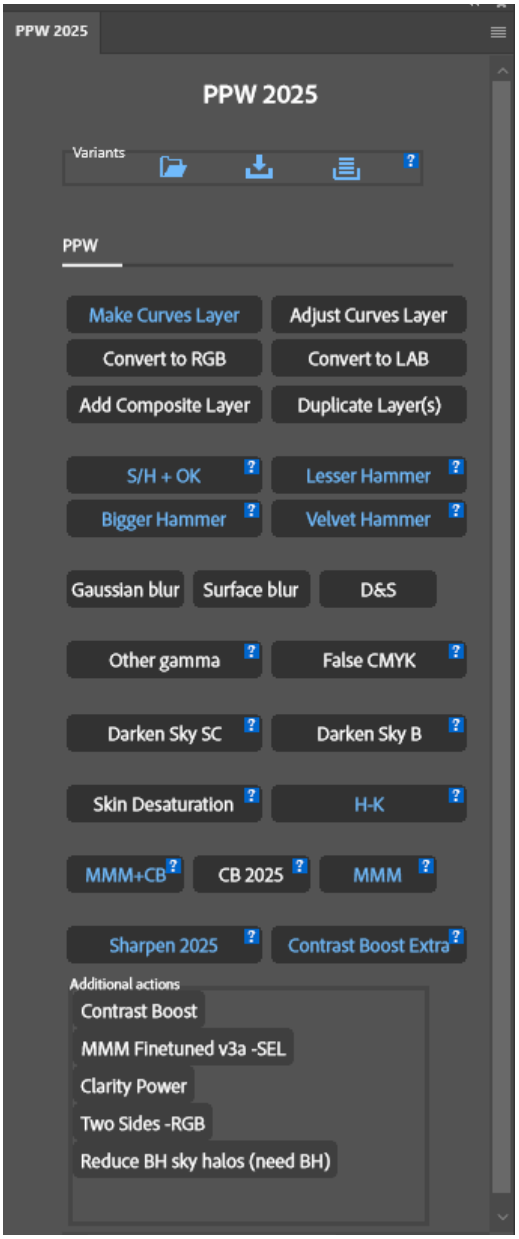
A Classic Revived



Welcome to PPW2025, a resurrection of one of the most powerful and popular image correction tools of the pre-Creative Cloud era—the PPW Panel, based on the teachings of Dan Margulis.

The previous panel went through five major releases, beginning in 2011. New features were added each time, but the updates were also needed because the goalposts were constantly moving. Once Apple silicon was introduced into Macintosh products, Photoshop would no longer recognize the panel at all, except in Rosetta mode. In 2018, after the release of panel v.5, we regretfully stopped development, because the panel would have to be rewritten from scratch to comply with new requirements. By 2022 we no longer supported the product, although many diehard users found workarounds to keep the panel functioning.

The PPW Panel has always been freeware. Dedicated groups worldwide have proven willing to develop it without compensation. The original versions were prepared through 2018 by an Italian team led by Giuliana Abbiati. PPW2025 hails from The Netherlands, programmed by Bart Mellenbergh, with strong support from Gerald Bakker. It has been written from scratch in compliance with Adobe's Unified Extensibility Platform, which means that it should not be obsoleted by future versions of Photoshop.

As always, the panel is designed as a command center for those wishing to incorporate parts or all of Dan's Picture Postcard Workflow. Certain buttons are merely convenient shortcuts for moves that can be made elsewhere. The real power is in the signature scripts of the workflow, particularly those involving color enhancement and sharpening.

The complexity of the sharpening routine exemplifies how the panel caters both to the beginner and the most sophisticated power user. It's perfectly reasonable to apply the script without modification, and simply reduce its opacity if the sharpen seems excessive. But an expert can modify each individual step with great accuracy.

This is why the panel has on-board PDF documentation of all its functions, amounting to hundreds of pages. To activate each, click the question-mark icon by the appropriate button. Recently, all documentation has been revised and updated to cover the latest enhancements.

From the first release of PPW2025 (dated March 2025), we aimed to add more power. The actions now listed as Sharpen 2025 and Color Boost 2025 are significantly improved compared to their ancestors. Two new Contrast Boost scripts have been added. It is our intention to keep adding and improving functionality in future releases.

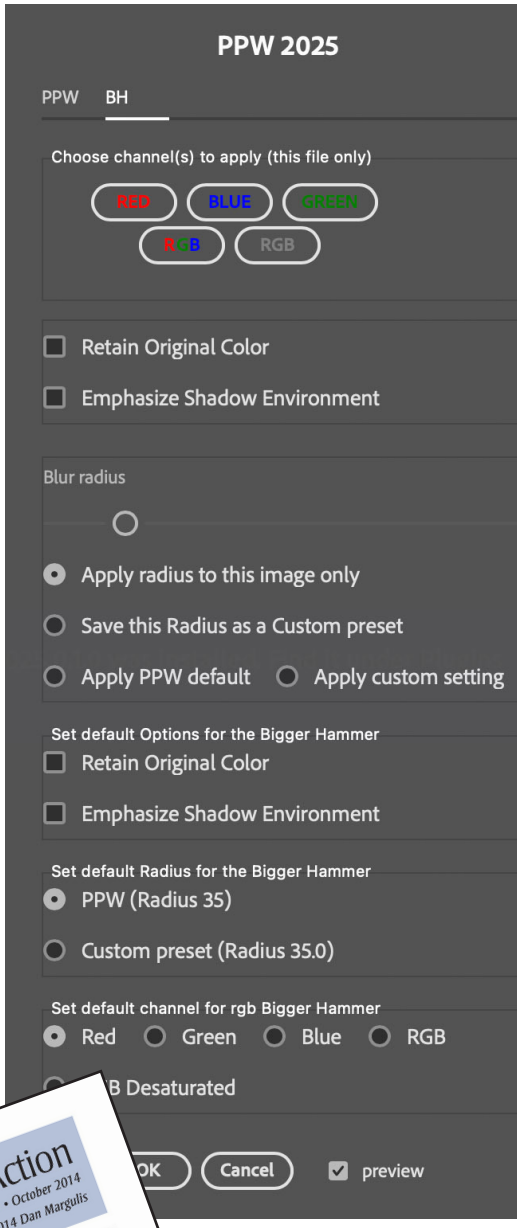
Installation is easy, provided your Creative Cloud assets are up-to-date. The file you have downloaded in this package has the suffix .ccx. Double-click, and it installs in Photoshop without further ado, provided your settings permit it. Thereafter it can be accessed through Photoshop's Plugins menu bar item.

Enclosed in this package, in addition to this file and the installer itself, is an Overview PDF outlining the function of each button and options associated with them. Also, a PDF outlining the Picture Postcard Workflow itself. The definitive discussion of PPW is found in Dan's *2013 Modern Photoshop Color Workflow*.

Although the panel has been tested extensively by various users, bugs can still turn up. Please report any that you find to https://geraldbakker.nl/home/contact.html. Discussion of the PPW2025 panel is welcomed in our colortheory forum, https://groups.io/g/colortheory

We hope you'll find the panel worthwhile.

—Dan Margulis





The Picture Postcard Workflow

The Bigger Hammer Action

Version 4.0 • Draft 1 • October 2014

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Well over half of all originals benefit from enhancement of detail in the light and/or darkest ranges. Some don't need it because there's no detail to enhance, or because enhancing it would distract from more important parts of the image.

When enhancement is desired, it could be simply to add definition, and the need for it could be nearly negligible, or it could be absolutely critical to the success of the image, or anything in between. Or it could be a sun-and-shade type of situation where the picture seems to be divided into light and dark halves, and would look more natural if they came closer together. If that is the case, we may or may not wish to intensify detail in the process.

The problem existed in the last century too, of course, but our countermeasures were basically limited to curves and occasional channel blends. Now that computers can support more sophisticated techniques, a lot of attention has been lavished on solutions. I recognize six distinct ones, as follows:

- The Photoshop Shadows/Highlights command.
- Artificially lightening the image and then darkening strongly through a heavily blurred layer mask (see the False Profile PDF documentation in the PPW panel).
- The Bigger Hammer action discussed in this current document.
- Using the highlight/shadow enhancement techniques found in certain raw modules.
- The Lesser Hammer and Velvet Hammer actions, released in version 4 of the PPW; a single PDF file documents both of them.

That so many sophisticated measures have been developed is a testimony to the seriousness of the problem. Naturally each has its strong and weak points. The Bigger Hammer, being the most powerful of the six, is also the most volatile. It has the most upside of any, and also the most downside if not used carefully.

The Original Understanding

The Bigger Hammer antedates the Picture Postcard [illegible]. It was designed to do what the Shadows/[illegible]and was too weak for: to smash spec-[illegible]eas that need it. The name de-[illegible]ber who allegedly said that the only two tools he really needed were a bigger hammer and a bigger wrench.

The typical use was conceived to be cases like the waterfall of Figure 1. The default result of playing the Bigger Hammer action is Figure 2. It may not be perfect but unless we can find some other way to get that kind of action in the whitewater our efforts will be counted as having failed. The same might be true if this were a picture of an interesting cloud formation, or smoke, or a snowy landscape.

In all of these cases the subject is roughly neutral, meaning that all three RGB channels look about alike. But there's an important extension. In strongly colored objects like flowers, one or more channels may be quite heavy but at least one is likely to be as light as the waterfall. Getting detail out of that weak channel may be critical. The Bigger Hammer, if handled carefully, can do that. Shadows/Highlights and raw modules can't.

In the waterfall image adding pop to the highlights is far more important than the shadows. That's how it normally is: photos needing *serious* shadow enhancement aren't common, but they do exist. Bigger Hammer can be altered to meet their demands.

Such an alteration, and many other useful variants, is made much easier by the Options window that has been part of the PPW panel since v.3 in early 2013. These options greatly increase the number of images to which Bigger Hammer is applicable.

Figures 1 and 2. *A default application of the Bigger Hammer action. Above: the Layers palette immediately after playing the action.*

PPW2025 caters to both beginners and power users. This action, Bigger Hammer, can be applied effectively with a single click. However, if motivated, a user can access an extensive options menu (above) and a 13-page PDF explaining how it all comes together.