

I can't remember how I did it....

In the trial-and-error of creation it is easy to forget the exact steps used to achieve an effect or series of effects. Sometimes, it can be difficult to remember during the creative session itself and even more difficult later when you come back and wish to recreate an effect from an earlier image. Photoshop 6 offers several ways to keep track of the steps you've used to create your masterpiece.

Unless you've changed it in <preferences>, the history palette maintains a record of the last 20 steps you've used on an image during a session. Once you've closed the file you're working on, or used the <purge> command, this information is lost forever. So if, in the heat of creation, your short-term memory melts, you can always open the history palette to see how you've gotten where you are. At this point you can open the note (or annotation) tool (N) and, for posterity, type in a short description of your inspired achievement. For example you can list what filters you've applied, the sequence and the settings you've used or record the settings of the different tools you've used. This annotation is saved with the file and will always be there to refer to. You can have multiple notes within the same document if you wish. If you're really hi-tech and have a microphone hooked up to your computer you can record an audio description of what you've done and have it saved (embedded) in your file.

Another way to keep track of your inspirations, is by renaming layers with more descriptive titles. You should ALWAYS save a copy of your work in .psd format with the layers intact. This alone, will give you a partial history of 'how you've done what you've done'. You can rename a layer by right-clicking and choosing layer properties from the dialogue box. Type a brief description of what was done on that layer, such as the filter used and its settings: "Glowing Edges 2/6/5" for example and you have a permanent record of the techniques used. This method works with older versions of Photoshop as well.

Tonal and color effects and corrections should be handled by the use of adjustment layers. Adjustment layers are also saved with .psd files and become a permanent viewable and modifiable part of your image.