Color Picker vs. Color Swatches vs. Color Table
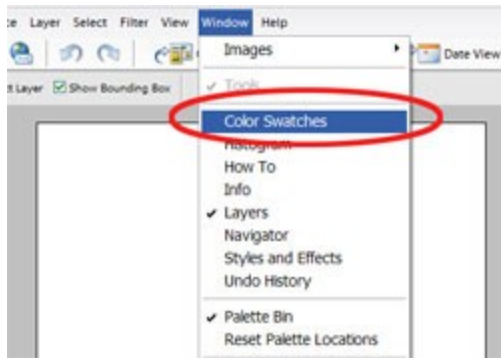## By Hummie

The use of words in PSE is often confusing. What is the difference between the color picker, color swatches, and color table?

The **color picker** is the most commonly used of the three as it is inevitable that newbies will stumble on a need to use it to creating most layouts. It is covered in several other tutorials (see the hue/saturation/value tutorial). Since it is covered well in other tutorials, no more detail will be provided here.

The **color swatches** are a means to save favorite or most used colors to reuse over and over again.
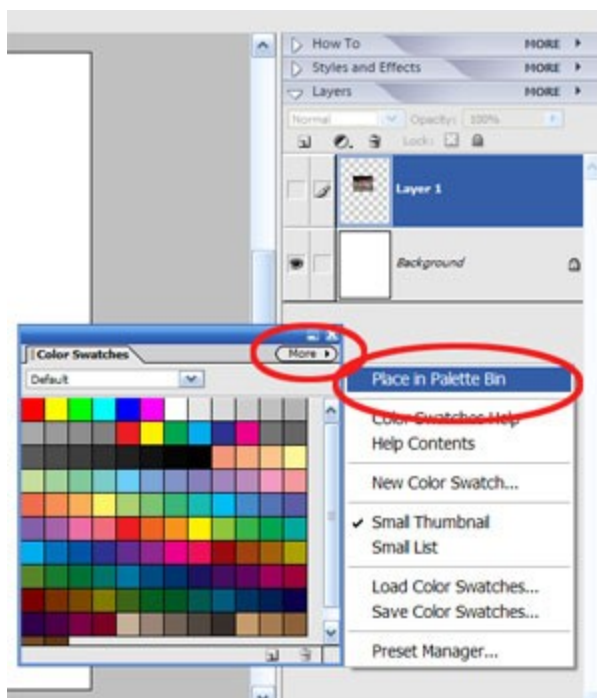
The **color table** is a means to obtain colors from a graphic.

COLOR SWATCHES

The default settings for PSE do not have the Color Swatches visible.

From the Windows drop down menu, click on Color Swatches and a box will appear on the desktop containing the default color swatches.

The box is bothersome and in the way! To place it in the Palette Bin, click on the "More" flyout arrow and then click on "Place in Palette Bin."

Nothing happens, right? Right.

Click on the "x' above the "More" flyout to close the box and the swatches will move to the Palette Bin. The next time PSE is opened, the Color Swatches will appear in the same place.
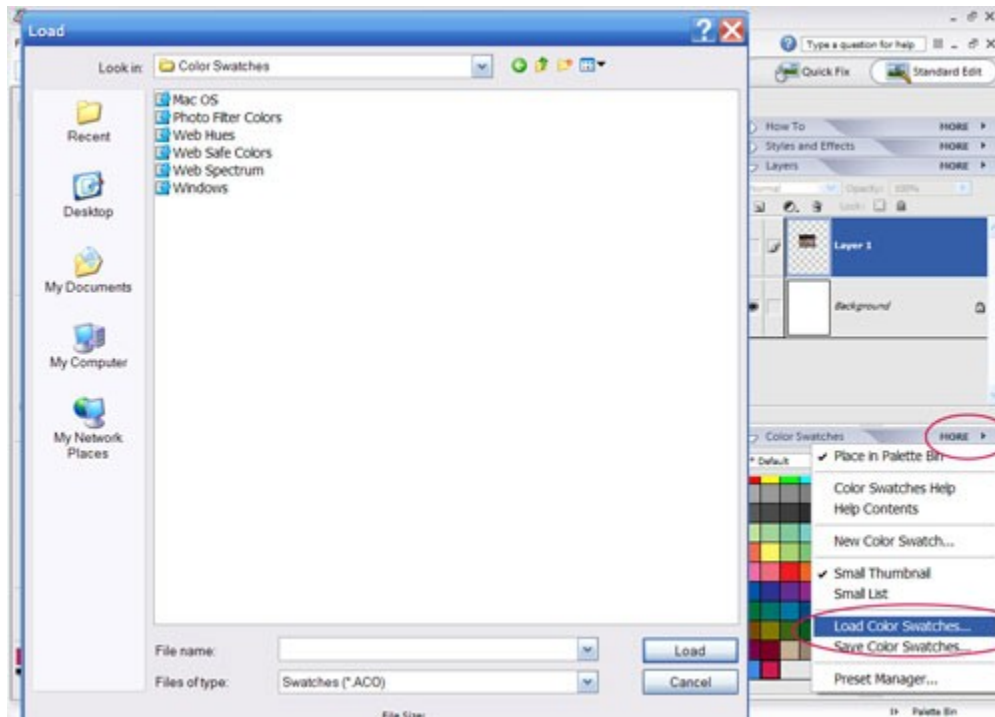
To use the Color Swatches, move the mouse over the box at any time and the mouse will turn to the eyedropper icon. Click on any color and the foreground color will be converted to that color.

To add a color to the Swatches, use the Color Picker or eyedropper tools to place the desired color as the foreground color. Hold the mouse over a grey (blank) box in the Swatches and the paint tool will appear. Click with the mouse. (Or click with the mouse on the new swatch icon next to the trash can at the bottom of the Swatches box.)
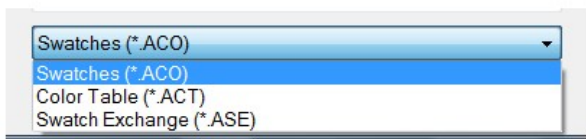
A box will pop up. Change the name of the color, if preferred, and click OK. The new swatch will appear at the bottom of the Swatches.

Adobe provides a few other Color Swatches, although I do not find them useful. To load a different Color Swatches, click on the "More" flyout arrow and click on "Load Color Swatches." The pop up box is set to default to the file on your drive where the Adobe Color Swatches are located. Click on one of them and then click "Load." The new Color Swatches will appear in the Palette Bin.

Color Swatches end with the file name extension of .aco.

To find free swatches on the internet, do a search. There are some available at Adobe Exchange for free. (http://www.adobe.com/exchange/) or (http://www.**share.studio.adobe.com**) Log into a free account to download from this site.

Upload a photo at Big Huge Labs (http://bighugelabs.com/flickr/colors.php) to create a color swatch from a photo. These swatches download as an Adobe Swatch Exchange (ASE) file. When loading these files, choose the file type in the drop down menu.

At Color Blender (http://colorblender.com/), palettes are created and may be downloaded as a Color Table file (.act) which can also be loaded by choosing the same in the drop down menu.

Adobe Kuler (http://kuler.adobe.com) is another popular place to create and obtain color swatches. You must be logged in to download the files. This login is the same as that created for Adobe Exchange as indicated above. Downloads are .ase files.

Colour Lovers (http://www.colourlovers.com/) offers downloads in a variety of formats.

There are various software programs which create color schemes from your desktop. **Be sure to view the links list on my site for more resources**.

Download my Color Swatch favorite colors. Do not put the Color Swatches in the Adobe files on your hard drive. Create a folder on the hard drive called "Color Swatches" which is regularly backed up.

To load Color Swatches, navigate to the folder you have created from the Load pop up box.
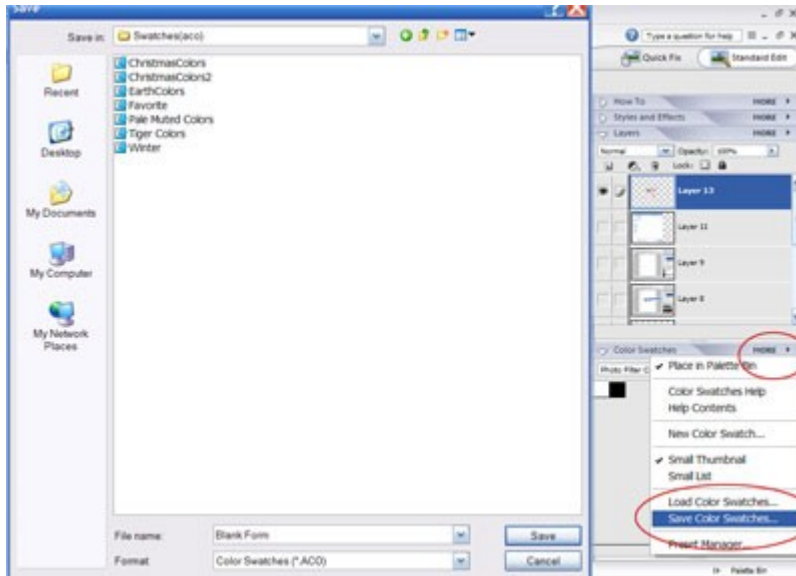
CREATING COLOR SWATCHES

It is easy to create your own collections, such as Christmas colors, Fall colors, Spring colors, Bright colors, Pastel Colors.
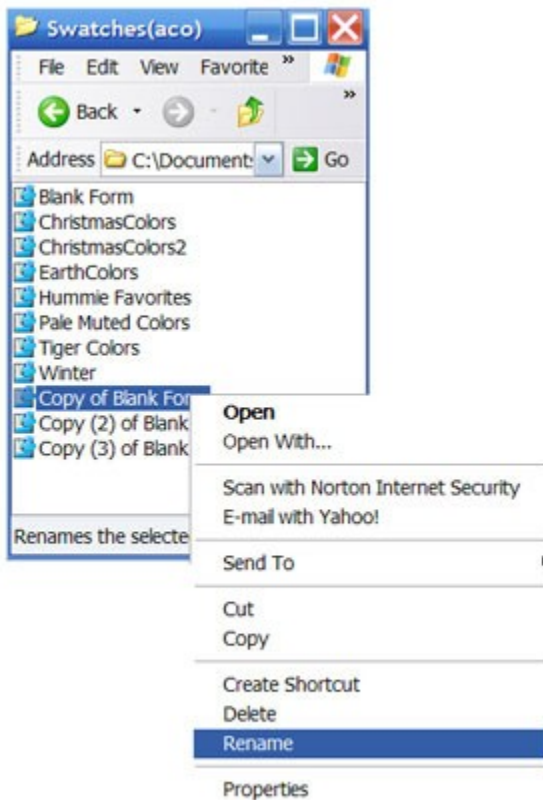
First, a blank swatch file must be prepared. Click with the mouse on a swatch and drag it to the trash can. Click okay in the deletion popup box. A much quicker way to achieve this is to hold down the alt key while hovering with the mouse over the swatch to see a scissor icon. Click with the mouse to delete the swatch.

In general, deleting colors from the Color Swatch is safe. Colors are only permanently deleted when you try to switch to another Color Swatch and choose to save the changes from the pop up box. However, sometimes things go wonky or mistakes happen. It is best to utilize the form swatch as indicated below.

Add a few colors to the Color Swatches. Click on the "More" flyout arrow and click on "Save Color Swatches." Navigate to the folder you created for Color Swatches, give the file a new File Name, and click on Save.

Continue to add more swatches and save the changes when finished.

I do not like deleting the swatches to prepare a new file again and again and, therefore, I have a "Blank Form" .aco file with only a black and a white swatch within.

In the folder on my hard drive where the swatches are located, copy the Blank Form file and rename it to a title applicable to the new swatch. Load the swatch in PSE and add colors to it.

I have provided my file for your convenience to download.

Place this file in the Presets folder:
C:\Program Files\Adobe\Photoshop Elements 7.0\Presets\Color Swatches

COLOR TABLE

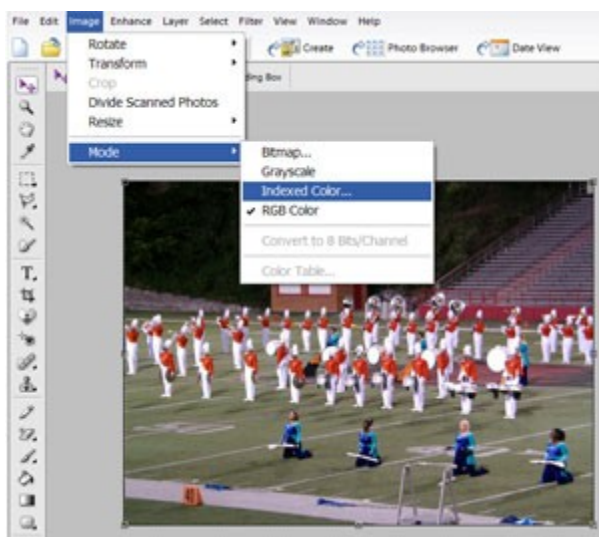The Color Table is a tool to obtain colors from a photo or graphic to make a Color Swatch.

The most direct way to obtain colors from a photo to match a layout is to use the eyedropper tool. However, another fun way is to create an entire table of colors to choose from. Shh…I have been known to see kits in my favorite colors and use the previews to create a color table.

To create a Color Table from a graphic (photo), the file must be in the "Indexed Color" format. Files with the .gif extension utilize the Indexed Color format.

Open a .gif file. Click on the Image drop down menu, clicks on Mode, and observe that there is a checkmark in front of "Indexed Color."
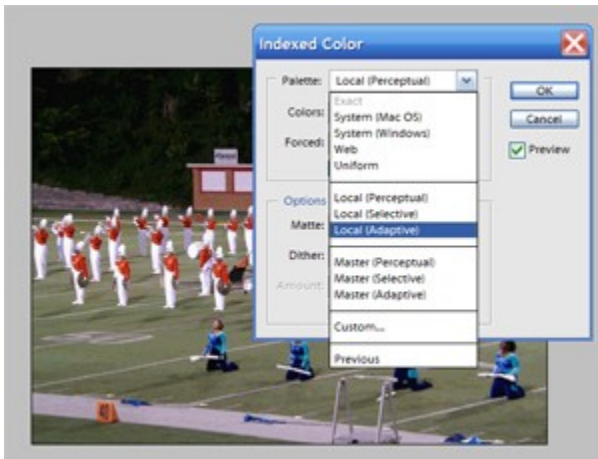
The Indexed Color format consists of 256 colors which are each assigned a number.

When a .jpg photo is opened up, you will note that it is most likely in the RGB Color format.

I am using a photo of the marching band as I often create layouts of the band.

In order to create a Color Table, change the format to Indexed Color by clicking on the Image drop down menu, clicking on Mode, and then clicking on Indexed Colors.

A popup box will appear. The first drop down menu is for the "Palette" choices.
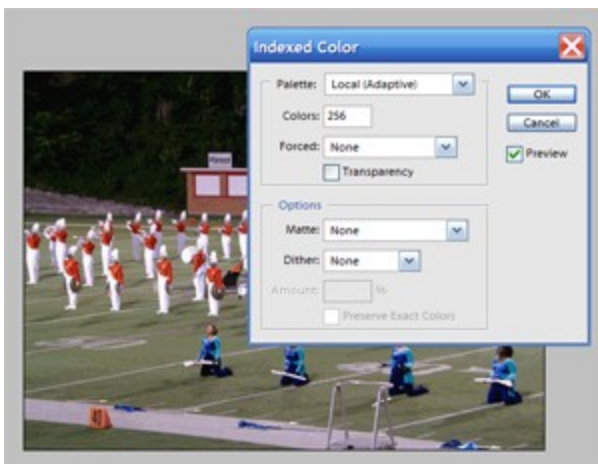
Although others recommend choosing the "Local (Perceptual)," I believe that it is not all that important which one is chosen.

Both the "Perceptual" and the "Selective" prioritize colors to those which are more sensitive to the human eye. However, the Selective also focuses on colors that are web safe and is a broader range of colors.

"Adaptive" creates a table of colors that are most commonly found in the image. I found this choice the most practical for the purposes of a layout. For instance, a photo of a school uniform would pick up a table of colors most common in the photo, that being the school colors.

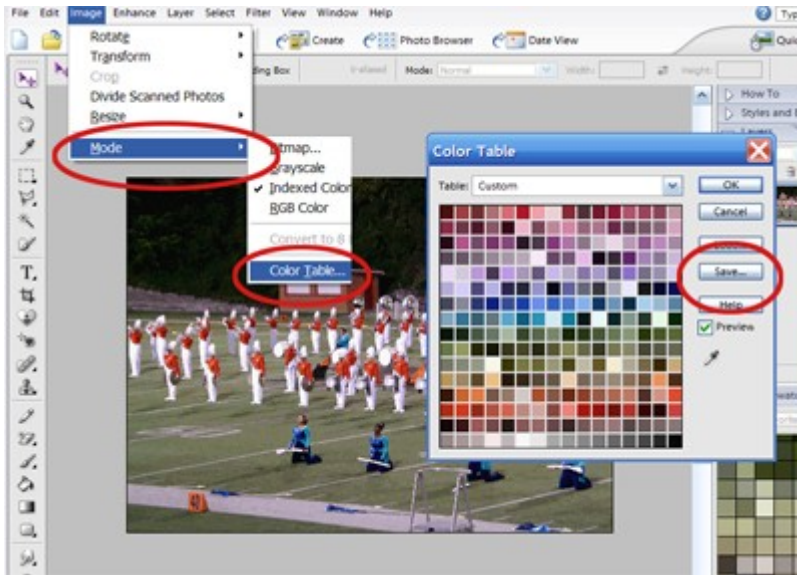All in all, any of these three will produce a satisfactory table.

To control the colors that appear in the table, crop out of the photo areas of color that are not wanted before converting the image to Indexed Color.

In the Colors field, leave it as 256 colors. As you will recall, Indexed Color formats are made up of 256 colors and, therefore, this is the maximum number for this field. If a lower number is entered in this field, the table will contain fewer colors.

Change the Forced, Matte, and Dither fields to "none."
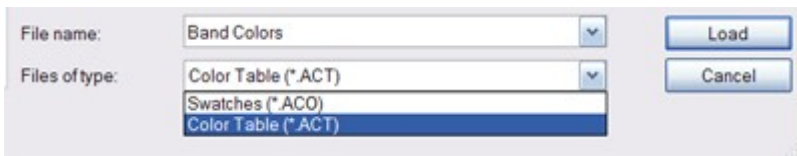
Uncheck the box next to Transparency. Click OK.

Go back to the Image drop down menu/Mode and click on Color Table.

The new Color Table will pop up.

Click on the save icon and navigate to the folder on your hard drive for swatches.

Color Tables are saved with an .act extension, rather than an .aco extension for Color Swatches.

From the "More" flyout arrow in the Color Swatches palette, click to load this new Color Table. Navigate to the file on the hard drive. Change the "Files of type" to "color Table (*ACT)" to see the file within the folder.

Once the Color Table is loaded, resave it as a Color Swatch (.aco). Click here to download the Color Swatch I created using this tutorial.