing I want to do before I start delving into contrast and color is to make sure I've incorporated all the design elements that will lend themselves to the story. When I shoot I tend to grab "options"—props styled differently or placed in different locations, doors open and closed, lights on and off—that I have the option of incorporating later if those elements will facilitate the story line. These options are added in much the same way as in the stitching process, where they are masked in.

For instance, in the hero shot, the garage door is closed—however, I later decided to shoot the door open with light coming through later, because it added an element of mystery. I also photographed the curtain blowing in the wind, and the wine spill on the table (which had to be shot very quickly and then cleaned up before it left a stain and ruined my table). Even my dog's tongue licking the plate was photoshopped in. For me, these little details really help add dimension and make the viewer ask questions and start creating their own narrative interpretation.



Perspective adjustments.

Once the image is at a place I'm happy with in terms of content and composition, I will stamp the image and use the transform tool make any perspective shift adjustments either here or at the final stage of the process, depending on the image. This is more important in some images than others, but for this particular shot, being more architectural in nature, I didn't want any slight perspective distortions to distract from the image.

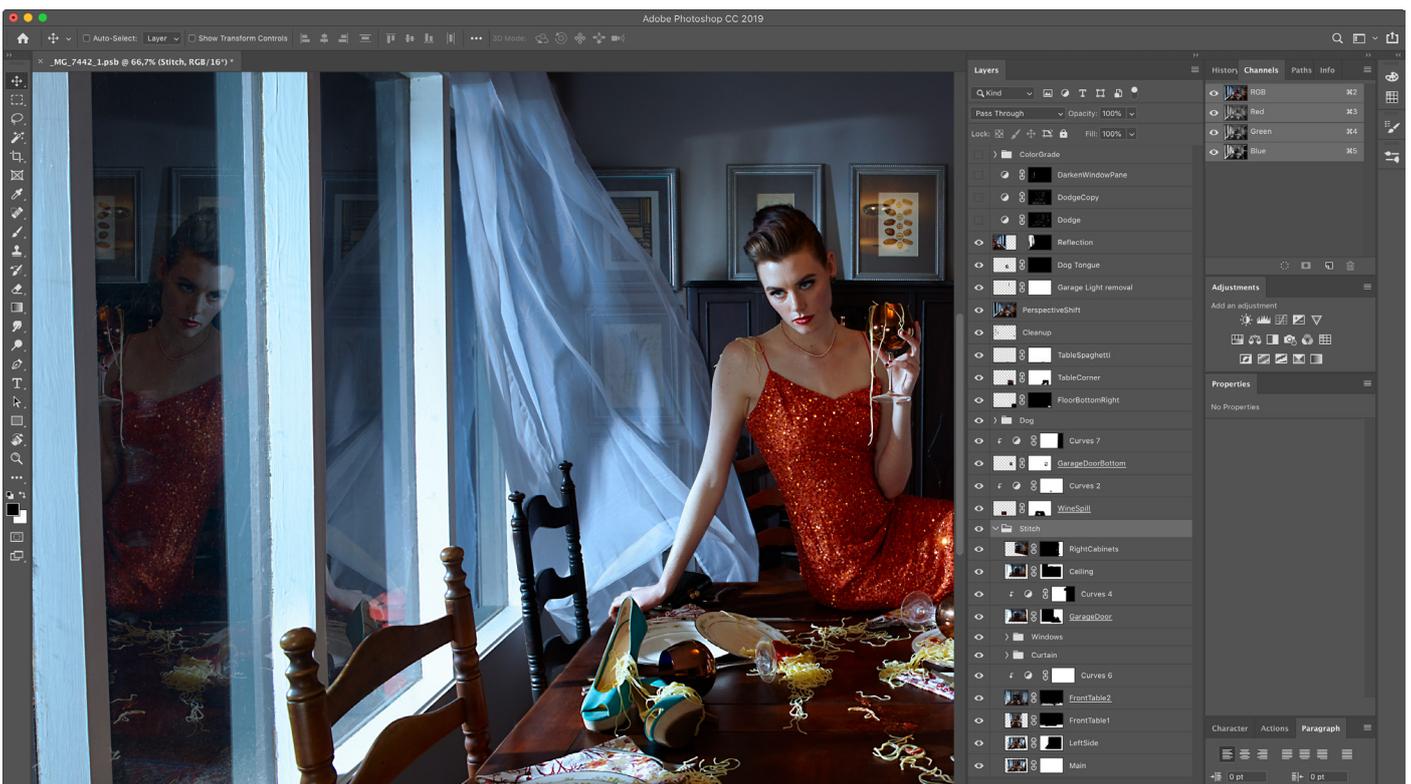
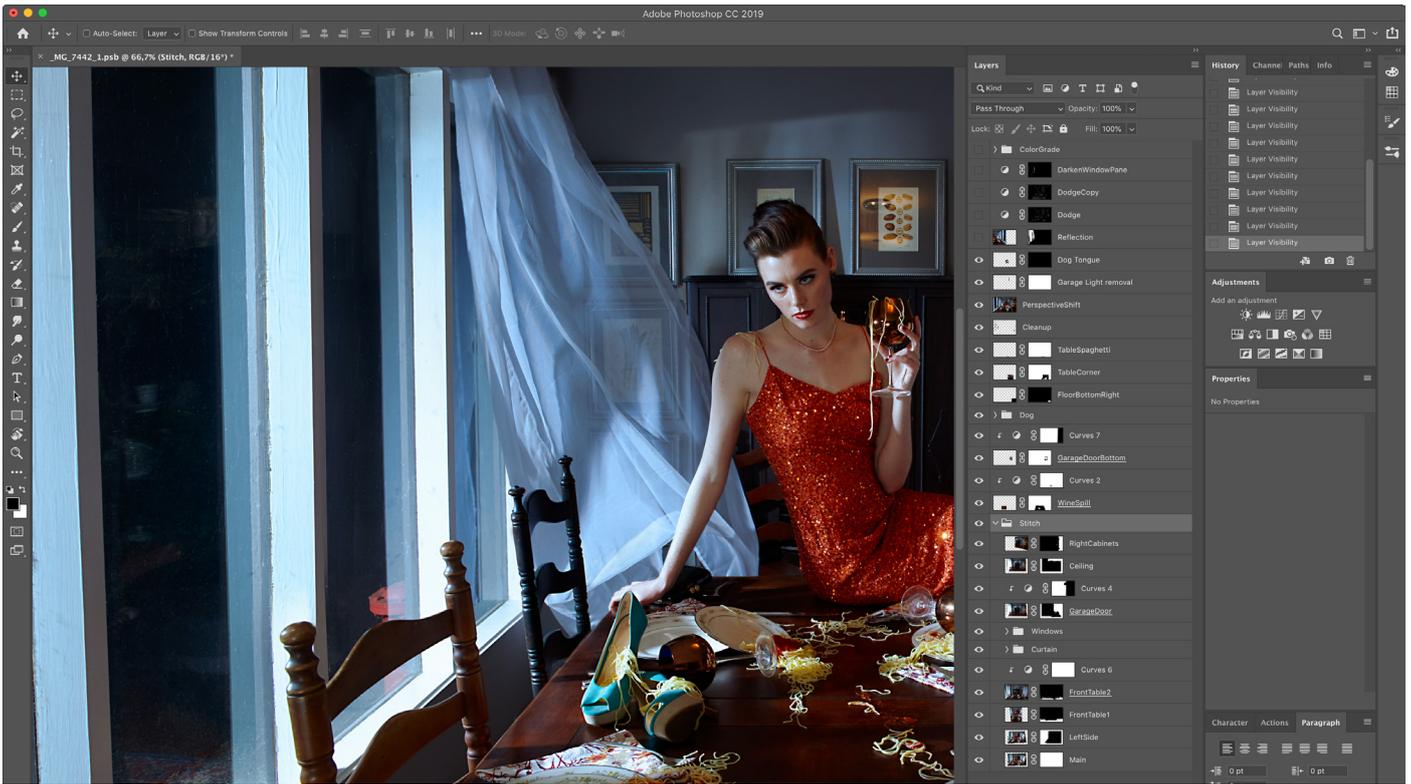


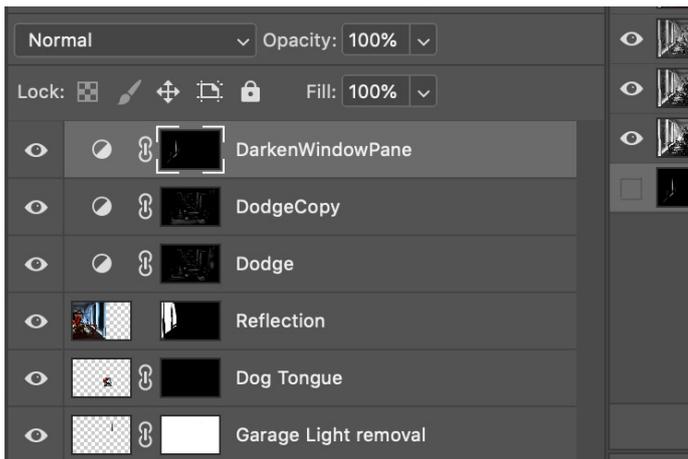
Shadowplay.

This should probably be categorized under the details section, but for this particular image I made the decision to add a reflection of the scene in the window after I made the perspective adjustments. Though the reflection didn't actually exist in person, I felt it added another dimension to the image that you might not notice the first time around. The editing process is often iterative, and

while I try to stick to a consistent workflow, sometimes a moment of inspiration will strike out of order.

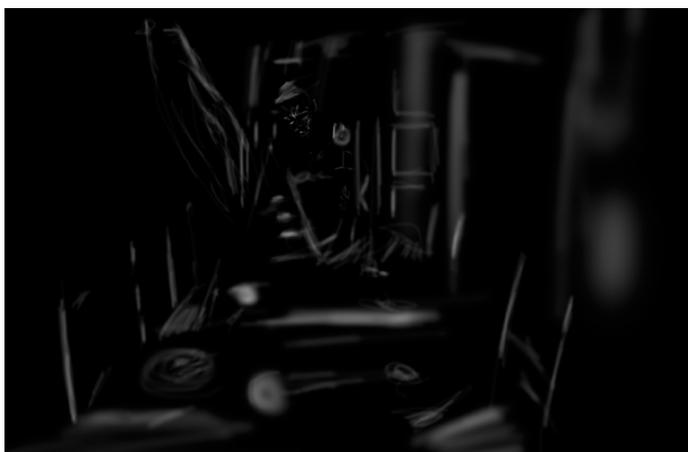
To do this, I copied the stamped layer, flipped it horizontally and moved it to the window, experimenting with its placement until it felt believable. I then masked out around the window mullions (using the magnetic lasso tool to make my selection) and reduced the opacity to give it a translucent appearance.





Dodge and burn.

The last thing I do before getting into the grading is the dodge and burn process. This is typically done with curves adjustment layers, and using a soft brush set to an opacity of 100% and flow of 1% to allow me to build up my adjustments gradually and subtly. I will often create two D&B curves sets—one for micro scale D&B (i.e. skin retouching) and the other for more macro/global adjustments. My typical process is to emphasize the existing light rather than try and change it—that usually means dodging existing highlights and burning existing shadows to showcase texture and add dimensionality to the objects/subjects I’m trying to draw attention to. I will also use D&B to subtly brighten or darken general areas of a scene to distribute contrast in a way that best highlights the important narrative elements. The key here is subtlety—you never want to feel like something is deliberately brightened or darkened, and it should retain a sense of believability.



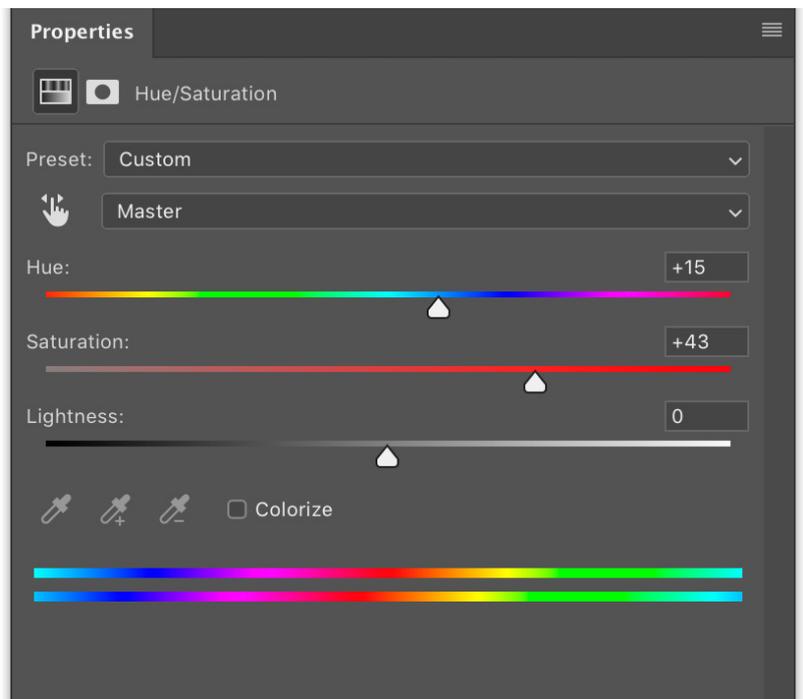
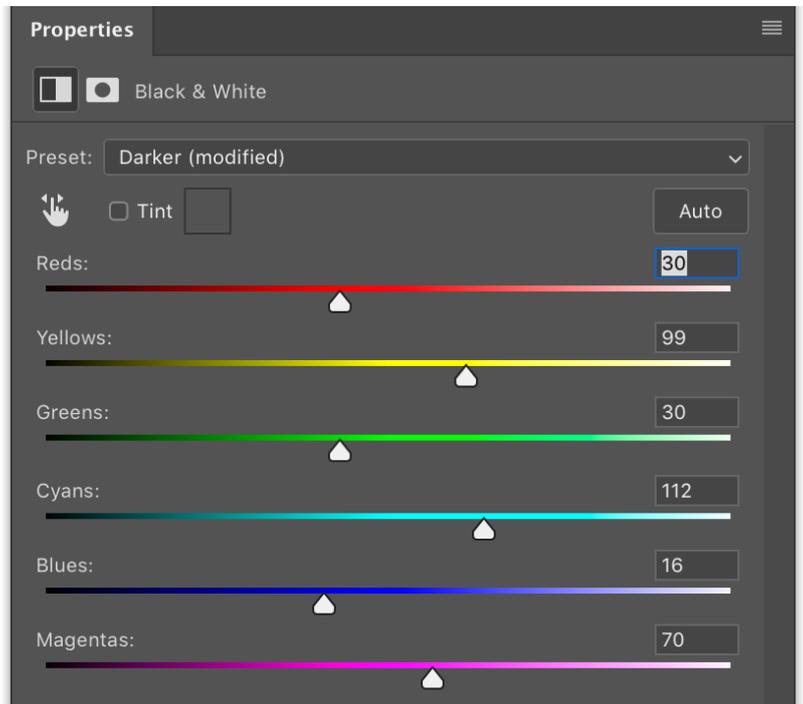
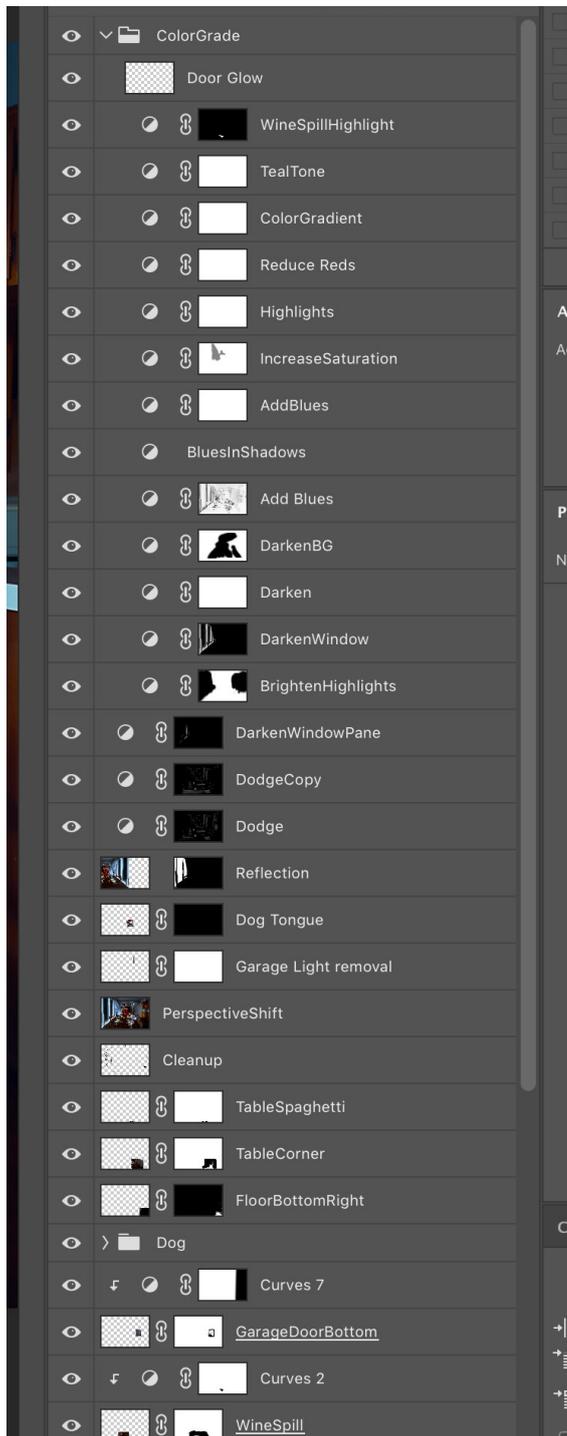
Color grade.

The color grade is the fun part and it's where the whole image can really come together. My color grade is usually the most experimental and flexible part of the editing process, as each image requires different treatments to facilitate the narrative. My ultimate goal with the color grade is to work with rather than against the existing tonal range of the image to really bring it to life.

There are 2 parts to what I consider the "color grade" of an image, and those are luminosity and color. While I usually try to focus on luminosity first, the color grading process is generally iterative and I end up going back and forth between my luminosity and color layers, building up the overall tone in a series of subtle layers that add depth as they build on one another.

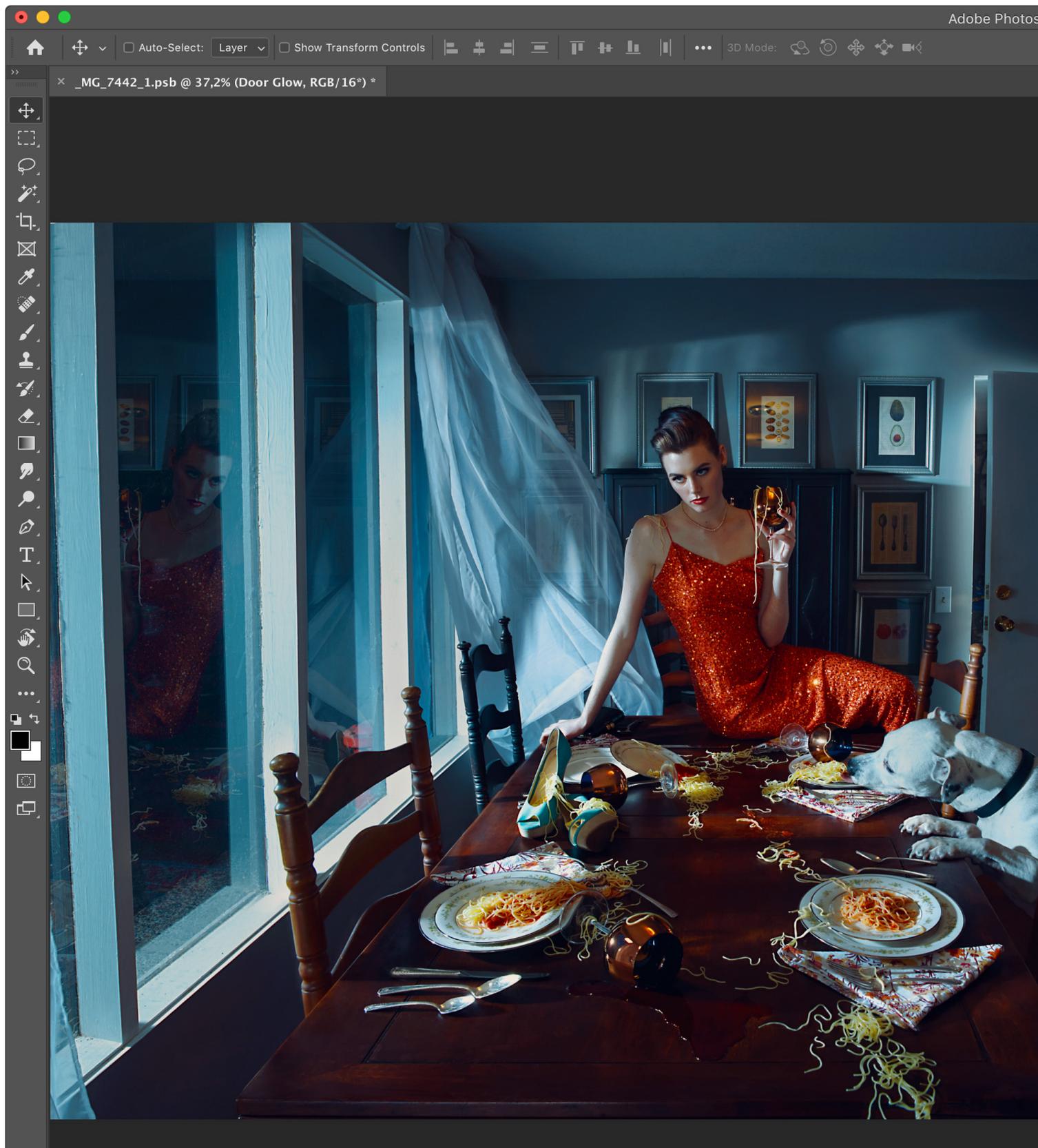
For luminosity adjustments, I typically rely on two tools: the curves layer adjustment, and the black and white layer adjustment, which I set to a luminosity blend mode. This layer allows me to adjust the luminosity of individual colors rather than tonal range, while the curves layer serves the opposite function, allowing me to isolate tonal ranges and make luminosity adjustments accordingly.

I rely on a variety of different tools for color adjustments, including but not limited to the following adjustment layers: Hue/Saturation, Selective Color, Gradient Maps, LUTs, and Photo Filters. I prefer to make small adjustments with each of these layers, isolating certain adjustments; for example, if I want to add blues to shadows and oranges to highlights, I might do this using two separate Selective Color layers rather than the same



one so that if I change my mind, I can toggle the layers on or off rather than having to go back to it and adjust it. Certain adjustment layers, such as gradient maps and photo filters are very useful at creating nice transitions between colors that help give that cinematic feel. I prefer to add these layers set to a low opacity to build up the color grade.

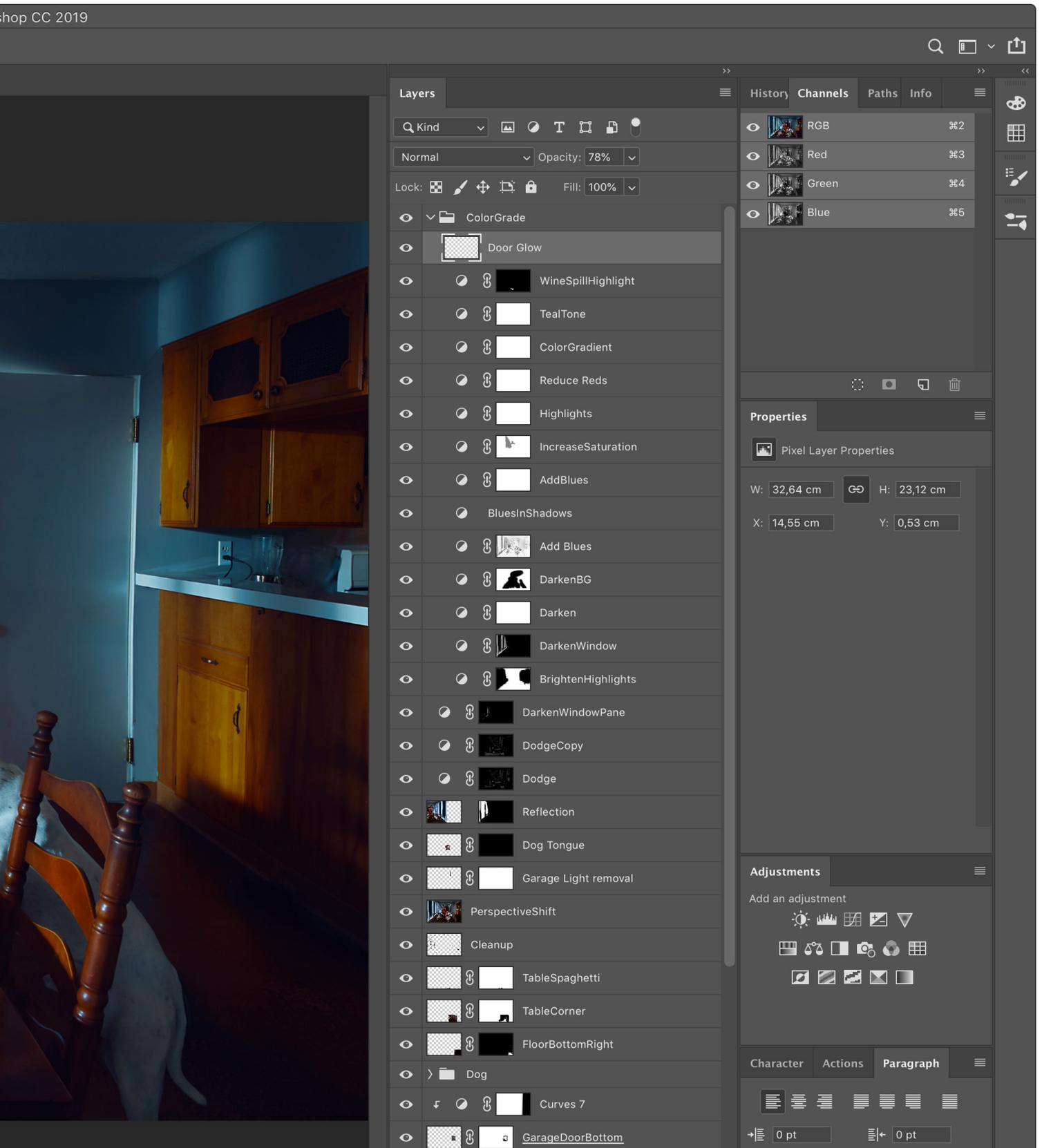
For this image, I ended up using a total of 14 layers to complete the color grade, most of which were geared towards saturating the blues and bringing down luminosity to sell the night time effect without losing any of the detail in the shadows. I have since created my PROEDU Midnight Action using the color grade from this image, which is available from the PROEDU store.



The Export

Once I'm happy with the final image, it's time to get it ready to see the world! Because multiple color grading layers can sometimes result in banding, I'll usually stamp my final image to create a flattened layer, which usually

eliminates this phenomenon. I'll save the high res layered TIFF or PSB file, export a high res JPEG and a low res JPEG, both in sRGB color space. This provides me with an image ready for web display, and the higher quality images I make sure to send to my team.



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COMING SOON IN THE NEXT ISSUE... GEMMY WOULD BINNEN-DIJK