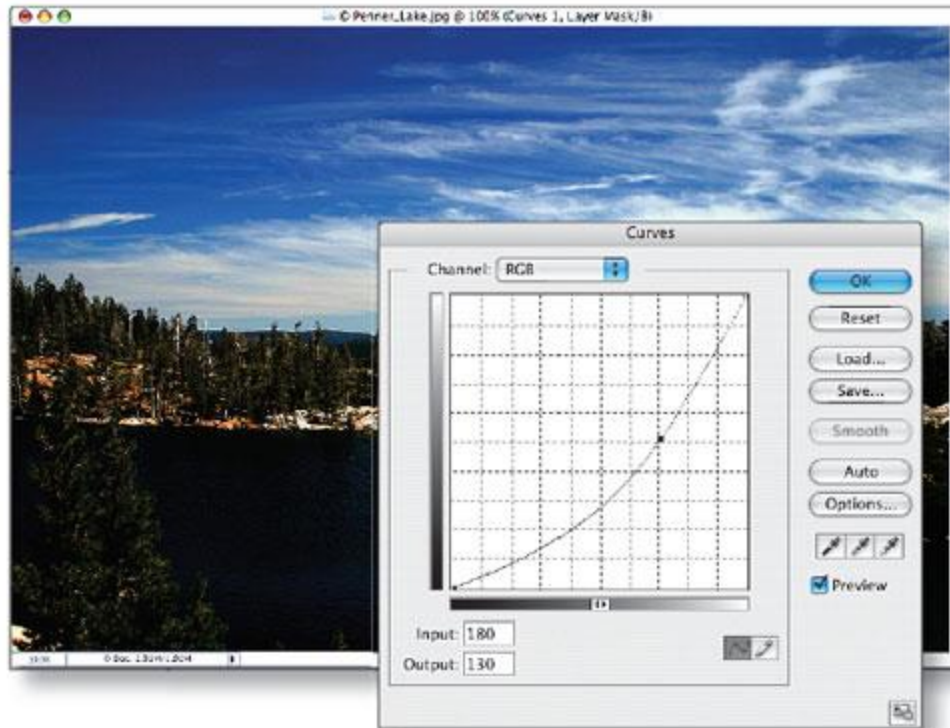


Creating a Gradient Filter



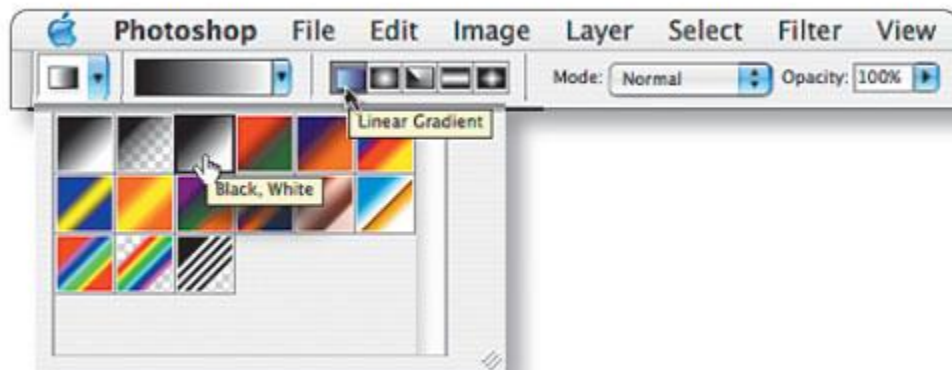
STEP 1: Open the Penner Lake Image

Photographers have long used gradients on actual glass filters to balance the exposure between a bright sky and a darker foreground. This can also be done in Photoshop by using an adjustment layer and then modifying the layer mask with the Gradient tool. If you want to follow along, download the Penner Lake image and open it in Photoshop. Penner Lake is located at about 7,000' in the backcountry of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, not far from where I live.



STEP 2: Add a Curves Adjustment Layer to Darken the Sky

Add a Curves adjustment layer by clicking on the Create New Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers palette and choosing Curves from the pop-up menu. When the Curves dialog opens, click in the middle of the curve and drag downward. Don't worry if the lake and mountains get too dark; we'll take care of that with the gradient mask in the next step. Once you're satisfied with the darkening effect on the sky, click the OK button to finalize the adjustment.



STEP 3: Set Gradient Tool Options

Choose the Gradient tool (G) from the Toolbox. In the Options Bar for the tool, click the triangle button next to the gradient thumbnail to open up the Gradient Picker. Click on the third switch from the left in the top row. This is always black to white. You also want to look at the row of five icons next to the Gradient Picker and make sure that the first one (Linear Gradient) is enabled. Finally, make sure that the Mode is set to Normal and the Opacity to 100% and that the Reverse checkbox isn't checked.



STEP 4: Apply the Gradient in the Layer Mask

Make sure the Curves adjustment layer is the active layer and place your cursor on the Penner Lake image at the edge of the far shore of the lake. Click-and-hold, press the Shift key, and drag up to about halfway between the horizon and the top of the sky. Let go to apply the gradient (the Shift key here constrains the gradient to a straight vertical line). If you need to redo the gradient, simply start over and any existing gradient will be replaced by the new one.



Combining a Hard-Edged Mask

STEP 1: Open Source Images and Combine into One File

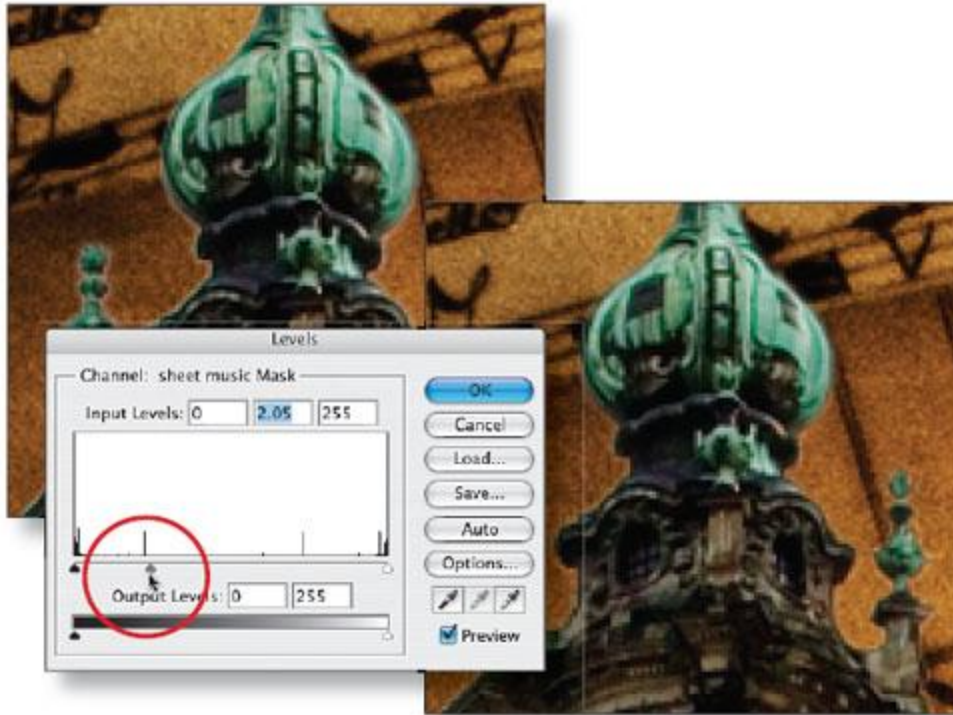
Download and open the source files Dresden_Church and Antique_Sheet_Music. Arrange the files so that you can see them both. Click on the title bar of the sheet music image and select the Move tool (V). Click in the sheet music image, hold down the Shift key, and drag-and-drop the file onto the church photo. Keep the Shift key down until you've released the mouse button. The Shift key here will center the imported image in the destination file. Double-click on the new layer and rename it "sheet music." Double-click on the Background and rename it "Church."



STEP 2: Apply Church Mask as a Layer Mask

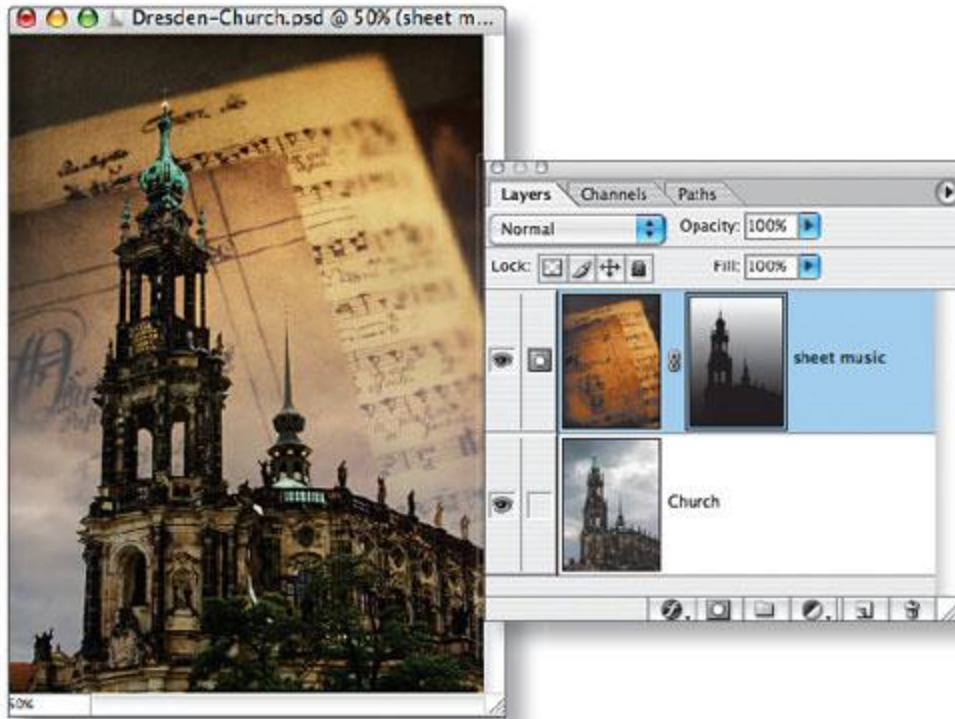
Click on the Channels palette tab and you'll see that there's already a mask of the church sky that has been prepared for this tutorial. Load this as a selection by Command-clicking on it (PC: Control-clicking). Click back on the Layers palette tab and click on the sheet music layer to make it active. Click the Add Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the Layers palette to turn the selection into a layer mask that lets the church show through the sheet music.

Close the sheet music image as we won't need it again.



STEP 3: Smooth and Modify the Mask Edges

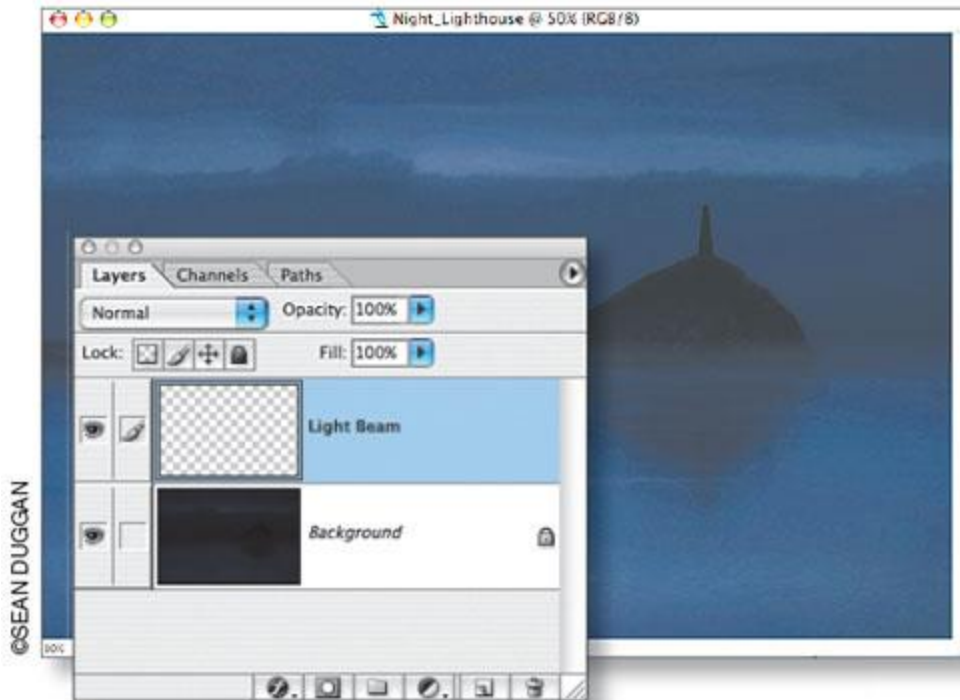
Before we move on to adding a gradient to the layer mask, let's smooth the edges a bit. Zoom in to 100% (View>Actual Pixels) and click on the thumbnail of the layer mask to make sure it's active. From the Filter menu, choose Blur>Gaussian Blur. Blur the edges of the layer mask using a radius of 0.6 pixels. Click OK. If you notice any light fringes along the church edges, try running Levels on the layer mask and moving the middle slider to the left. This will cause the edges of the mask to contract toward the sides of the church.



STEP 4: Apply the Gradient to the Mask

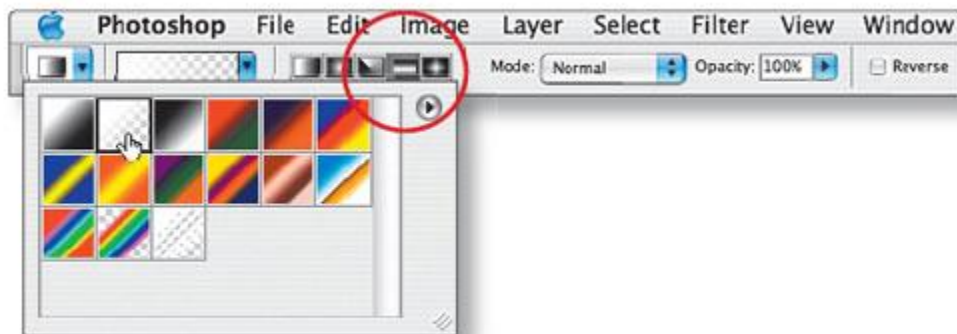
The layer mask should still be active. Select the Gradient tool and use the same options as in the previous technique, but change the blend Mode for the tool to Darken. The Darken mode will preserve the darkest parts of the mask, which is the silhouette of the church. Click in the bottom part of the image, hold down the Shift key, and drag straight up to just above the top of the tower before releasing the mouse button. The end result is a mask that is a combination of a soft gradient and the precise silhouette of the church.

Creating a Beam of Light



STEP 1: Open Image; Add a New Layer

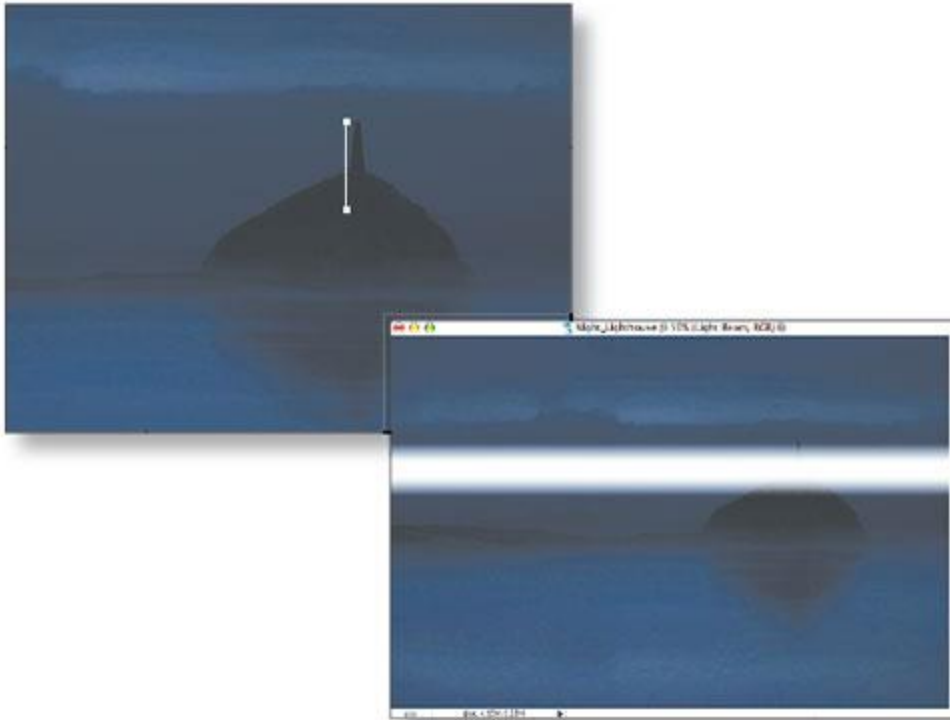
Download and open the image Night Lighthouse. Add a new layer (Layer>New>Layer), and name it "Light Beam." Press D to set the default Foreground/ Background colors and then X to exchange them and place white in the Foreground swatch.



STEP 2: Set the Gradient Options

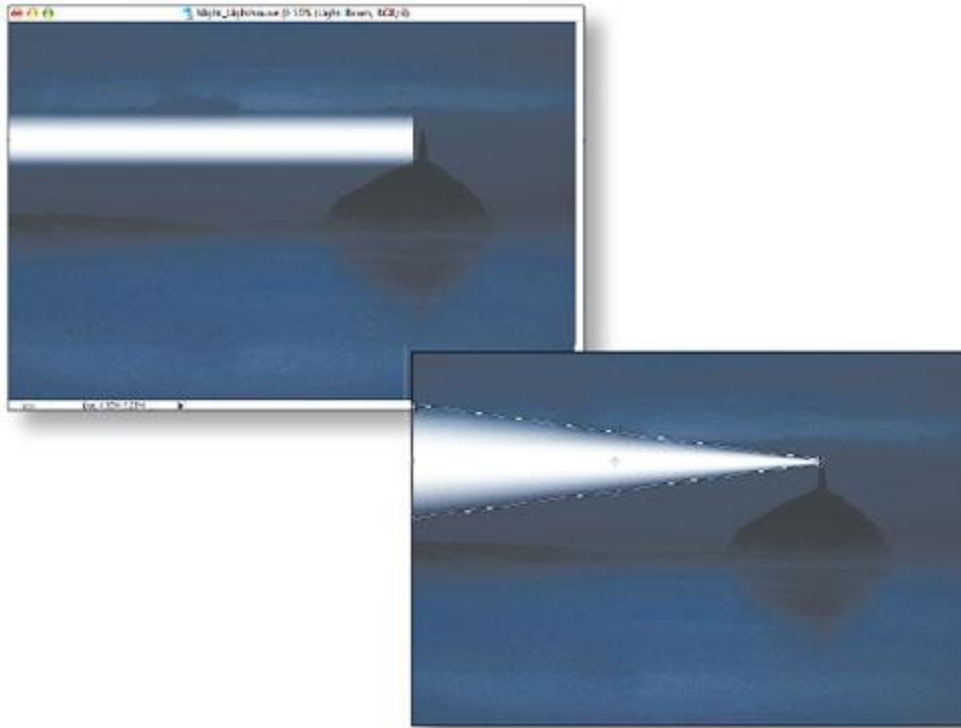
Select the Gradient tool and in the Options Bar, click on the triangle button next to the gradient thumbnail to open the Gradient Picker. Choose the second swatch from the left in the top row. This will create a gradient from the Foreground color (white) to transparency. To the right of the

Gradient Picker, click on the fourth icon to set the style as a reflected gradient. The mode should be Normal, the Opacity 100%, and Reverse should not be checked.



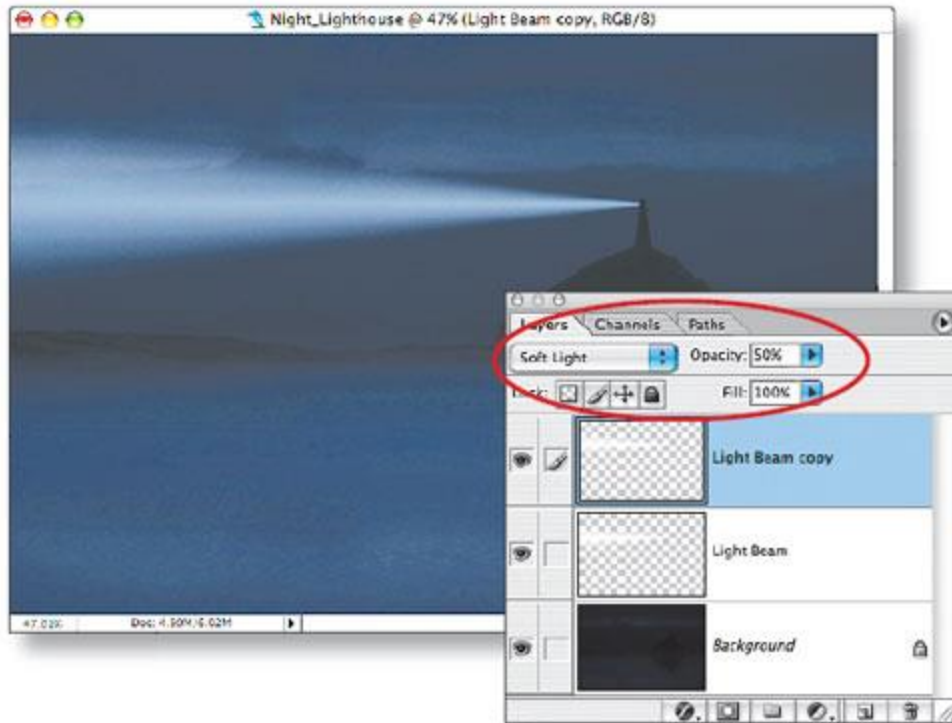
STEP 3:

With the Light Beam layer active, position your cursor at the base of the lighthouse tower and drag upward to the top of the tower, holding down the Shift key to constrain the line to a vertical. Release the mouse button at the top of the tower to create a reflected gradient that runs horizontally through the image. By using the size of the lighthouse as a guide for how far to drag the gradient line, it gives us a light beam that's approximately the size we need. We'll add further transformations in the next step.



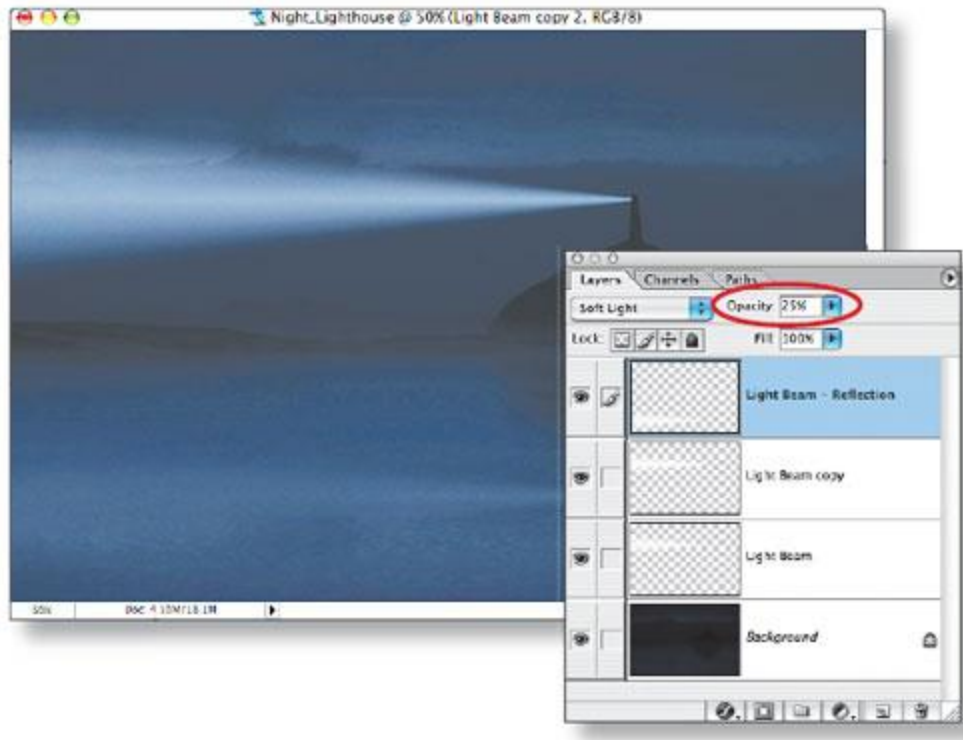
STEP 4:

Select the Move tool and drag the gradient/beam to the left of the tower. Position it next to the top of the tower. From the Edit menu, choose Free Transform. Hold down Command-Option-Shift (PC: Control-Alt-Shift) and click on the top-right corner handle and drag down to create a perspective transformation that narrows the side of the gradient closest to the lighthouse. Do the same thing to the far left side of the gradient, except drag outward to fan out the end and make it larger. Press Enter to finalize the transformation.



STEP 5:

This initial effect isn't bad, but the light beam looks a little too bright to be realistic. A quick way to fix this is to change the blend mode for the Light Beam layer in the Layers palette from Normal to Soft Light. This tones down the brightness and the beam blends much better with the background colors, taking on a bluish tint. Still, it could be a bit brighter. To fix this, duplicate the layer by choosing Layer>New>Layer via Copy, or use the Command-J shortcut (PC: Control-J). Lower the Opacity of the duplicate layer to 50%.



STEP 6:

To finish the effect, we need to create a reflection of the beam in the water. Make a copy of the top Light Beam layer. With the Move tool, drag it down and position it with the reflection of the lighthouse tower. Leave the blend mode set to Soft Light and lower the Opacity to 25%. Choose Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur and blur the beam by a radius of 6 pixels. Click OK. You might also add a small amount of noise (Filter>Noise>Add Noise) to each light beam layer (we used a value of 3 pixels, Gaussian) to prevent any banding when the image is printed.