

Custom Shadows

By Hummie

Even in paper scrapbooking, the mats and photos are not always flat. Giving a photo or mat (or other element) a custom shadow can give it a whole new look and feel.

Although a tad time consuming, with a little practice, custom shadows can be quite easy to accomplish.

For this technique, it is easier to add a border (stroke) to the photo before making a custom shadow (although not impossible to achieve later, but the shadow will need to be resized to fit the now larger photo). For my examples, I will not be using a border.

ZERO-DISTANCE DROP SHADOW



The first technique which I often use standing alone is to apply a low drop shadow and, thereafter, to change the shadow distance of the layer style to zero. This will make a very thin shadow all the way around the photo, including the left edge. A shadow with a larger distance generally has no shadow on the left edge. Sometimes this is just the perfect tweak desired. For all of my custom shadows, I have been adding this zero-distance drop shadow first.

IRREGULAR DROP SHADOWS

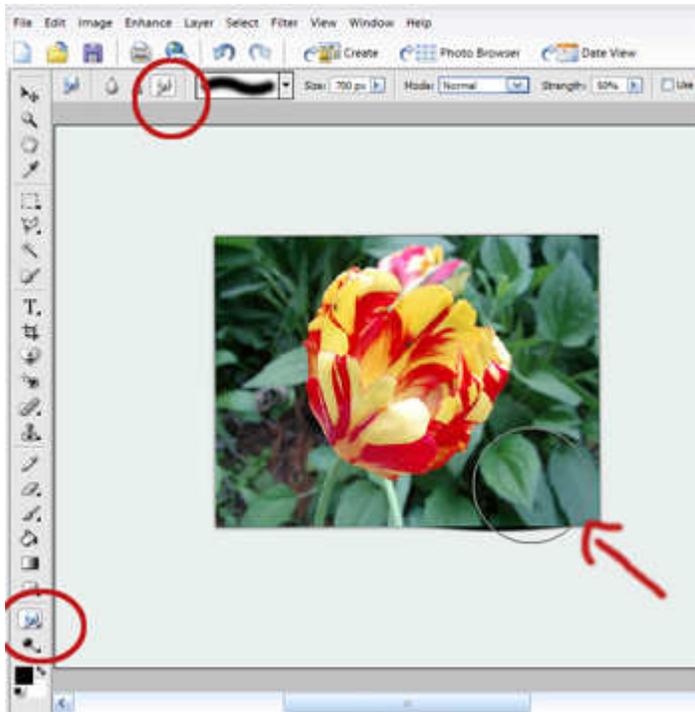
Papers are not always bent uniformly. This technique is fun to experiment with to see the results.



Make a new layer. Move the new layer below the photo layer.

Control Click on the photo layer to obtain a selection (marching ants) around the photo.

With the new layer as the active layer, fill the selection with black (use the paint bucket or Edit/Fill Layer).



With the black shadow layer as the active layer, use the smudge tool to gently move the shadow outward from the photo under the portion of the photo that is bent upwards off of the page. This will take some imagination. Papers are not always bent symmetrical. As in my example, I imagined that a person held the photo with their thumb off to the side, making a bend with the thumb. Sometimes edges are bent slightly all along the edge, with the middle being flat, due to moisture. In addition, photos laying in a shoebox can take on an array of bending.

Use the [and] keys on the keyboard to adjust the size of the smudge brush. For edges bent all along the

edge, use a small brush. For a photo that has a larger bent area, use a larger brush. The default brush and settings work fine; however, sometimes using a softer brush or lowering the strength of the brush may bring varying results.

Position the brush so that only a small portion of the brush circle is out of the bounds of the photo. Click with the mouse and move the mouse very slightly. Too much movement will make the shadow too deep. If the result is not acceptable, hit undo and try again. Continue adding smudges until the desired shadow is achieved.

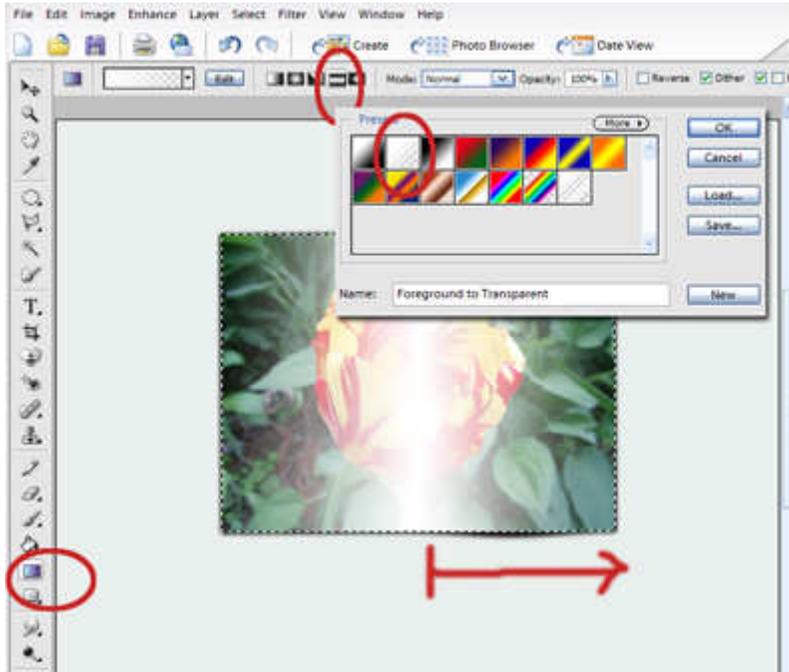
Add custom shadows to other portions of edges as desired.

Shadows are not all one shade. Shadows further from the element are lighter. To apply a gradient to the shadow, apply a Gaussian blur. (Filter drop down menu/Blur/Gaussian Blur). Changing the radius drastically can result in different effects. Watch the preview as the slider is moved until something acceptable is achieved. A radius will look different on a solid white background than on a grungy background. Sometimes a radius as low as 4 is suitable. A larger radius from 25 to 30 results in a larger gradient. When using a larger radius, thereafter resize the shadow down. Sometimes it is better to run a smaller radius several times in a row.

If needed, reduce the opacity of the shadow layer.

The best way to learn how to make custom shadows is to play, observe, and practice.

HIGHLIGHT



Where a photo is bent upwards, the light source creates a highlight.

To achieve this effect, use the gradient tool. Choose the "Reflective Gradient" option. Click on the edit button and choose the "Foreground to Transparent" gradient.

Make the foreground color white (this is an important step!)

Control Click on the photo layer to obtain a selection layer (marching ants) around the photo.

Create a new layer.

Click in the middle of the photo and drag the mouse to the outer edge.

Reduce the opacity of the highlight layer.

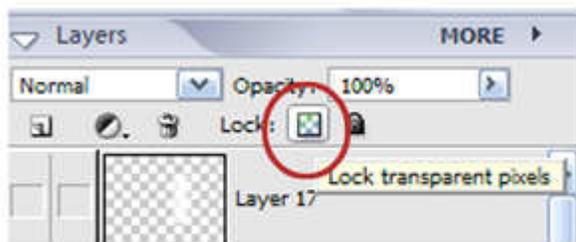


Of course, in my example above, the highlight does not match the placement of the custom shadow. Rather than making a selection of the entire photo, use the selection tool (play with the rectangle and the circle selection tools) to make a selection of the area that matches the position of the custom shadow. It is possible that a diagonal selection may be made with the polygonal lasso selection tool.



Here is an example of irregular custom shadows.

CHANGING THE COLOR OF THE CUSTOM SHADOW



Sometimes a shadow will take on the color of the element (or the back side of an element) that is casting the shadow. Or maybe the shadow needs to be changed black to grey.

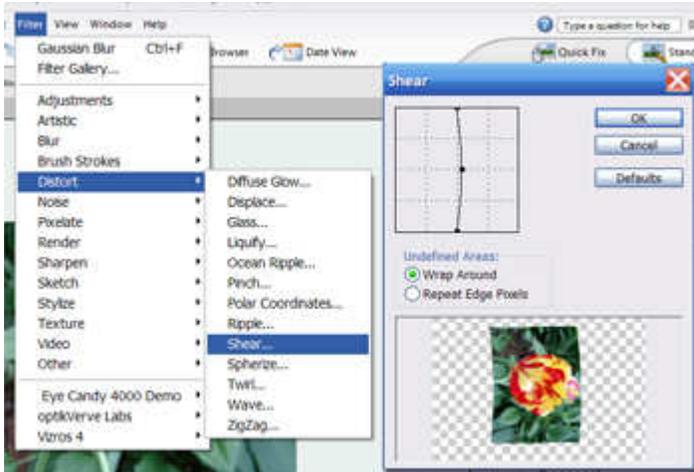
After creating the custom shadow, to change the color of the shadow, it is important to click on the box to “lock transparent pixels.” When using the paint bucket tool to change the color of the shadow layer, this option will preserve the areas of transparency created by the Gaussian blur filter.

BALANCED DROP SHADOWS

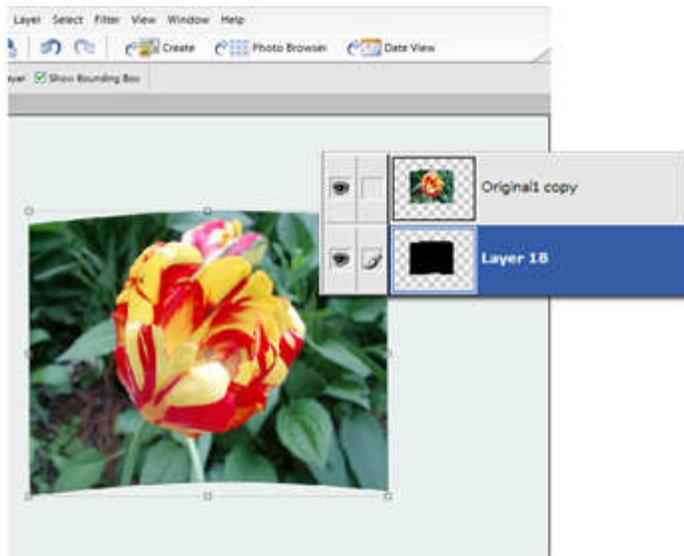
To create custom drop shadows that are more symmetrical, flipping layers is required to achieve the effect in PSE.

Adding a custom shadow alone can make a photo or mat appear to be bent; however, curving the photo or mat itself, in addition to the shadow, can add an extra depth to the look.

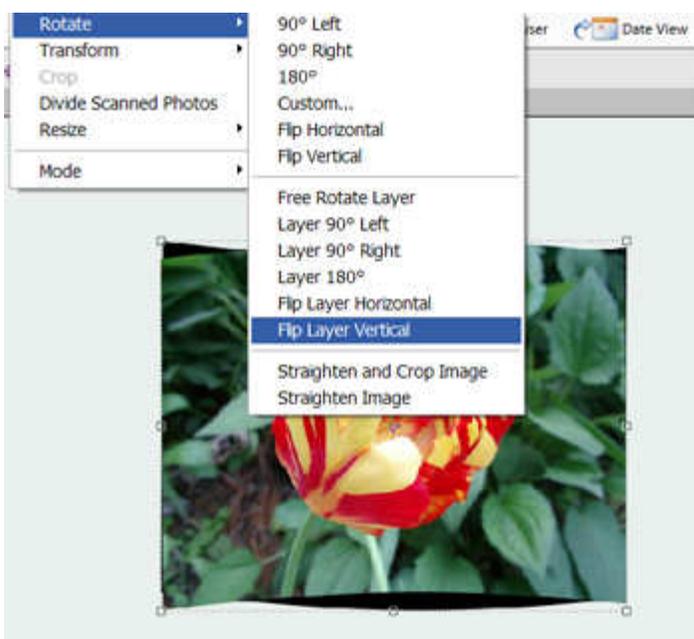
To add a curve to the bottom of a photo, rotate the photo to the right. (Image/Rotate/Layer 90 right). After applying the filter, return the photo to its original position. (Image/Rotate/Layer 90 left). To add a curve to the side of the photo, do not rotate the photo.



Bring up the Shear Filter pop-up box (Filter/Distort/Shear). Click in the center of the line and a small box will appear. Move the box slightly to the right with the mouse. Click okay.



As in the irregular drop shadow instructions above, make a shadow layer identical in shape to the curved photo.



Flip the shadow layer (Image/Rotate/Flip Layer Vertical).



Apply a Gaussian Blur. Move the shadow down and to the right. Resize the shadow downward applicable to the photo. In general, no shadow will be visible on the left hand side (based on the default settings for the light source direction). Remember that a zero-balance shadow applied to the photo looks perfect for the left edge.

CURLED UP CORNERS

To curl up the corners, a similar technique as the balanced drop shadow is utilized.

In this case, it is better to make the shadow layer before distorting the shapes. Therefore, begin with a photo layer and a matching rectangle shadow layer underneath.

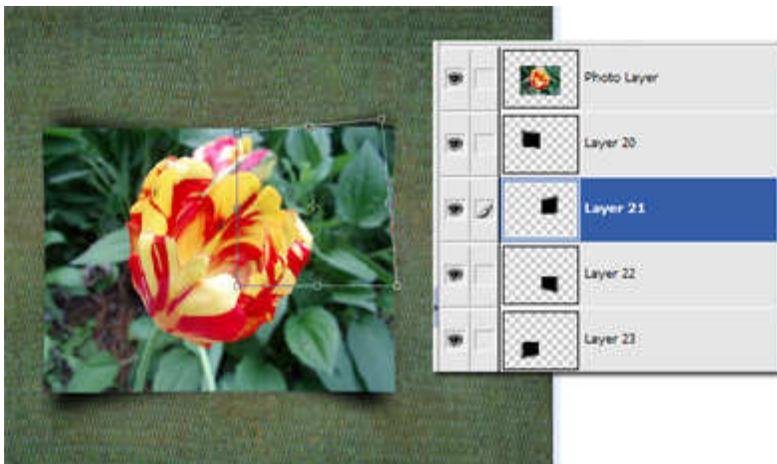


With the photo layer as the active layer, apply a pinch filter (Filter/Distort/Pinch). Choose an amount of pinch (I like 3 or 4). Click okay.

With the shadow layer as the active layer, apply a pinch filter with a larger amount of pinch (I like 30).

Resize the shadow layer so that the most downward curve of the layer is hidden behind the photo, but the corners extend beyond the photo corners.

Apply a Gaussian Blur.



Make a selection of each corner of the shadow and copy the selection to a new layer.

Hold down the Control key while reshaping and pointing the shadows until the corner

appears to lift off of the page, remembering the direction of the light. Also remember that no shadow would be visible at the center of each edge where the paper is closest to the edge.

Maybe one of the corners will not be bent and, therefore, that corner can be deleted.



Apply highlighting to the corners. I made a new layer and used an airbrush to paint white at the tips of the corners and black at the creases in the corners. Thereafter, I lowered the opacity of the highlight layer and tweaked the look with a low opacity eraser.

As I stated above, the best way to learn how to make custom shadows is to play, observe, and practice. It is fun to play and achieve a different look with each layout.