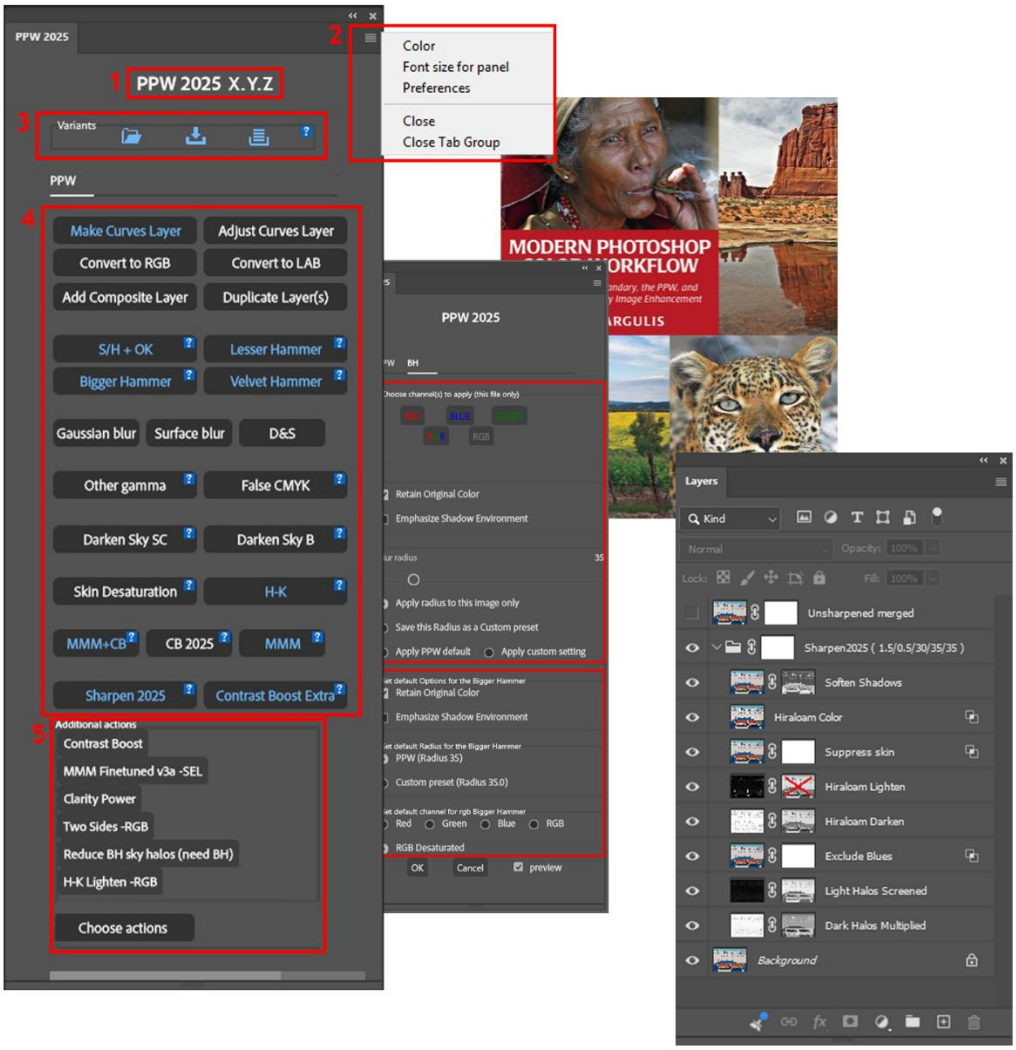
PPW 2025

Panel Manual



Dan Margulis
Bart Mellenbergh
Gerald Bakker

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Table of Contents

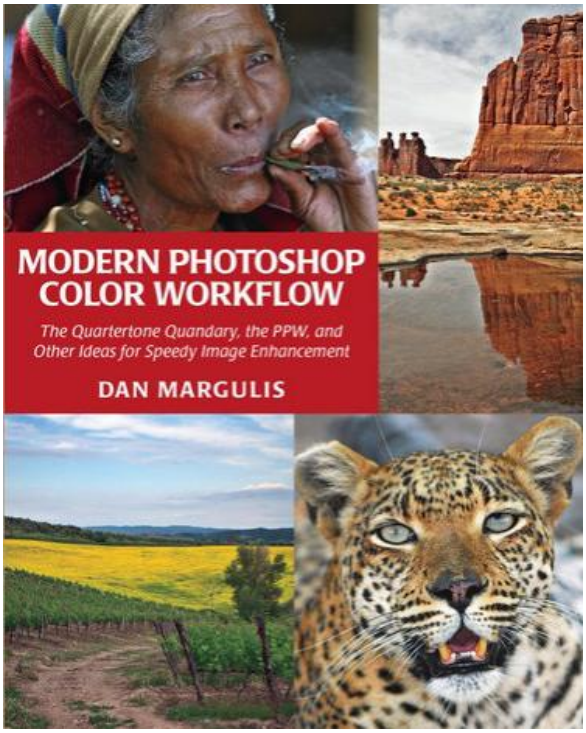
1 Introduction 3
1.1 Acknowledgments 3
2 Installation 4
2.1 Where to get it 4
2.2 How to install it 4
2.3 What you get 5
2.3.1 Panel overview 5
2.3.2 Installation of Additional Actions 6
2.3.3 Installation of ICC profiles 7
2.4 Panel documentation 8
2.5 Reinstallation, upgrading and deinstallation 9
3 Panel: main buttons overview and options 10
3.1 Curves, colorspaces and layers 10
3.1.1 Make Curves Layer 10
3.1.2 Adjust Curves Layer 10
3.1.3 RGB 10
3.1.4 LAB 10
3.1.5 Add Composite Layer 10
3.1.6 Duplicate Layers 10
3.2 The Hammers 11
3.2.1 S/H + OK 11
3.2.2 Bigger Hammer 11
3.2.3 Lesser Hammer 12
3.2.4 Velvet Hammer 13
3.3 The Blur Shortcuts 13
3.3.1 Gaussian blur/Surface blur/D&S (Dust & Scratches) 13
3.4 False Profiles 14
3.4.1 Other Gamma 14
3.4.2 False CMYK 14
3.5 The Sky actions 15
3.5.1 Darken Sky SC 15
3.5.2 Darken Sky B 15
3.6 The Desaturation Scripts 15
3.6.1 Skin Desaturation 15

3.6.2 H–K 16
3.7 The Color Enhancers 17
3.7.1 CB 2025 17
3.7.2 MMM 17
3.7.3 MMM + CB 18
3.8 Sharpening and Contrast Boost 18
3.8.1 Sharpen 2025 18
3.8.2 Contrast Boost Extra 20
4 Variants 21
4.1 Variants panel buttons 21
4.2 Variants File Management 21
5 Additional Actions 22
5.1 Actions overview 22
5.2 Postfixes and history states 23
6 The menus 24
6.1 Color 24
6.2 Font size for panel 25
6.3 Preferences 25
6.3.1 Preferences for assigning profiles 25
6.3.2 Conversion/Flattening preferences 26
6.3.3 Sharpen2025 preferences 27
6.3.4 Variants preferences 28
6.3.5 PPW2025 parameters 30

1 Introduction

The "Picture Postcard Workflow" (often referred to as PPW) is a color correction method devised by Dan Margulis. Simply said, PPW is a disciplined approach to enhance a photo's color and contrast. Its steps aim to correct color casts, improve contrast, enhance shadow and/or highlight detail, strengthen color and color variation, and sharpen.

A quick primer on the workflow can be found in PPW_Overview.pdf which comes with the panel. For those who want to learn more, the book “Modern Photoshop Color Workflow” is the ultimate resource: it contains 450 pages of background information, techniques, examples and challenging exercises. (See figure.) Even though new ideas have been developed since the publication of this book, all of its contents are still valid.



Together with the workflow and the book, a supporting Photoshop panel has been made available. The current incarnation of this panel is called “PPW 2025”. This document serves as a manual, containing information about installation, prerequisites and descriptions of all buttons, options, menus, preferences etc.

1.1 Acknowledgments

Dan Margulis can be seen as the architect of the panel. Earlier versions were developed by **Giuliana Abbiati**, with help from Dan and an Italian team of Photoshop experts. When support of this version degraded, Dutch programmer **Bart Mellenbergh** took the immense task of rewriting the full panel from scratch. Development is supervised by **Gerald Bakker**, doing extensive test work and deciding on release scope.

2 Installation

2.1 Where to get it

The installation package of PPW2025 can be obtained from two sources:

- https://geraldbakker.nl/PPWF/ppw2025-latest-version-and-download-info.html
  Just below the top of this page, a link is supplied “It can be downloaded from here.”
- For those who have an account on the colortheory group on groups.io:
  https://groups.io/g/colortheory/files/PPW%202025
  This page contains a number of items. Search the file called PPW2025_xxx.zip with ‘xxx’ the highest version number.

Clicking the link will start the download of the current PPW2025 version (a zip file). Install it in any folder you wish.

2.2 How to install it

Double-click the zip file to extract its contents:

- **PPW2025_PS_x.y.z.ccx**
  Panel installer (x.y.z is the release number). A double-click triggers the Manage Plugins tab of the Creative Cloud Desktop. From there, it takes only a few clicks to actually install the panel in Photoshop
- **PPW_Welcome.pdf**
  A short summary of the panel's history, why it's there in the first place, where it can be obtained and other introductory information
- **PPW_Overview.pdf**
  A step-by-step overview of the Picture Postcard Workflow itself, establishing the link between the workflow and the panel
- **PPW2025_Panel_Manual.pdf**
  This document, describing everything related to the panel, from the installation process to an overview of what each button does and which user options are available
- **PPW2025_Version_History.pdf**
  A full release history of both panels PPW Tools and PPW 2025. The history goes back to September 2011

The .CCX file is the installable file for the panel. Proceed as follows:

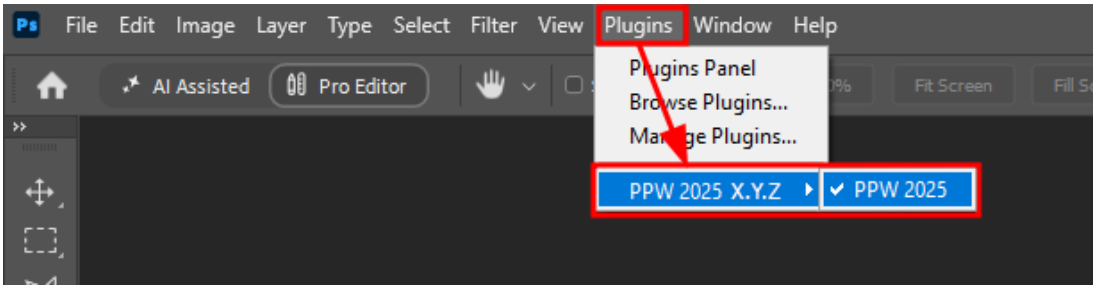
1. Double-click the .CCX file (or, if that does not work, right-click on it, and Open with > UnifiedPluginInstallerAgent). The Creative Cloud Desktop application opens
2. A warning is given about installing a non-marketplace plugin; click Install
3. Another warning follows; read carefully and if you agree, hit OK

PPW2025 is now installed.

2.3 What you get

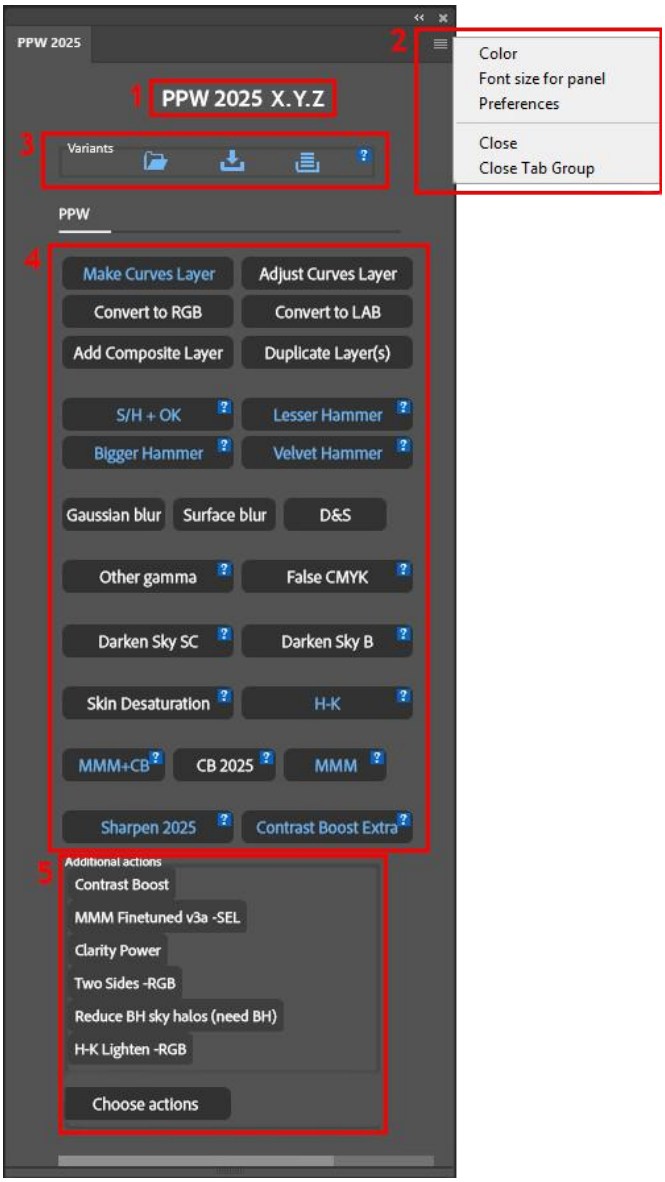
The installer delivers the following resources:

1. A Photoshop panel. If it's not already there after the installation has finished, restart Photoshop and find it under the Plugins menu:



2. A set of Photoshop actions that mimic the panel scripts with default options. The set is called "PPW2025 Action Set"; actions can be used right away from Photoshop's Actions window
3. A set of additional actions that may be useful in a color correction workflow; they are automatically made available in the panel, but a simple procedure adds or removes any user-chosen actions
4. A set of ICC profiles, required for correct functioning of one of the panel buttons
5. Extensive PDF documentation of all panel scripts

Items 3 and 4 require additional manual actions to get them to work with the panel. This is elaborated below.



2.3.1 Panel overview

The PPW2025 panel can be divided in a number of partitions (figure at right):

1. The panel title (X.Y.Z is the release number)
2. The menu
3. The Variants frame
4. The main body of the panel
5. The list of additional actions

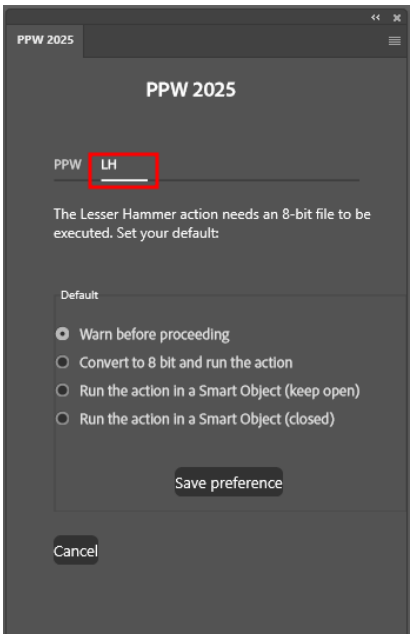
Each of these are explained in full detail in subsequent Sections of this document. Below are some general remarks that apply to the main body of the panel.

Buttons with blue text have associated options.

- A normal click applies the script with its default settings.
- Alt-click (Windows) or Option-click (MAC) does the same, but in addition shows you an options window. In some cases, you can

change certain settings and see the result on the current image. In some cases, you can save certain settings as the action's new default.

The Options window is presented in a separate tab on the panel. See figure at right for an example.



Even though the interface does not force this, the best way of working is to choose and commit (or cancel) your preferred settings *before* working further on the current image.

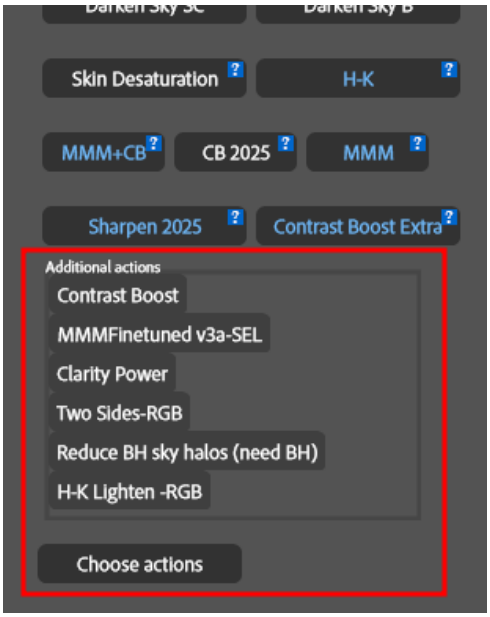
Most scripts only work in a certain colorspace (usually RGB or LAB). If the current colorspace differs from that, the script first has to do a conversion and in some cases also flatten the file's layers. You are able to configure how to perform these steps, either fully automatically or by means of a confirmation popup.

Buttons with a question mark have their own PDF documentation. See Section 2.4 for more information.

2.3.2 Installation of Additional Actions

At installation of PPW2025, a set of so-called "Additional Actions" is provided in the Additional Actions frame of the panel. This set currently contains six actions:

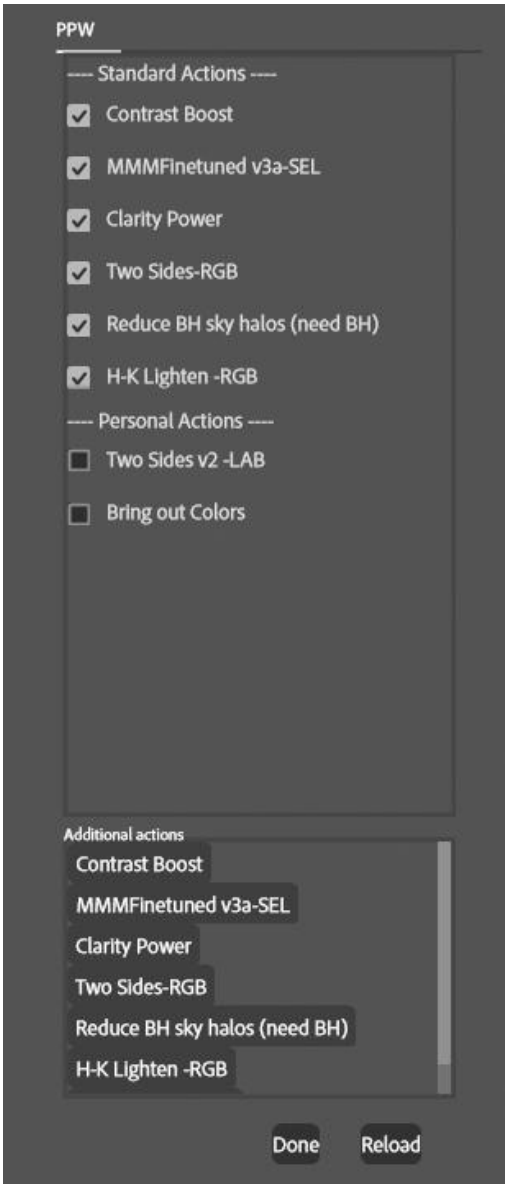
- Contrast Boost
- MMM Finetuned v3a
- Clarity Power
- Two Sides
- Reduce BH sky halos
- H-K Lighten



These actions do not exist as real Photoshop actions (they used to, but we decided to change this). They are there for free, but you are able to fully recompose this list - remove actions that you don't like, and add your own favorite ones. The procedure is as follows.

1. In Photoshop, create an action set with the name "My Personal Actions for PPW 2025".
2. Move or copy the actions that you want to make available in the panel into this set.
   (NB. If you don't have these, you can skip steps 1 and 2.)
3. Click the button **Choose actions** below the list.
   The panel will now show two lists of actions: "Standard Actions" (containing the six default actions listed above) and "Personal Actions" (containing your own actions). Figure on next page.
4. If you recently changed the contents of the "My Personal Actions for PPW 2025", click **Reload**. This refreshes the Personal Actions part of the list. (By default, all personal actions are selected.)

5. Check or uncheck the actions that you want to see or hide in the Additional Actions frame. The list is immediately refreshed.
6. When finished, click **Done**.



At any time, e.g. when you start to work on a different genre of images that requires different actions, you can recompose the list with just a few mouse clicks.

At any next installation of PPW2025, the configured action set is left untouched, with one important (and obvious) exception. If we release a new action that we consider interesting enough, it is added to the set of standard actions. Other actions in the set are left alone. You are informed about the new action by the release notes of the new version.

2.3.3 Installation of ICC profiles

The ICC profiles are installed in the following folder (substitute the actual Photoshop version for the XX):

(Windows:) ~\AppData\Roaming\Adobe\UXP\PluginsStorage\PHSP\XX\External\PPW 2025\PluginData\Profiles

(MAC:) ~\Library\Application Support\Adobe\UXP\PluginsStorage\PHSP\XX\External\PPW 2025\PluginData\Profiles

Note: *These folders are hidden by default. To reveal, in Windows Explorer, click the View menu and Show>Hidden items. In MAC Finder, Option-click-hold>Go in the menu bar.*

In order to function properly, the "Other gamma" button of the panel requires these profiles to actually be installed on your system. Unfortunately, the installer is unable to do this, so a manual step is required. Proceed as follows:

(Windows:) Open Explorer and navigate to the above directory. Select all files and click Install Profile from the right-mouse menu.

(MAC:) Open Finder and navigate to the above directory. Select all files and move or copy them into the folder ~\Library\ColorSync\Profiles. Nothing further is required.

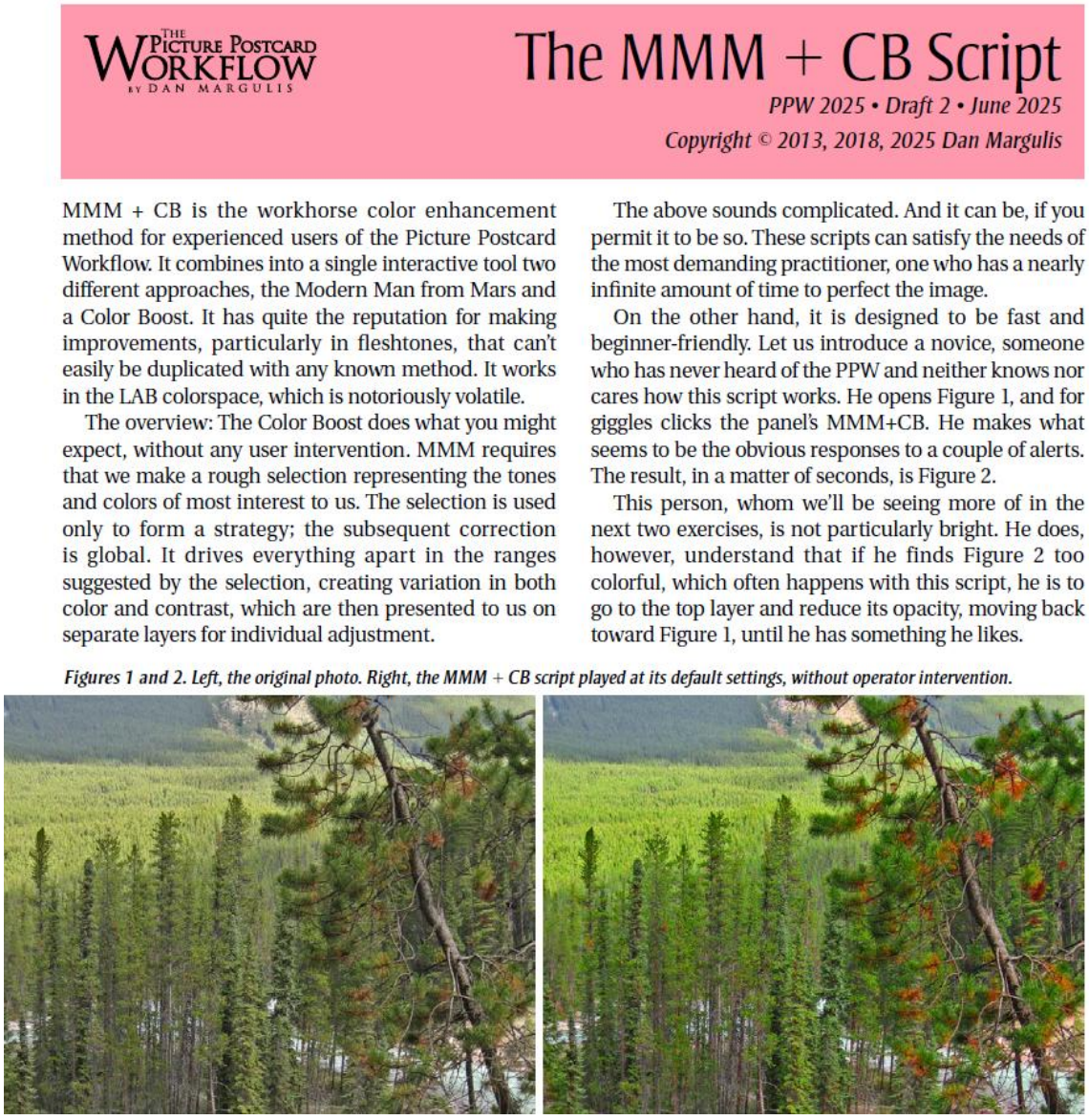
After installation of PPW2025, Photoshop (at every restart) warns you to store the color profiles (ICC files) that the "Other gamma" button uses. Once the above procedure has been followed, this warning becomes obsolete. It can be switched off from the panel menu: Preferences - PPW2025 parameters - Suppress profiles message when starting Photoshop.

2.4 Panel documentation

All panel scripts – meaning: all buttons that do not just execute a single Photoshop command – have associated PDF documentation. This documentation is easily accessible by clicking the white question mark top right on the button.

This documentation is not primarily meant to explain the simple mechanics of the button, its options, preferences etc. The current document serves that purpose. Instead, the PDF's provide a wealth of information like historical and theoretical background, what the scripts try to accomplish, their place in the context of the PPW workflow, example images and many tips and tricks.

Every time a question mark is clicked, the panel asks for permission to open the proper PDF – until you click the "Remember my choice" checkbox followed by the "Allow" button.



THE PICTURE POSTCARD WORKFLOW
BY DAN MARGULIS

The MMM + CB Script

PPW 2025 • Draft 2 • June 2025

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MMM + CB is the workhorse color enhancement method for experienced users of the Picture Postcard Workflow. It combines into a single interactive tool two different approaches, the Modern Man from Mars and a Color Boost. It has quite the reputation for making improvements, particularly in fleshtones, that can't easily be duplicated with any known method. It works in the LAB colorspace, which is notoriously volatile.

The overview: The Color Boost does what you might expect, without any user intervention. MMM requires that we make a rough selection representing the tones and colors of most interest to us. The selection is used only to form a strategy; the subsequent correction is global. It drives everything apart in the ranges suggested by the selection, creating variation in both color and contrast, which are then presented to us on separate layers for individual adjustment.

The above sounds complicated. And it can be, if you permit it to be so. These scripts can satisfy the needs of the most demanding practitioner, one who has a nearly infinite amount of time to perfect the image.

On the other hand, it is designed to be fast and beginner-friendly. Let us introduce a novice, someone who has never heard of the PPW and neither knows nor cares how this script works. He opens Figure 1, and for giggles clicks the panel's MMM+CB. He makes what seems to be the obvious responses to a couple of alerts. The result, in a matter of seconds, is Figure 2.

This person, whom we'll be seeing more of in the next two exercises, is not particularly bright. He does, however, understand that if he finds Figure 2 too colorful, which often happens with this script, he is to go to the top layer and reduce its opacity, moving back toward Figure 1, until he has something he likes.

Figures 1 and 2. Left, the original photo. Right, the MMM + CB script played at its default settings, without operator intervention.

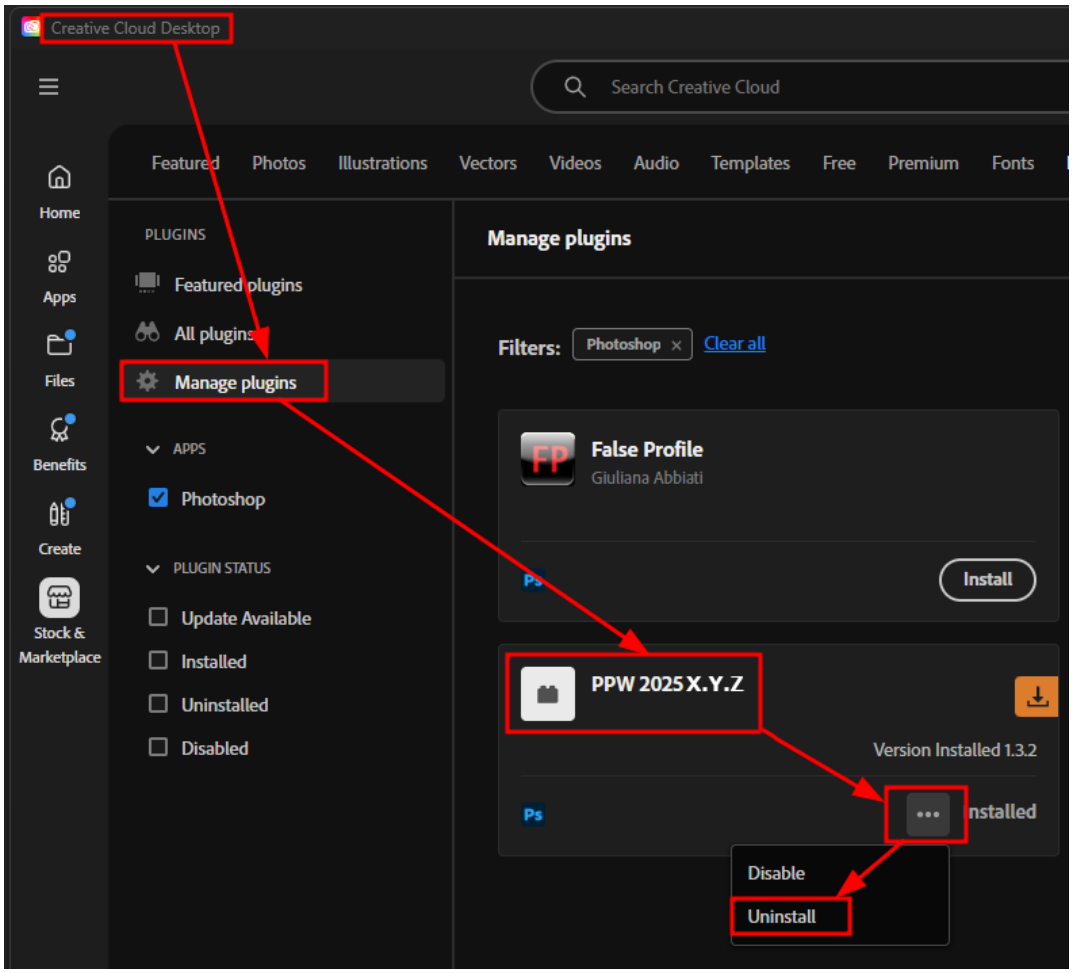
2.5 Reinstallation, upgrading and deinstallation

In case a new PPW2025 version has become available and you wish to upgrade, the recommended practice is to **not** uninstall the current version, but install the new version over the existing one instead. Only in this way will user preferences be saved and preserved in the new version. The installation procedure will automatically uninstall the old release. The procedure is identical to what's described in Section 2.2.

(Disadvantage of this scheme is that no two different official releases can co-exist on one system. This is only possible for test/debug releases.)

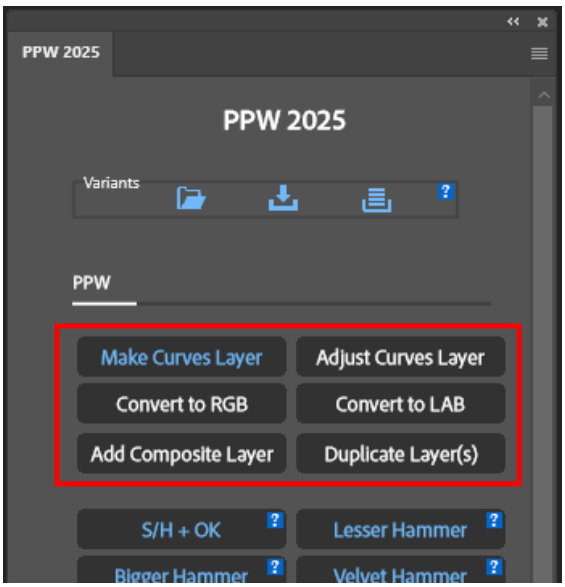
The only scenario when an explicit deinstallation may be the better option is when an existing release has become corrupt for some reason. Be aware that deinstallation causes loss of user preferences.

Deinstallation is done from the Photoshop menu: Plugins – Manage Plugins. This opens the CC Desktop. Find the PPW 2025 plugin, click '…' and Uninstall. (See figure.)



3 Panel: main buttons overview and options

This Section gives a full overview of the main panel buttons: what they do and which options are available for them. Enclosed in the download package is also a PPW Overview file, which links the buttons with a suggested workflow.



3.1 Curves, colorspaces and layers

See figure at right. These six buttons offer nothing that can't be easily accessed in Photoshop, but you may find a one-click approach more convenient. They are:

3.1.1 Make Curves Layer

Clicking this creates a new Curves adjustment layer, and invokes the traditional (pre-2008) curves dialog. This used to be a big deal, because when the Properties panel was first introduced its curves dialog was much smaller and unreasonably difficult to work with. The traditional Curves popup that PPW2025 upholds contains more controls.

Options: Option-clicking the button prompts you to name the new Curves adjustment layer.

3.1.2 Adjust Curves Layer

Clicking this opens an existing Curves adjustment layer with the same traditional dialog that Make Curves Layer does. It only works if the currently active layer is a Curves adjustment layer; it doesn't matter whether the layer had been created by the panel or not.

Options: None.

3.1.3 RGB

Executes Image: Mode>RGB. *Options:* None.

3.1.4 LAB

Executes Image: Mode>LAB. *Options:* None.

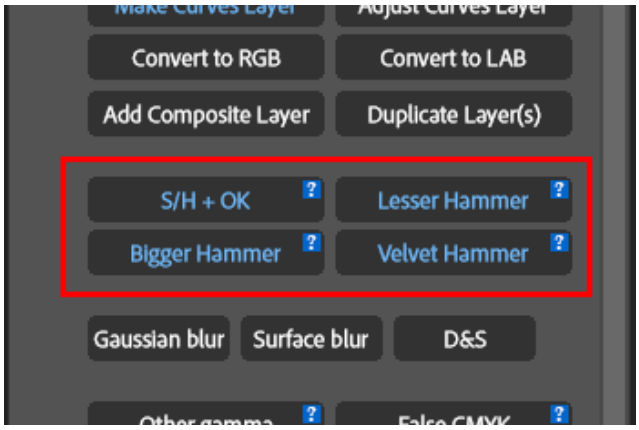
3.1.5 Add Composite Layer

Creates a composite of all visible layers. *Options:* None.

3.1.6 Duplicate Layers

Duplicates all selected layers. *Options:* None.

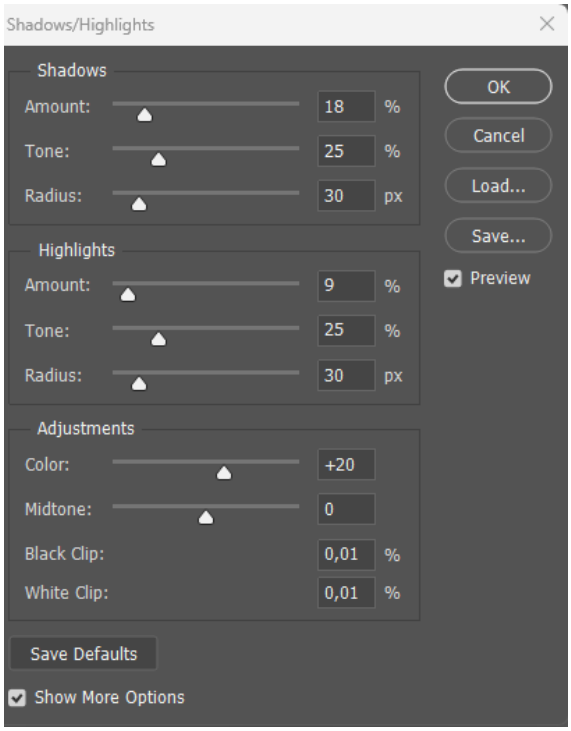
3.2 The Hammers



See figure at right. These actions address images where there is too much contrast between highlight and shadow areas. Typically this is caused by strong sunlight, but there are many other instances.

3.2.1 S/H + OK

Clicking this, the least volatile of the four buttons in the set, applies Photoshop's Image: Adjustments>Shadows/Highlights, using the workflow's recommended defaults rather than Photoshop's. See figure below what these are.



Options: Option-clicking the button allows creation of a Smart Filter, either for this file only, or as a permanent default.

3.2.2 Bigger Hammer

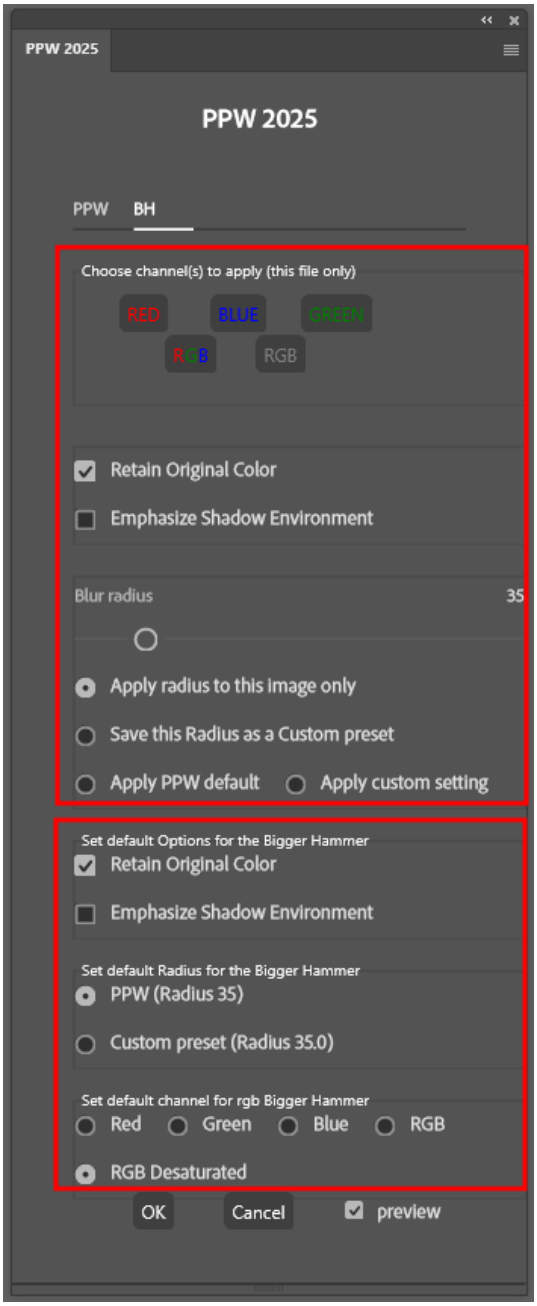
The most violent of the four buttons, this script is best for images that live or die by how much detail can be gotten in highlight areas. Typical uses might be in whitewater, or in skies where the cloud formation is very important. A 13-page PDF elaborates how it works, and what can be changed (accessed by clicking the question icon next to the Bigger Hammer button).

The action creates a layer group consisting of three (the default) or four (if "Retain original color" is enabled) layers. The real work of the Bigger Hammer action happens in the bottom layer, "Overlay Layer". Other layers in the group are meant to tone done the effect.

Strong as it is, BH is also infamous for certain side-effects, the most common of which is the appearance of halos in textureless colored image areas – notably in blue skies. Especially

targeted to eliminate such artifacts is the action “Reduce BH sky halos” which is one of the standard additional actions of the panel.

Note that Bigger Hammer requires an RGB-coded image file. You can set preferences what the panel must do otherwise, and what the panel must do if the file is multi-layer; this is explained in Section 6.3.2.



Options: Option-clicking the button opens a Pandora’s Box of variations. See figure at right: the top part controls what should happen to the current file; the bottom part what the default options must be for any next time Bigger Hammer is applied.

When you change anything in the upper red box, the action is replayed with the updated settings. This way, you can immediately judge the effect.

Changing a setting in the lower box will have no effect on the current file, but will impact any next invocation of the action.

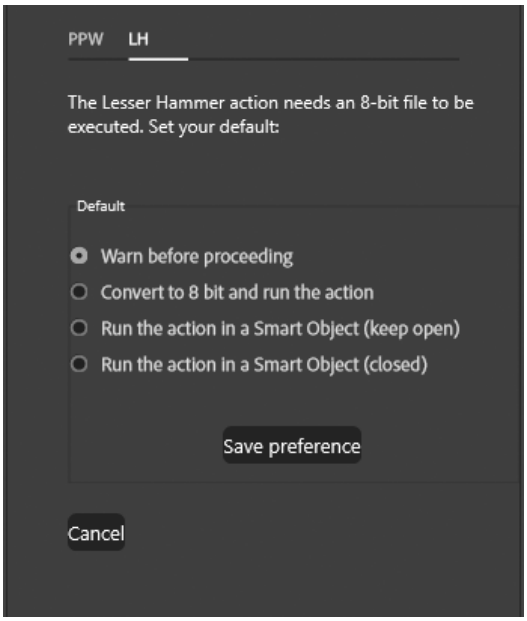
3.2.3 Lesser Hammer

An intermediate-strength script, typically not the first choice.

It creates a four-layer group which has more or less the same structure as the Bigger Hammer group. The Overlay layer does the main job, but it strongly desaturates the image and reduces contrast. The Restore Color layer is therefore vital for an acceptable result; other than for BH, there is no option to turn off this layer. The layer called Lightnening Curve in fact restores the contrast that the Overlay layer diminished.

A 15-page PDF compares it with the more commonly used Velvet Hammer.

Options: The Lesser and Velvet Hammer scripts require an 8-bit file. Option-clicking their buttons enables you to specify what to do if your file is 16-bit (figure at right).



3.2.4 Velvet Hammer

The least dangerous of the three Hammer scripts, it is particularly suitable for fleshtone images.

Its layer structure differs from the other hammers. Roughly speaking: the layer "Darkening Function" darkens light image areas, and "Lightening Function" vice versa. The action hardly affects color; it does contain a Restore Color layer but this is by default switched off. The top layer "Lightening Curve" serves the same purpose as for Lesser Hammer.

Options: As described above for Lesser Hammer.

3.3 The Blur Shortcuts



See figure at right. These filters are not scripted by us and have been included for convenience only.

3.3.1 Gaussian blur/Surface blur/D&S (Dust & Scratches)

These buttons do nothing more than access the appropriate Photoshop filter. There are no options.

The popups for these filters always open with fixed default parameter values (Threshold and Radius):

- For Gaussian Blur: Radius 1.0
- For Surface Blur: Radius 5 and Threshold 15
- For Dust & Scratches: Radius 1 and Threshold 0

Even when you apply the filter with different values, next time they are called from the panel, they are as listed above. Updates are not remembered.

3.4 False Profiles



See figure at right. Both buttons involve a change of the image's color profile. They serve a different purpose though.

3.4.1 Other Gamma

Like the Hammer scripts, this one addresses images where the difference between light and dark is excessive. Here, however, it is not assumed that highlight and/or shadow detail is critical, rather an overall smoothing effect is desired.



Clicking the button opens a second panel that provides a choice of nine gamma values: 0.75, 1.0, 1.2, 1.4, 1.7, 2.0, 2.2, 2.5 and 3.0 (figure at right). The idea is to apply a new gamma value to the file, without changing any pixel values. Normally one would want to make the image look lighter, implying a choice of 1.7 or lower. The move is normally followed by the addition of a Multiply layer with a blurred mask.

Note that applying a false profile demands converting the file to a more standard RGB, or to some other colorspace, likely LAB, shortly thereafter. Retaining a file bearing a wildly unusual profile is a recipe for disaster.

Important note. Your file must carry a profile in one of the following six RGB spaces: Adobe, ColorMatch, ProPhoto, image P3, sRGB, and Wide Gamut. If it doesn't (this includes the case when the file has no profile at all), one of the above should be assigned, or the file should be converted to one of them before running this script.

More information on how the panel behaves in case an unsupported profile is found, can be found in Section 6.3.1.

Options: None.

3.4.2 False CMYK

This one has largely been supplanted by the introduction of the H-K script. However, it can still be useful in images where color is the enemy and/or a dull, depressing look is desired. It generates a somewhat washed-out image but with an artificially created black channel that is useful for restricting color while holding shadow detail.

As with the previous script, the use of a false CMYK profile means that there will have to be a prompt subsequent conversion to another colorspace.

Options: None.

3.5 The Sky actions

Skies often appear too weak in the context of the overall image. These two actions identify and darken blue areas, hoping to create more contrast with existing clouds. They don't work if the sky is almost completely blown out. Also, intervention is needed if the image features other blue objects, since these scripts have no way to differentiate them from sky areas.



Note that these date from before the time of Artificial Intelligence. Photoshop can now generate its own convincing skies, sometimes yielding a happier result than these scripts would.

3.5.1 Darken Sky SC

This creates an alpha channel representing all blues, which is then used as a mask to multiply the underlying file. The alpha channel is saved because it may need to be edited if there are important other blues in the image. You will need to discard this channel to save the file as a JPEG.

Options: None.

3.5.2 Darken Sky B

This script works exactly like the other, except that its mask is based on the B channel of LAB, even though the script itself operates in RGB. The result is better if the cloud pattern is complex with little patches of blue peeking through. It's less effective in large cloudless areas.

Options: None.

3.6 The Desaturation Scripts

PPW's powerful color enhancement tools can create problems in objects that don't accept more color gracefully. The two actions in this group (figure at right) can help avoid them.



3.6.1 Skin Desaturation

This script is for images where fleshtones are critical. It is a pre-emptive strike against making them too colorful with subsequent PPW maneuvers. The script runs in the LAB colorspace. If your image is differently coded, a popup is shown giving you three options to proceed:

- *Continue* – this converts the image to LAB. Pixel layers survive this step; adjustment layers however must be merged or they will be discarded; Smart Objects are rasterized
- *Bring the result into this file* – the action is performed on a temporary file and the result is added to the current layer stack as a single layer called "Skin Desaturation"

- *Duplicate* – this creates a duplicate file which is converted to LAB and on which the Skin Desaturation action is then performed

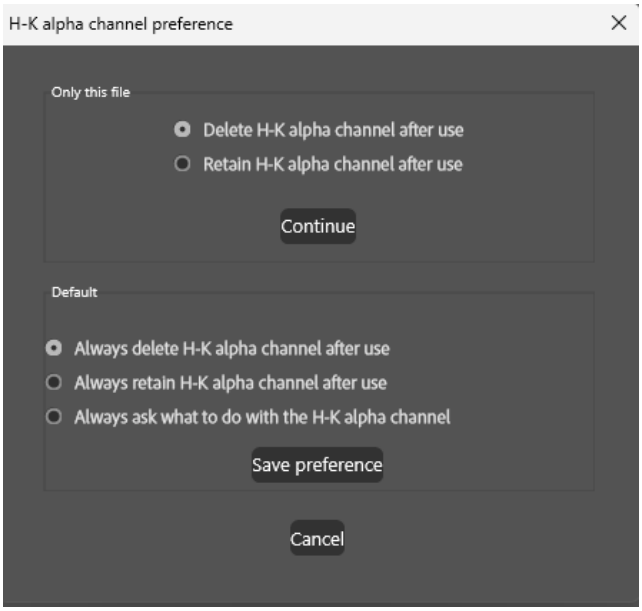
Be aware that this action cannot distinguish skin from anything else with a similar color: it will desaturate both. When this happens, some manual masking may be required to eliminate the effect where it is unwanted.

Options: None.

3.6.2 H–K

The name derives from a visual phenomenon known as the Helmholtz-Kohlrausch Effect. It states that even if a machine measurement evaluates two swatches as being of the same darkness, a human observer will believe that the less colorful of the two is darker.

The script exaggerates this effect by identifying less saturated areas and, on separate layers so that each can be adjusted individually or eliminated, darkens them and/or desaturates them further. Like many PPW steps, this may temporarily make the image look worse. It is dangerous if misused. But as the saying goes, when everything is colorful then nothing is colorful. If that describes your image, H-K followed by a color boost can be extremely effective.

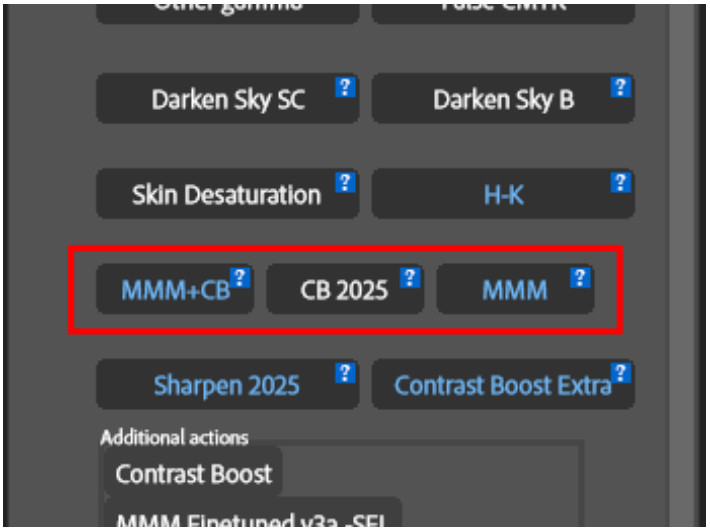


Note that H-K requires an RGB-coded image file. You can set preferences what the panel must do otherwise, and what the panel must do if the file is multi-layer; this is explained in Section 6.3.2.

Options: The script can create an alpha channel that is more or less a saturation mask.

By default, it is discarded after the script runs. By Option-clicking the button, you can direct that the alpha channel be saved, either this time only or as a permanent default (figure at right).

3.7 The Color Enhancers



These are the signature moves of the PPW. The philosophy is that it is easier to make a final adjustment when an image is too colorful than when it is not colorful enough. Everything takes place in LAB. There are three scripts, listed from easiest to most complex:

- **CB 2025:** Increased color, with masks intended to prevent it from going into undesired areas.
- **MMM:** The Modern Man From Mars, a sophisticated routine based on a user-defined advisory selection that tells Photoshop the sort of things that interest us. Based on this selection, which is then discarded, the script forces similar colors and similar darknesses apart, even if this causes a hue change in certain items; the variation is often worth the cost.
- **MMM + CB:** A combination of MMM plus an earlier version of CB 2025.

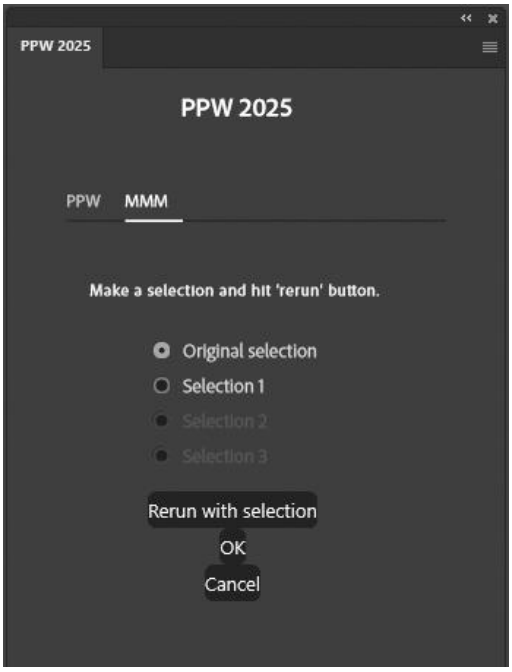
3.7.1 CB 2025

This is a more sophisticated version of the color boosting routine found in MMM + CB (see 3.7.3). It breaks the color boost into separate layers, for the A (with its own preloaded layer mask) and for the B of LAB. There are also optional layers to restrict the color boost in greens and/or blues, and a curve at the ready to change the L channel (meant to fix any remaining range or contrast problems at the end of the workflow).

Note that CB 2025 requires an LAB-coded image file. You can set preferences what the panel must do otherwise, and what the panel must do if the file is multi-layer; this is explained in Section 6.3.2.

Options: None.

3.7.2 MMM



This is a standalone version of the Modern Man From Mars routine. It tries to induce color variation rather than simply boost color like CB 2025 does. Its effect is usually not very pronounced, but MMM in combination with CB provides the real strength of PPW's color enhancements.

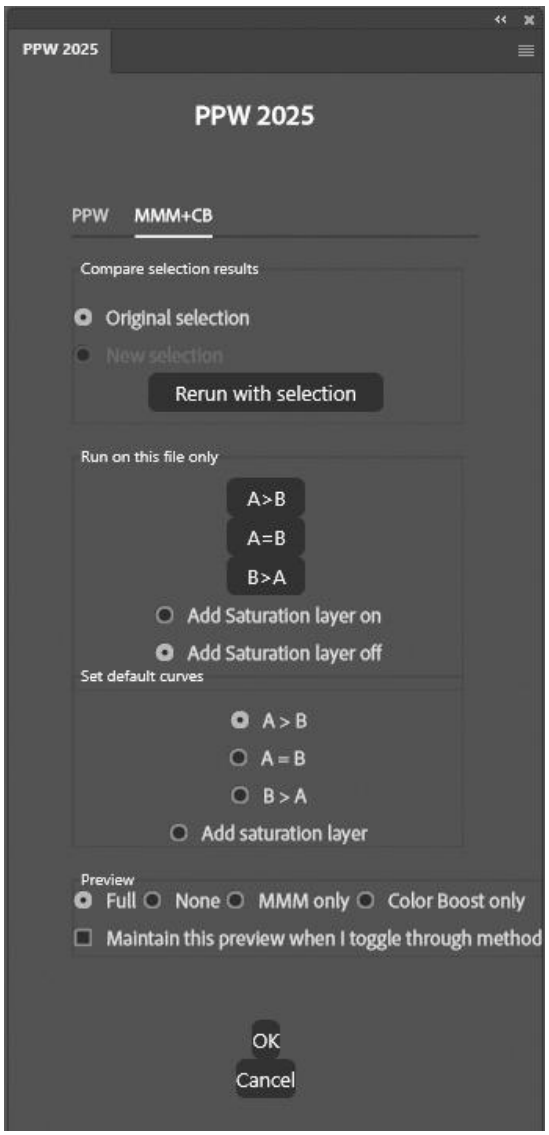
Note that MMM requires an LAB-coded image file. You can set preferences what the panel must do otherwise, and what the panel must do if the file is multi-layer; this is explained in Section 6.3.2.

Options: Option-clicking the button allows you to make up to four selections to govern the MMM routine, and then to toggle between the selections to decide which one to use. Very

effective in fashion images, where the fleshtone balance is critical. (Figure on previous page.)

3.7.3 MMM + CB

This script executes both MMM and an earlier variant of CB 2025 in one go. One layer group is created, combining the functions of both actions. The Color Boost part is a single Curves layer in which the color channels are strengthened by steep curves of the A and B. The layers that restrict the color moves of the greens and the blues are not repeated.



This can be considered the workhorse script for most images. It requires an advisory selection for the MMM part. You can adjust the amount of MMM and of CB in many different ways.

Like the stand-alone MMM and CB 2025, the combined script also requires an LAB-coded image file. You can set preferences for what the panel must do otherwise, and what the panel must do if the file is multi-layer; this is explained in Section 6.3.2.

Options: Option-clicking the button provides a number of variations to run the action (figure at right):

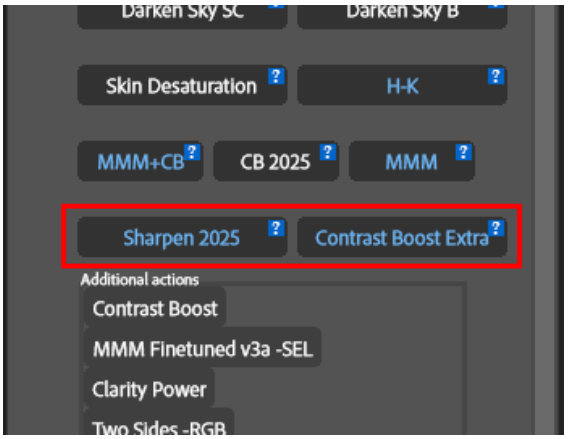
1. It permits a comparison of two different MMM advisory selections;
2. It allows some modification of how the Color Boost portion functions: giving more emphasis to the A channel, more to the B, or use equal intensity for both;
3. It allows to add a Saturation-only layer, to enable you to manipulate saturation isolated from hue;
4. To help evaluating the action's result, it enables you to view the effects of the MMM part only, the CB part only, none or both.

For items 2 and 3, you can specify your preferences for the current file only, or as the action's default.

3.8 Sharpening and Contrast Boost

3.8.1 Sharpen 2025

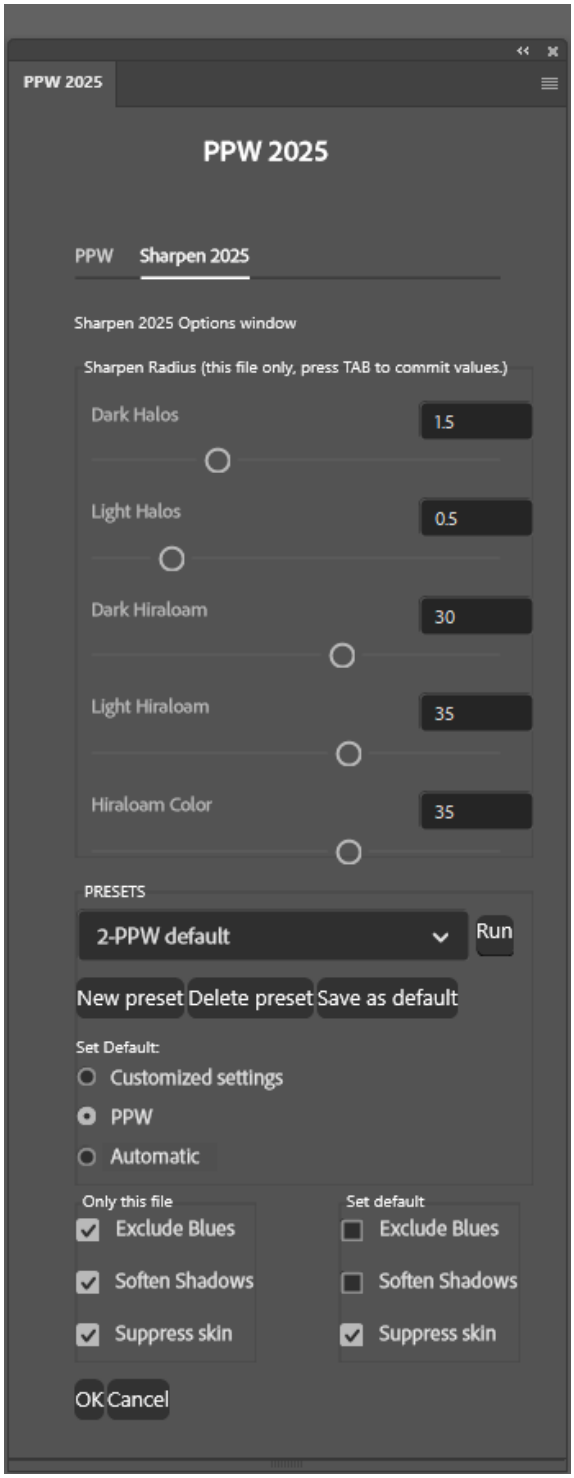
The most complex of all the PPW scripts, this one works in LAB, where it applies five different sharpening routines, and three different exclusion possibilities. Everything is generated by halo map, which can be modified easily. Most users will take the simple path of adjusting overall opacity, but each kind of sharpen can be modified individually.



On top of the layer group, a layer called *Unsharpened merged* is added, allowing you to quickly compare sharpened and unsharpened versions, but also enabling a local reduction of the effect by painting in the associated mask.

Note that the Sharpen action requires an LAB-coded image file. You can set preferences what the panel must do otherwise, and what the panel must do if the file is multi-layer; this is explained in Section 6.3.3.

Options: (Figure at right.) Option-clicking the button allows adjustment of halo size for each type of sharpen, to be applied one time, saved as a permanent default, or saved as a preset that can be re-loaded into future images. It also permits the inclusion or exclusion, either one-time or as a permanent default, of any or all of the Exclude Blues, Soften Shadows, and Suppress Skin layers.



A lot is possible customizing the five halo sizes of the panel. Here are the mechanics.

First, you can set a default. Possible choices are:

- **Customized settings** – this is the same as the Sharpen Default Preset; halo sizes for this choice are saved when you click "Save as default"
- **PPW** – this is a fixed set of halo sizes (top to bottom: 1.5, 0.5, 30, 35, 35)
- **Automatic** – this lets the panel choose halo sizes based on image size:
  less then 5 MP: Weak preset (1.2, 0.4, 30, 25, 30)
  5 to 15 MP: Default preset (1.5, 0.5, 30, 35, 35)
  15 to 25 MP: Strong preset (2, 0.7, 45, 40, 45)
  over 25 MP: Extra Strong preset (2.5, 1, 70, 60, 70)

Second, you can save one or more presets. When you want to keep an established set of halo sizes for later usage, click "New preset". A popup is shown asking you to enter the name of the preset. Click OK and you have the current set of halo sizes ready to reuse in any future image. Click Save as default and this is the new default – meaning the current halo sizes will be used automatically for any next image, provided that "Customized settings" is check in the Set Default frame.

When you judge that a custom preset is no longer needed, select it from the drop-down and click "Delete preset".

And **third**, obviously it is possible to fine-tune any of the five halo sizes, by manually entering a value or by moving the accompanying slider. Be aware that any new value is only processed when you move out of the entry field or release the slider.

Note that the selection or deselection of any of the optional layers (bottom part of the panel) is not included in a sharpening preset as described above.

3.8.2 Contrast Boost Extra

This powerful action strengthens contrast on a local but large-radius scale. Roughly speaking: darker spots in lighter areas will be made even darker and vice versa. The default radius is 100 pixels, but right after the action has finished, a panel is shown in which you can update that (figure at right). Be aware that the smaller the radius, the greater the risk of unpleasant halos, especially in flat areas like blue skies. The action provides a second layer "Reduce sky halos" which attempts to remove such halos (hidden by default).



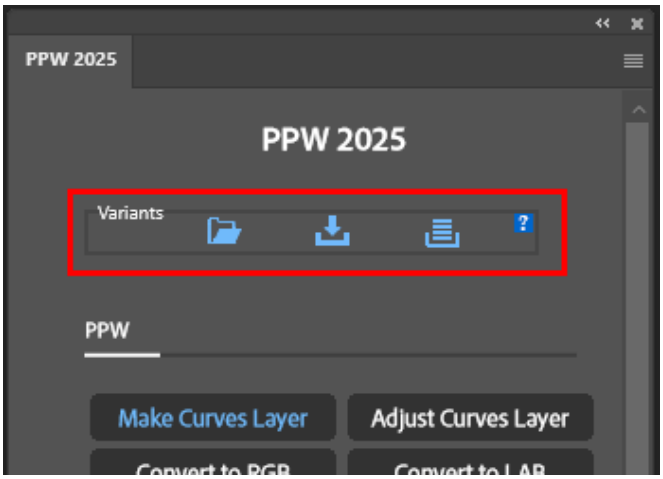
The most logical place for this script in the workflow is together with (or instead of) the channel blending phase, but you are free to run it after the color enhancements steps and before sharpening.

Options: The script always presents a panel to update the Radius. You can then try different Radius values by moving the slider or updating the value in the entry field and hitting the Go button.

"OK" then serves as a commit.

4 Variants

This Section is aimed at power users who have adapted the Picture Postcard Workflow in a nontraditional way. The PPW as originally proposed was much speedier than existing methods because certain liberties were taken. It was generally assumed that if the image was important enough, these shortcuts would be eliminated and the correction time increase.



Experience has shown, however, that if time allows it's more effective to do several quick versions from scratch and then explore how to best to blend them. We use the term *Variants* to denote such alternate versions.

4.1 Variants panel buttons

The Variants structure of PPW2025 gives a framework for organizing these elements efficiently. Everything is controlled by three small icons (buttons) at the top of the panel (figure above). From left to right, their meaning is as follows:

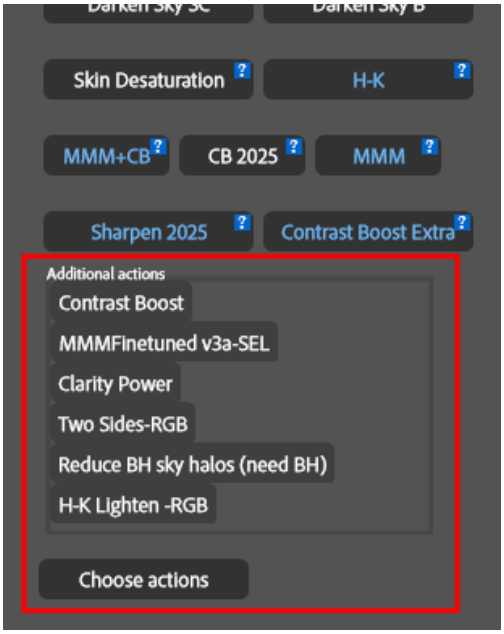
Action	Description
	Show the location of the Variants folder for the current image. This only works if at least one Variant has already been saved for the image.
	Save current image as flattened Variant. The panel will automatically assign it a sequence number.
Alt- 	Save current image as layered Variant. The panel will automatically assign it a sequence number.
Shift- 	Save current image as flattened Variant. The panel will ask to enter a custom name.
Alt-Shift- 	Save current image as layered Variant. The panel will ask to enter a custom name.
	Load all saved Variant files for this image to a new layered file (stack)
Alt- 	Select which saved Variant files for this image to load to a new layered file (stack)

4.2 Variants File Management

Variants File Management – where to store and retrieve Variant files - can be configured from the menu by clicking Preferences – Variants Preferences. This is fully explained in Section 6.3.4.

5 Additional Actions

See Section 2.3.2 for a description how to organize the Additional Actions set on the bottom of the panel.



The figure at right shows the list of additional actions as they are delivered as part of the PPW2025 installation. You are free to remove any of these and add your own favorites (the procedure for this is outlined in Section 2.3.2); below we provide short explanations of the six default actions.

5.1 Actions overview

- **Contrast Boost** – A simpler and less powerful variant of the Contrast Boost Extra script. This action applies Photoshop's Unsharp Mask filter with the following parameters:
  - Amount 40%
  - Radius 100 pixels
  - Threshold 0 levels

  The action is run in a Smart Object, so that you can update these parameters to taste. An extra layer "Reduce sky halos" is added – in cases where the action causes unwanted halos in plain blue areas like skies, this layer can be switched on to reduce those halos.
- **MMM Finetuned v3a** – A variant of the MMM script, except that the effect is limited to areas that more closely resemble the initial advisory selection contrast- and color-wise. Like the original MMM, this action needs a selection; unlike it, it won't work if the full image was selected (in that case, you should revert to the normal MMM). The script automatically converts to LAB if needed. In case of a multi-layered file, the action asks to flatten or not.

  It makes perfect sense to run the action multiple times for one image. For a landscape image, it could be invoked for greens, browns (tree trunks, earth) and blues (sky).

  This script does not provide layers that restrict the effect on greens or blues – we assume that the initial selection defines the restriction of affected colors.
- **Clarity Power** – An emulation of Camera Raw's Clarity and Texture controls combined. This script creates five layers, each contributing a bit to the total effect. Contrast is boosted on a very local level (as opposed to the Contrast Boost script which operates on a high radius. One could say that Clarity Power is closer to sharpening than to Contrast Boost.

  Of course, every layer can be manipulated freely to change the final effect: switch on/off, change opacities or apply different masks.
- **Two Sides** – A simple script that reduces contrast between lights and darks of an image. The script creates two Curves layers:
  - one lightening the image with a layer mask that targets darker areas
  - one darkening the image with a layer mask that targets lighter areas

  This script is a quick alternative to the more complex (and more powerful) hammer actions. Advantage is that the lightening and the darkening effects can be manipulated independently.

- **Reduce BH sky halos (need BH)** – A script that can be invoked right after Bigger Hammer and tries to counter the halos in skies that BH often introduces. The action utilizes a layer "Unblurred" which was created by the BH script. (If this layer is no longer present, the action will immediately stop with an error.)
  A new layer "Reduce BH sky halos layer" is created. Of course the action cannot distinguish skies from other blue areas; be aware that the effect in non-sky blues can be counterproductive. The easiest way to solve this issue is by directly painting on the mask of the new layer. Note that the Unblurred layer that BH created is retained.
- **H-K Lighten** – This action applies the H-K script in a slightly different way. The "original" H-K darkens and/or desaturates near-neutrals while making few adjustments to more saturated colors and to shadow areas. H-K Lighten behaves similarly, except that instead of darkening near-neutrals, it lightens more saturated colors. This difference is found on the H-K Effect layer only; for the Color Only layer both do approximately the same thing.
  The rule of thumb is that the H-K *script* is generally preferred. The H-K Lighten *action* often works better for images with important dark saturated colors (think deep, rich reds or blues).

5.2 Postfixes and history states

An action name can be provided with a suffix that limits its execution. The following suffixes are supported:

- -RGB – the action can only run in the RGB colorspace
- -LAB – the action can only run in the LAB colorspace
- -CMYK – the action can only run in the CMYK colorspace
- -SEL – the action can only run if an active selection exists

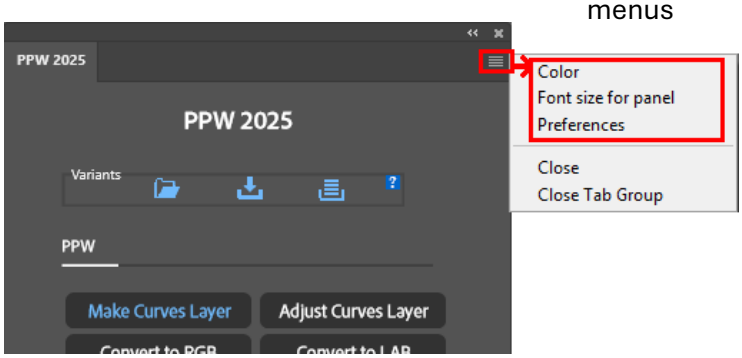
If a supplied condition has not been met, the action will show an error and not start. You are supposed to fix the problem manually (e.g. convert to the required colorspace). Note that an action that does the necessary colorspace conversion by itself does not need a suffix.

Be aware that only one suffix per action is allowed. We do not support actions that both need to run in a certain colorspace and need a selection.

Last but not least, an action that is executed from the panel always takes only one history state. A single ctrl-Z undoes the full action. This is independent of the Photoshop setting on the Playback Options popup "Create a single history state."

6 The menus

This Section discusses all panel menus and associated options. The menu is accessed from the “hamburger” menu top right of the panel window. The actions “Close” and “Close Tab Group” are standard Photoshop and need no explanation here.



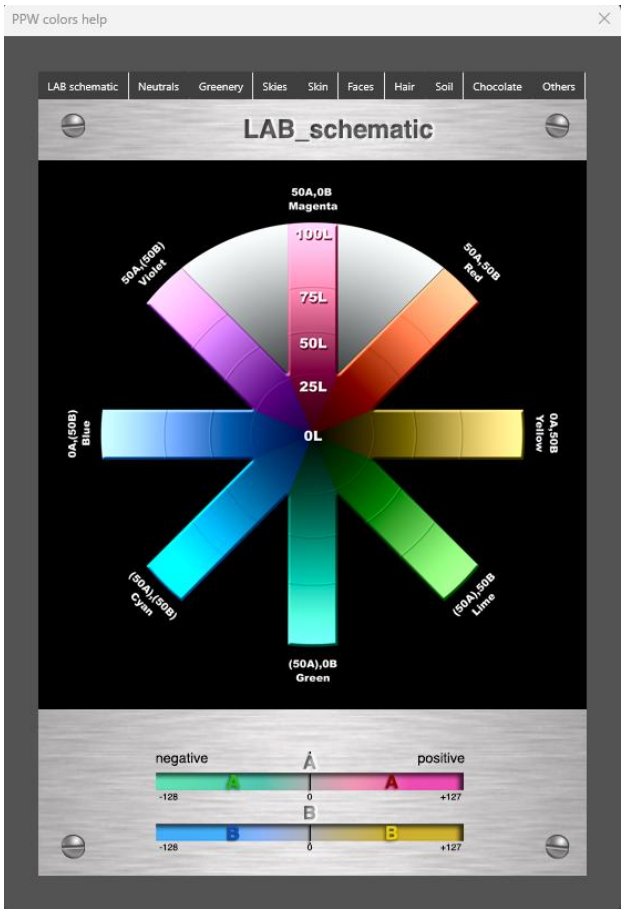
The PPW2025-specific menu actions are:

- Color
- Font size for panel
- Preferences

Each of these will be detailed in the final parts of this manual. Most of this concerns Preferences, with a number of submenus.

6.1 Color

The option “Color” on the main menu opens a separate window containing color reference values in the LAB color space. The front page is a schematic overview of the primary LAB colors, all other pages cover one category of image elements like sky, greenery, skin etc.



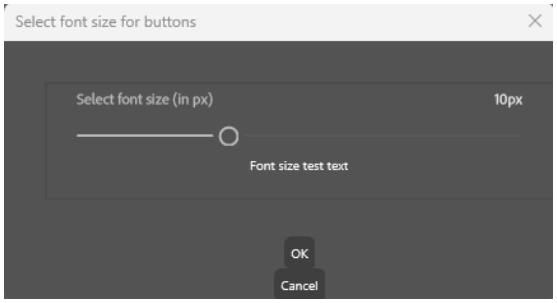


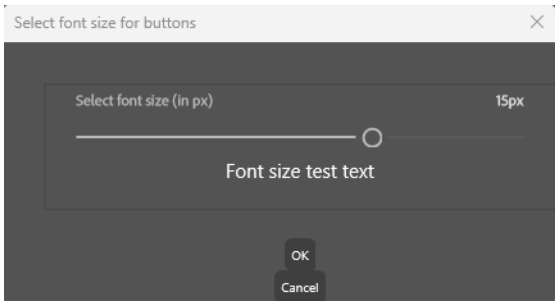
The window can be kept open for quick verification of color values while other Photoshop work continues.

6.2 Font size for panel

This option enables you to change the font size of button labels and other text elements of the panel. The default is 10 pixels. This may look fine on a monitor with low resolution, but may be annoyingly small on high-res displays. When invoked, the action shows a simple popup with a slider. Possible values are anything between 5 and 20 pixels.

Below figures show the difference between font sizes 10 and 15. The accompanying text "Font size test text" is redrawn with every slider move, enabling you to preview the effect of a certain value.

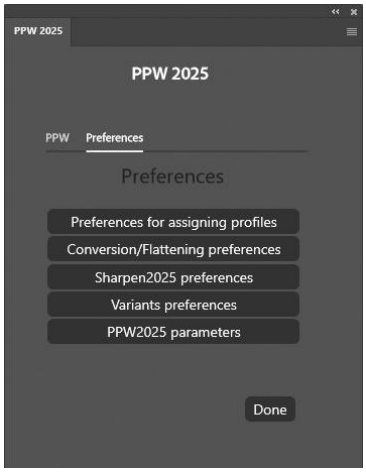




There is no protection against setting a font size so big that button labels do not fit any more. In that case, texts are simply cut off.

6.3 Preferences

When you click this menu item, a subpanel with five buttons is opened (figure at right), each of which enables you to control certain panel behavior. We will discuss each in the following Sections.



6.3.1 Preferences for assigning profiles

The settings for assigning profiles are related to the Other Gamma script of the panel. To be able to correctly assign a different gamma value to an image, the panel needs to:

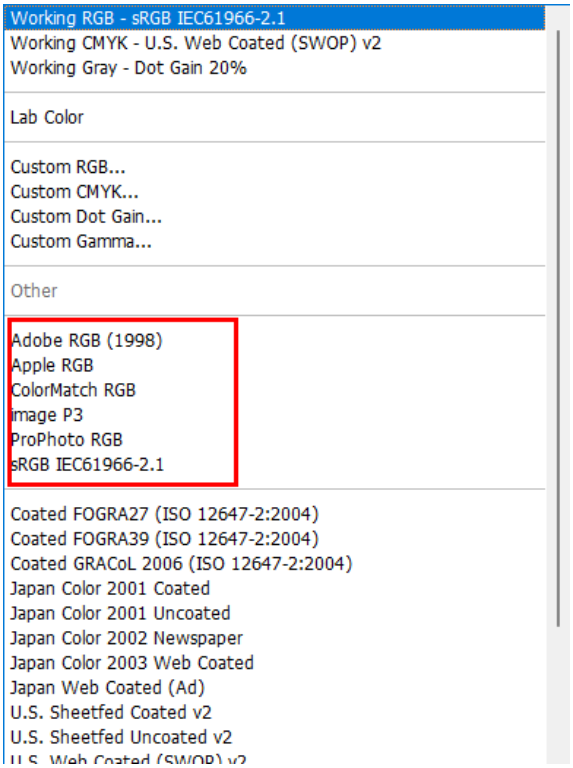
- Recognize that the image bears one of the six RGB definitions that the script currently supports
- Maintain and use a complete set of possible alternate profiles

If an image's current profile is not one of the marked profiles in the figure on the next page, the Other Gamma script cannot function. (This includes images that have no profile assigned at all.) For those cases, it needs to convert to one of the six "valid" profiles. This conversion can be done in two different ways:

1. Inform the user about this and present a choice which profile to convert to
2. Perform the conversion automatically; you will need to specify the preferred choice

The choice for one or the other can be done by the "Don't show Conversion Window" checkbox. Select it: conversion is done automatically – to the profile that you then select on the same Preferences tab, in the frame titled "Profiles". Deselect it: you need to make the required choice whenever it is needed.

In addition to the profile conversion settings, the panel contains a checkbox that tells the panel whether to automatically add a Curves Adjustment layer in Multiply mode. This is in fact a standard part of the Other Gamma procedure: you are then supposed to manually copy a suitable channel into the Curves layer's mask.

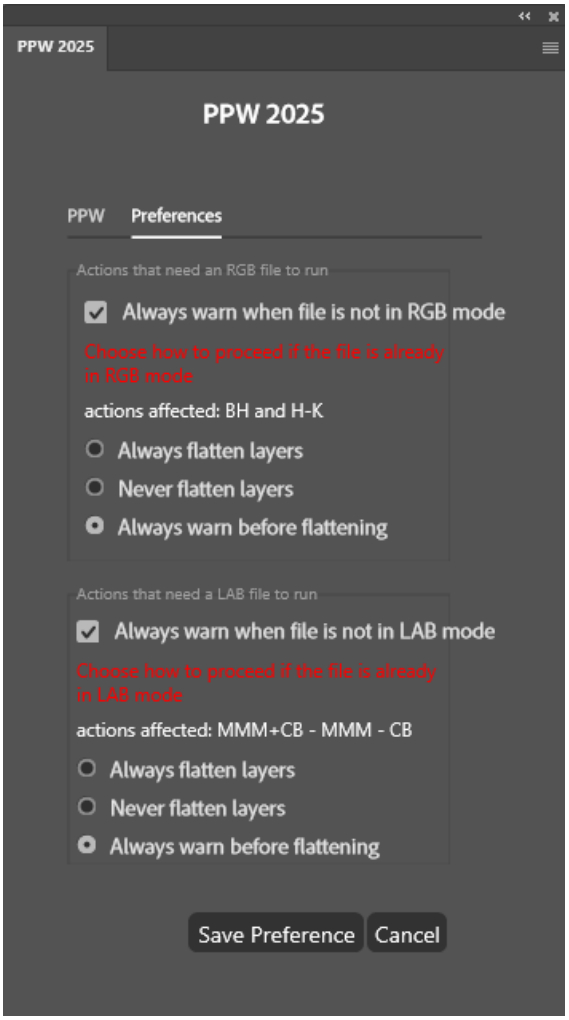


6.3.2 Conversion/Flattening preferences

This panel allows you to specify what should happen when an image's colorspace (RGB, LAB or something else) differs from what an invoked script needs.

The following table specifies to which actions this applies:

Action	Required Colorspace
Bigger Hammer	RGB
H-K	RGB
MMM	LAB
Color Boost	LAB
MMM+CB	LAB



Apart from the required conversion, a flatten step may also be desired before the action starts.

The Conversion/Flattening preferences panel contains all possible settings to configure this behavior. They are:

Always warn when file is not in <colorspace> – when checked, you are warned before a conversion takes place; in that case, you will be presented three options:

- Continue: flatten and convert
- Duplicate: run the action on a copy (the current image remains untouched)
- Cancel

Always flatten layers – when checked, the involved script will automatically flatten, regardless of the current colorspace;

Never flatten layers – when checked, the script will never flatten but retain the current layer stack; an exception is when a colorspace conversion needs to take place (see remark below);

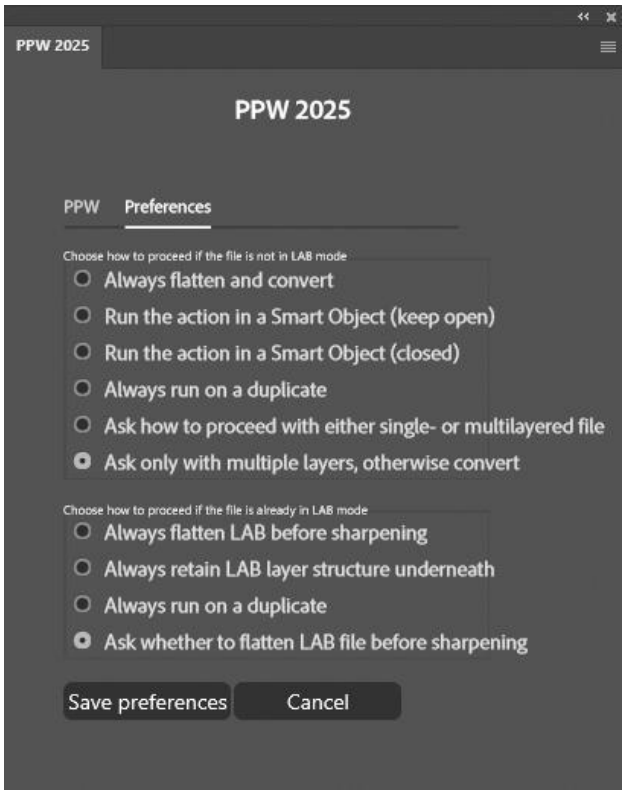
Always warn before flattening – when checked, the script will ask you what to do with the layer structure:

- Flatten and continue
- Continue with layer structure retained (but see remark below)
- Duplicate (run the action plus the flattening on a copy)
- Cancel

Remark. An important note about the combination of the two situations (layered image in an incorrect colorspace). Even if you have both "Warn when file is not in <correct colorspace>" switched on, and "Always warn before flattening" selected, only one popup is shown when the involved button is clicked, namely the one used for the colorspace conversion. In other words, when a colorspace conversion needs to be done, layers cannot be retained and the image will always be flattened.

6.3.3 Sharpen2025 preferences

This panel has a similar purpose to the one described in the previous Section: it defines what must happen when the Sharpen2025 action is called while the current open file either is not coded in LAB and/or contains multiple layers.



Let's go through each of these cases.

The Sharpen2025 action runs in the LAB colorspace. This requires a conversion whenever the current colorspace is something else. The first block of options in the Preferences panel (figure at right) provides six choices what to do in that case.

(NB. This block also covers the combination of the two cases: a multi-layered file in a non-LAB colorspace.)

1. *Always flatten and convert*. Do not ask, just flatten the image and convert to LAB.
2. *Run the action in a Smart Object (keep open)*. This option adds a composite layer "Sharpen2025" to the current layer stack, converts it to a Smart Object, opens it and does the conversion and sharpening routine there. The Smart Object remains open for further refinements before it is saved.
3. *Run the action in a Smart Object (closed)*. The same procedure as the previous item, but the Smart Object is automatically saved. If changes are required, you will need to reopen it.
4. *Always run on a duplicate*. The current image remains unchanged; the script creates a duplicate in Photoshop called "<current filename>_SHARPEN 2025", flattens and converts that and performs the sharpening.

5. *Ask how to proceed with either single- or multilayered file*. When choosing this option, you will be asked how to proceed each time. The possible choices then are exactly the same as the previous four listed options.
6. *Ask only with multiple layers, otherwise convert*. This is a combination of the previous and the first option: for a single-layered file, convert automatically, for a multi-layered file ask how to proceed.

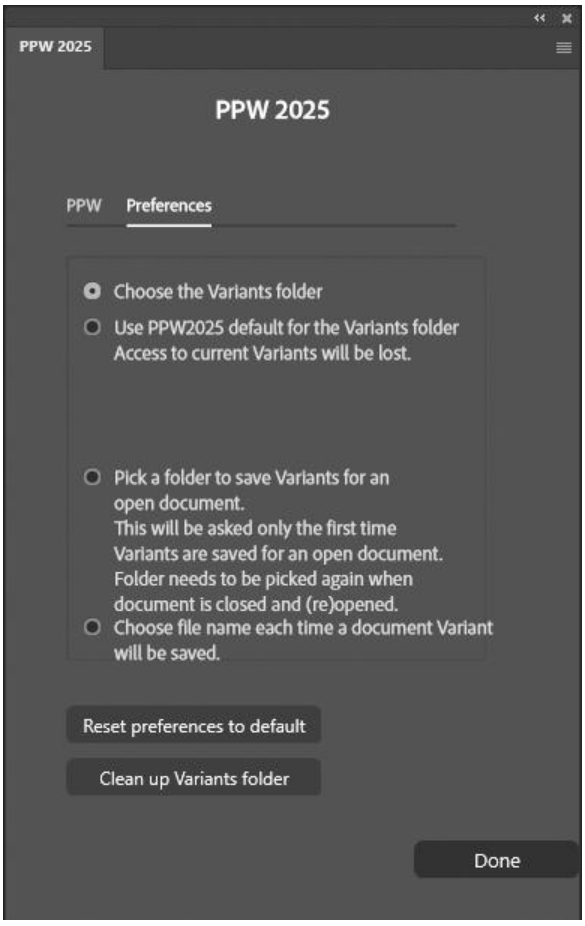
The second block defines what to do when the current colorspace is LAB and the file is multi-layered.

1. *Always flatten LAB before sharpening*. Flatten the image before sharpening.
2. *Always retain LAB layer structure underneath*. The file is not flattened; the Sharpen2025 layers are built on top of the existing layer stack.
3. *Always run on a duplicate*. The current image remains unchanged; the script creates a duplicate in Photoshop called "<current filename>_SHARPEN 2025", flattens that and performs the sharpening.
4. *Ask whether to flatten LAB file before sharpening*. When choosing this option, you will be asked how to proceed each time. The possible choices are the same as the previous three listed options.

A special mention for the situation when Sharpen2025 is called on a single-layered LAB-coded image. No user preference applies in that case: the sharpening is simply done on the current image file.

6.3.4 Variants preferences

All elements of this panel (figure at right) apply to the Variants file management.



The full documentation for Variants (accessible by clicking the question mark icon on the marked box in the figure above) contains a precise description of the Variants file management. For convenience, this description is repeated here.

For technical reasons, the policy where to store Variants is different for PPW2025 than it was for PPW5. In PPW5, they were always stored in a subfolder of the current image's source folder. Photoshop's file access rules no longer allow this, unless the user gives explicit permission. So you will need to specify which folder to use. For that purpose, the software offers a panel that can be accessed from the menu by clicking Preferences – Variants Preferences (see figure at right).

For good understanding of the available configuration options on this panel, note that Variant files are always stored as:

<Variants root folder>\<Variants image folder>\<Variant file name>.

Each of the three components in this path can be configured from the Variants Preferences panel. Below explains how.

- *Choose the Variants folder*
  This option is available even if no document is open. Clicking it enables you to set a **root folder** under which Variants will be stored. A logical choice could be C:\Users\<username>\Pictures\Variants (Windows) or \Users\<username>\Pictures\Variants (MAC). Note that the folder must exist, it will not be created by the panel.
  Be aware that actual Variant files will be stored in a subfolder; for instance, if you specify C:\Variants here, a Variant of an image file called Italy-32.jpg may be stored under C:\Variants\Italy-32_Variants.
  When you click this option while a Variants folder had already been configured before, a warning popup is shown.
- *Use PPW2025 default for the Variants folder; Access to current Variants will be lost*
  This is similar to the previous option, but leaves the actual choice of the Variants folder to the panel. The default is defined as *(XX being the current Photoshop version)*:
  (Windows) C:\Users\<username>\AppData\Roaming\Adobe\UXP\PluginsStorage\PHSP\XX\External\PPW 2025\PluginData\Variants
  (MAC) \Users\<username>\Library\Application Support\Adobe\UXP\PluginsStorage\PHSP\XX\External\PPW 2025\PluginData\Variants
- *Pick a folder to save Variants for an open document*
  Checking this option will have the effect that a user-specified **image folder** under the configured Variants folder is created as soon as you request to store the first variant of an open document.
  Imagine again that you are processing Italy-32.jpg and want to store its first Variant.
  - If this option is unchecked, the Variant is stored in <Variants root folder>\Italy-32_Variants.
  - If the option is checked, a popup titled “Please enter folder name for Variants” is shown. If you enter “Italia”, the Variant is stored in <Variants root folder>\Italia. Any subsequent Variants of the same image file will be stored in the same folder without confirmation, *as long as the document remains open in Photoshop*. When the image file is closed and reopened and you want to store another Variant, the image folder needs to be respecified.
- *Choose file name each time a document Variant will be saved*
  Checking this option has the effect that you are asked for the **file name** to use every time a Variant needs to be stored. This overrules the default file naming that the panel follows.
  Again, imagine you are working with Italy-32.jpg and want to store a Variant.
  - If this option is unchecked, the Variant is stored as <Variants root folder>\<Variants image folder>\Italy-32_v_X.psd (where X is a sequence number).
  - If the option is checked, a popup “Please enter name for Variant” is shown. If you enter Italia1, the Variant is stored as <Variants root folder>\<Variants image folder>\Italia1.psd. When an already existing file is specified, an error is shown and no Variant is saved.

- *Reset preferences to default*
  This unchecks the previous two options but not the Variants root folder. Given the example image file Italy-32.jpg, any subsequent Variant file is saved in: <Variants root folder>\Italy-32_Variants\Italy-32_v_X.psd.
  The previously configured Variants root folder remains unchanged.
- *Clean up Variants folder*
  This button opens a confirmation popup that contains a list of image folders under the currently active Variants root folder. All entries of this list are gray, meaning deselected. You can click entries for which Variants need no longer be kept. Clicking OK will remove all selected folders and containing Variant files. *Use with care!!*

6.3.5 PPW2025 parameters

This panel is reserved for miscellaneous settings. Currently it contains only one:



Suppress profiles message when starting Photoshop
The Other Gamma script of the panel needs a set of prefab color profiles installed on your system. The procedure for this is explained in Section 2.3.3 *Installation of ICC profiles*.

To inform you about this, a warning message is displayed every time Photoshop restarts. This warning can be switched off by checking the “Suppress profiles message when starting Photoshop” checkbox.