Reclaiming blown out Sky's – Photoshop Tutorial

This tutorial will guide you through the process to reclaim a blown out sky.

1.

Load your start image into Photoshop which has the blown out sky.

see sample below:

2.

Now we need to go into Shadow and Highlight..

This is found under in the top menu [IMAGE] → [ADJUSTMENTS] → [SHADOWS/HIGHLIGHTS]

Obviously you will need to tweak these settings to suit as these will probably
be a bit different for your image, but these will give you an idea on which
to adjust.

See Shadows/Highlights tool (screenshot), then below the screenshot are explanations for each setting and the values I have used for my image.
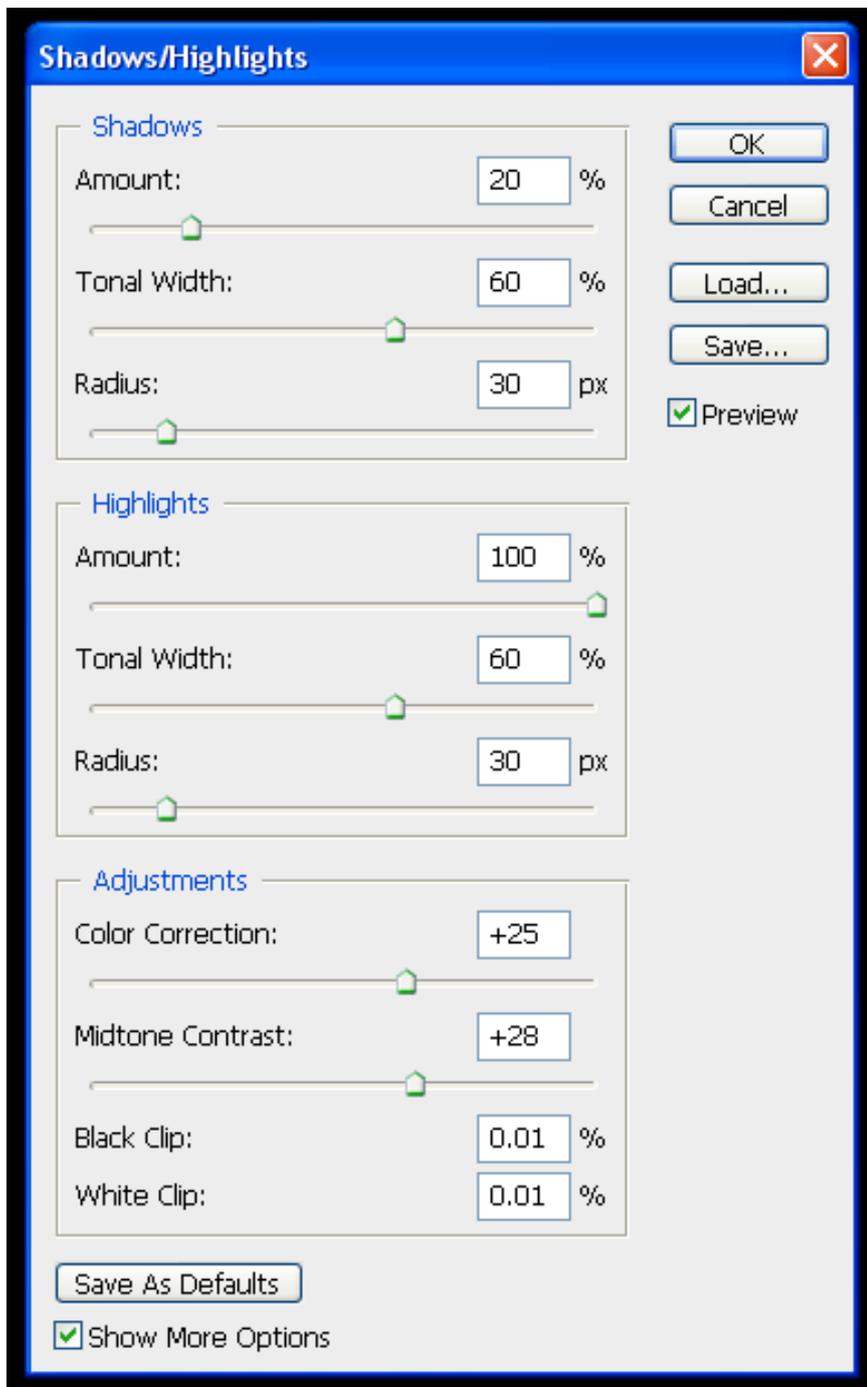
[SHADOWS section]

Amount = 20%

(The higher the value the lighter the dark "shadow areas" of the image will become,
in my case moving the slider up to 20% lightens the buildings and the pavement).

Tonal Width = 60%

(The higher the value the broader the tones within the shadow areas, I have set this to 60%).

Radius = 30px

(This value affects the radial area of shadow detail, I have left this at 30px)

[HIGHLIGHTS section]

Amount = 100%

*(The higher the value the darker the lighter areas of the image will become.
In my case moving the slider up to 100% darkens the blown-out sky and pulls
back definition into the clouds).*

Tonal Width = 60%

*(The higher the value the broader the tones. I have set this to 60% as this worked
to give the best trade off between the sky and the buildings).*

Radius = 30px

*(This value affects the radial area of highlight detail. I have left this at 30px.
Note: watch out for halo's occurring around outlines i.e. at the point the buildings and sky
meet. Adjust this value to give the maximum detail in the sky, and avoiding obvious halo's).*

[ADJUSTMENTS section]

Colour Correction = +25

*(Adjusts the colour within the changed part of the image. I have used +25 to
saturate the image a little bit as it was a little bit flat).*

Midtone Contrast = +28

*(Adjusts the Midtone contrast of the image. I have used +28 to
darken the image a little).*

NOTE:
Once again the values I have chosen are to suit the image I have used for
this tutorial and you will need to experiment with various values to see
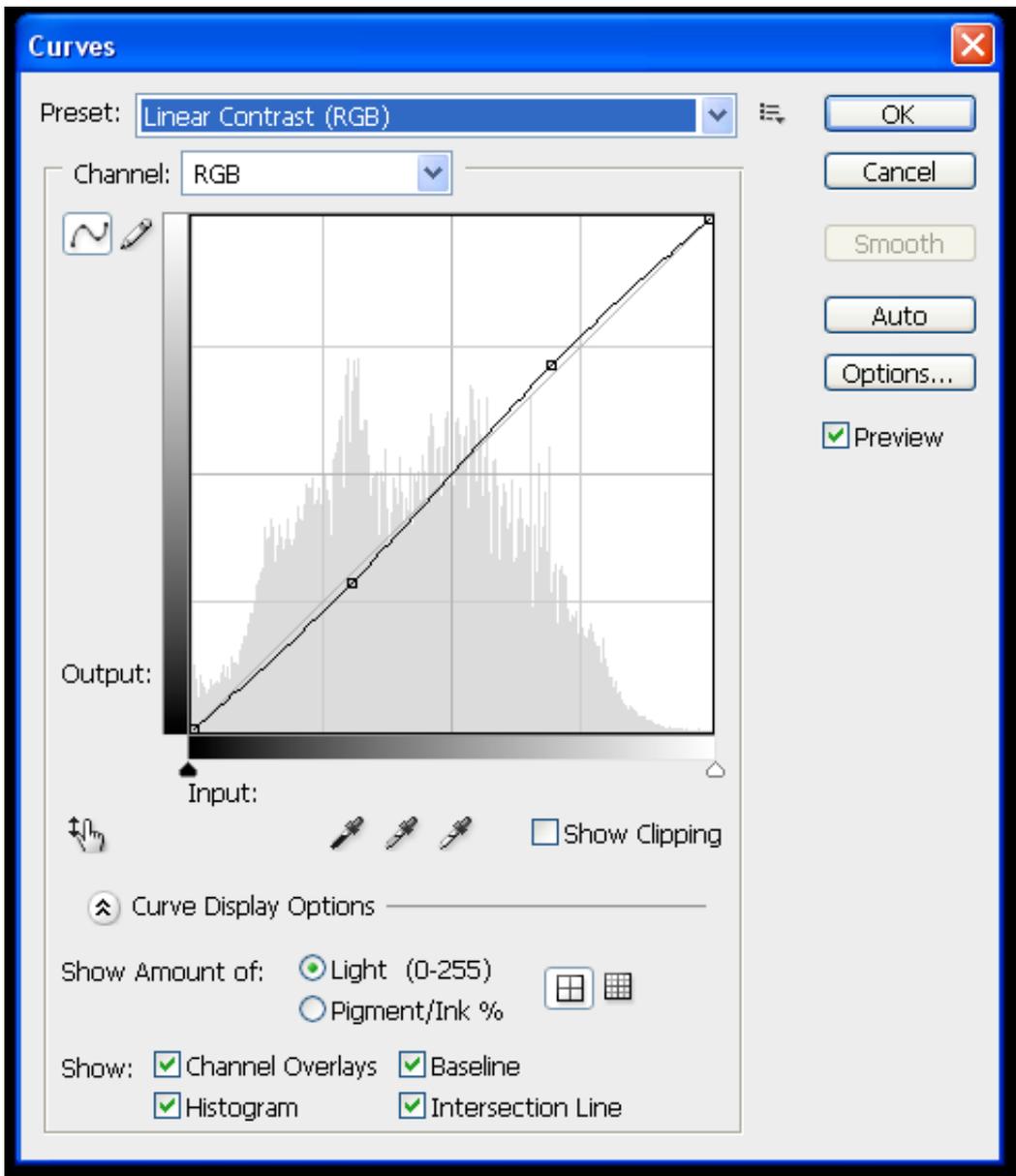which work best for your image.

After applying the above values within the "Shadows and Highlights" tool
my image now looks like this:

3.

Now we need to do a couple of "Linear Contrast" curves:

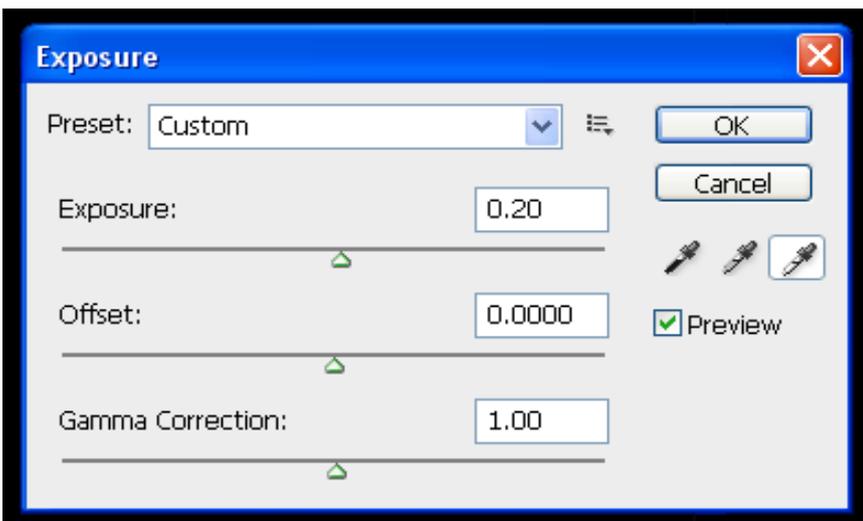This is found under in the top menu [IMAGE] → [ADJUSTMENTS] → [CURVES]

Now the image will look like this:

4.

Then a quick tweak of "Exposure" to brighten the image a bit:

This is found under in the top menu [IMAGE] → [ADJUSTMENTS] → [EXPOSURE]

Which will now give us the final End image (right hand image),
compared against the original Start Image (left hand image).

Start Image   End Image

As you can see in the final end image, we have reclaimed quite a lot of the sky and cloud detail, while enhancing the overall clarity of the image.

TIP: Shooting in your cameras RAW format rather than JPEG will help bring back more detail. As the JPEG format discards a lot of the redundant image information, which then can not be brought back. Were as in RAW we can reclaim quite a bit more detail.