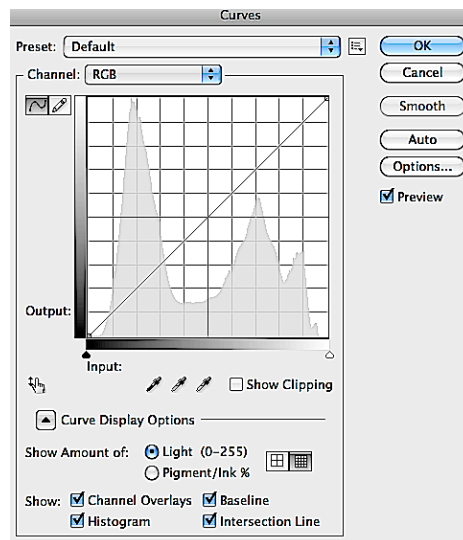
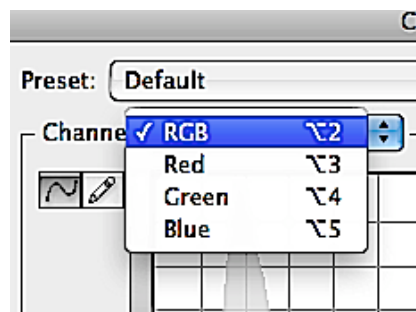


# Adjusting Skin Tones With Curves

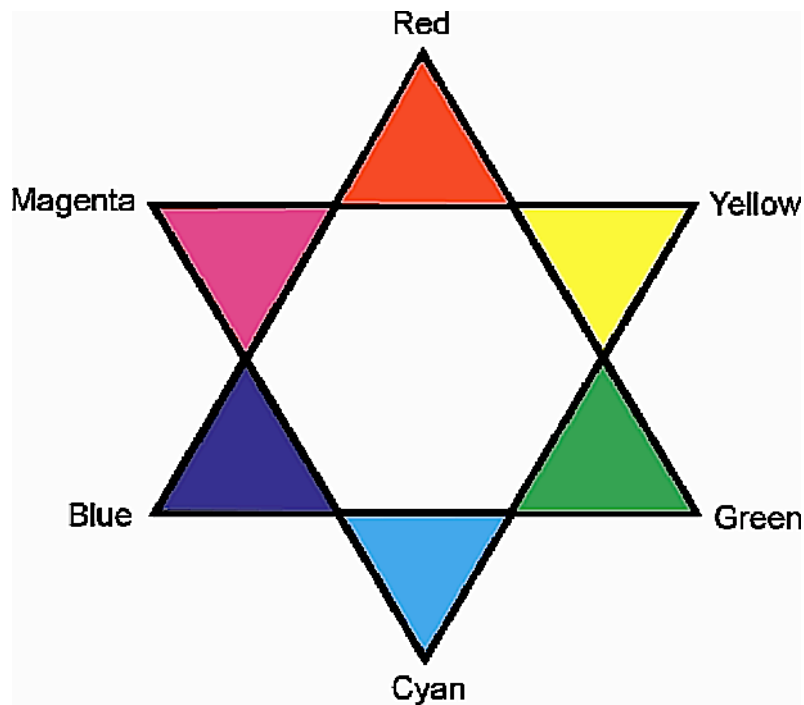
Here's one of my favorite techniques. I shoot a lot of people. Sometimes the person's skin tone doesn't look good. It might be a fair skinned person that looks ghostly white. It might be a man's face that has too red. Sometimes no matter what you try, you just can't find the right technique to adjust the skin tone. This technique takes the color of a good skin tone (from another image) and then applies it to the image with the problem skin tone. Like I said, this one of my favorite techniques.



When the channel pop up is set to RGB, all of the channels will change equally and only the brightness of the image will be changed. When you choose a channel from the pop up menu, you will only change the information that is found in that specific channel.



Each channel represents a color and its opposite. In the red channel, you will be able to shift the overall color of the image towards red or away from red. When the image is less red it is more cyan, the opposite color of red. Each color has an opposite color. Here's how it works.



**Red** is equal parts of Magenta and Yellow - Red is opposite of Cyan

**Yellow** is equal parts of Red and Green- Yellow is opposite of Blue

**Green** is equal parts of Yellow and Cyan- Green is opposite of Magenta

**Cyan** is equal parts of Blue and Green- Cyan is opposite of Red

**Blue** is equal parts of Magenta and Cyan- Blue is opposite of Yellow

**Magenta** is equal parts of Red and Blue- Magenta is opposite of Green

Now that we have a little color theory down, let's color correct an image using the channels in the Curves dialogue box. Open the image called Haden #4.



This image was taken with on camera flash that was bounced up into the ceiling. The camera exposure was 1/60 sec at F 4. This setting allows a lot of the ambient light to get exposed also. This is the only way I like to use my flash. I've always liked the skin tone on this image. Remember all color is made up of some combination of Red-Green-Blue pixels. So a good skin tone has a good set of RGB numbers.

Each channel has values from 0-255.

Red 0-255

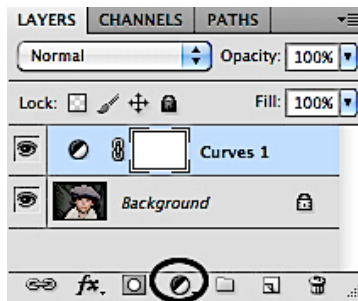
Green 0-255

Blue 255

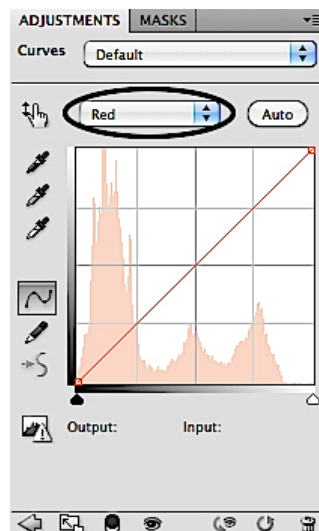
With Curves, it's about knowing the pixel value. Once the RGB value is known, the RGB value can be changed. So you always need the "Info" palette open when working with Curves. If you don't see it, choose: Window/Info. Now choose the eyedropper on the toolbar and move around the skin tone and watch the "Info" palette as the RGB numbers change.

So if a good skin tone has a good set of RGB numbers, which RGB number do you use. Overall this image has a good skin tone, but moving the eyedropper over the face yields many different RGB numbers. We'll get to that in a minute. For now let's show how the opposites colors work.

Start by making a Curves adjustment layer. Click on the black/white circle at the bottom of the layer palette and choose "Curves."



Change to the red Channel.



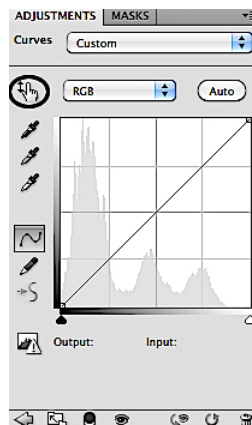
In the red channel the image will get “more” Red or less Red (Cyan). So the shadows, mid-tones and highlights can get more or less red in this channel. Click a dot on the middle of the curve and slightly drag up and down. Drag up to add red to the image. Drag down to take away red (more Cyan). Practice this visual of seeing too much in each direction, as this will be used in the final technique. Like I said, go to each channel, and click a dot in the middle and drag up and down until you find the best half way point for color in that channel. You will notice a little goes a long way with curves. With practice the skin tone should look good with this technique alone.

Click and drag the dot off of the curve to start over and place the dot in another part of the curve.

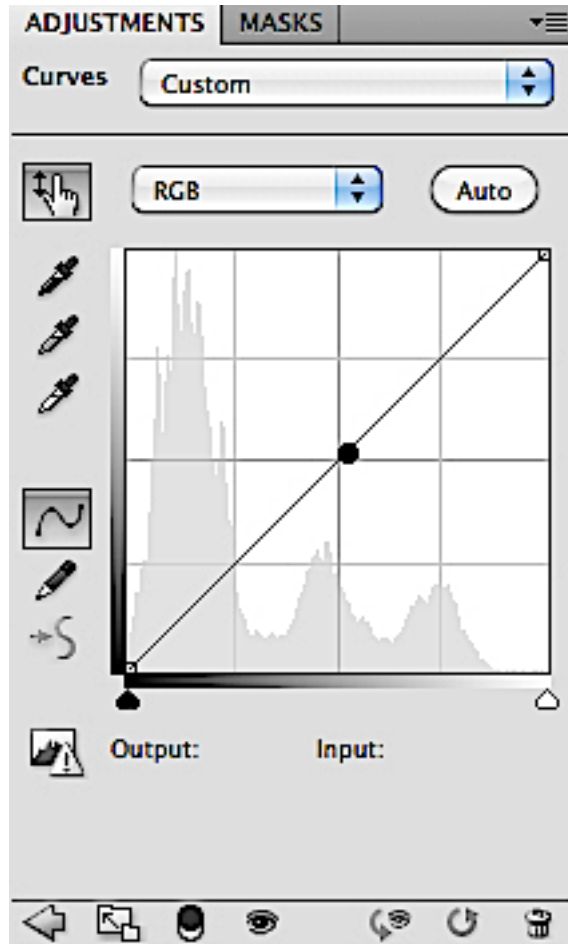
## Killer Skin Tone Technique

Here’s one of my favorite techniques. I shoot a lot of people. Sometimes the person’s skin tone doesn’t look good. It might be a fair skinned person that looks ghostly white. It might be a man’s face that has too much red. Sometimes no matter what you try, you just can’t find the right technique to adjust the skin tone. This technique takes the color of a good skin tone and then applies it to the image with the problem skin tone. I correct all skin tones using this technique.

Drag all of the dots off of the curve and set back to the RGB channel. Click on the little hand (CS4 & CS5) and move your mouse out over the image. With older versions of Photoshop, you don’t have the little hand. Just go out over the image and watch the dot move up and down the curve.



This technique works by setting a dot on the Red, Green and Blue channel and then adjusting those values. Move the your cursor around until you see the dot just above the half way point (mid-tone).

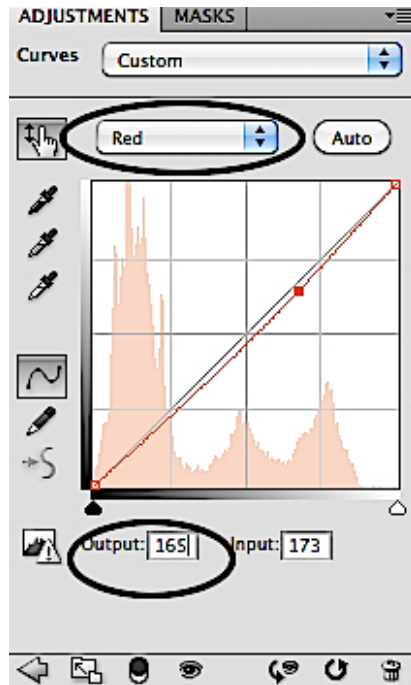


Shift/Ctrl click (PC),  
Shift/Command click (Mac), to set a dot on the Red, Green and Blue channels. You don't want a dot on the RGB channel. This technique is about changing the color in each channel to get the great skin tone.

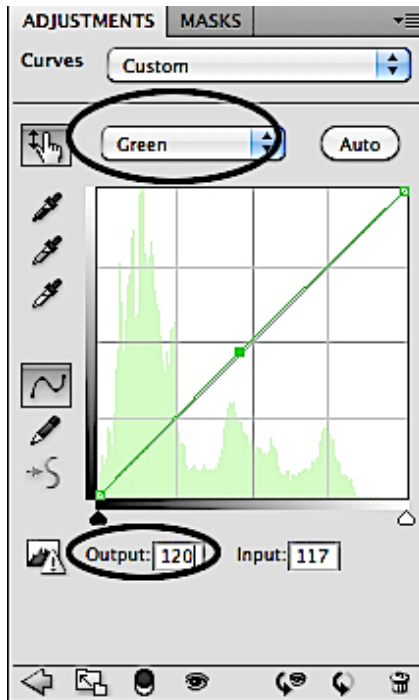
So here's the killer numbers:

Red 165  
Green 120  
Blue 100

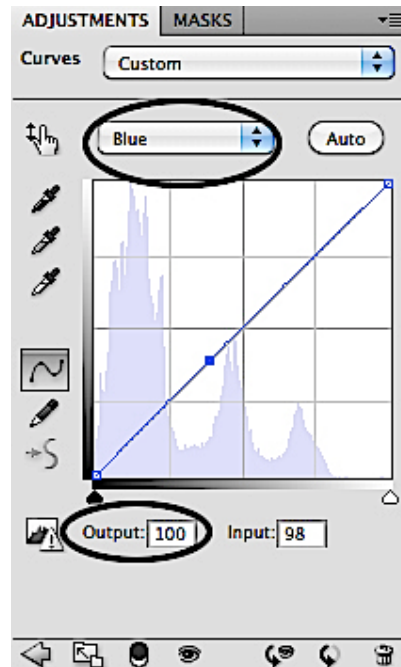
Now that we have a dot on each channel, change to the red channel and put 165 into the output box.



Change to the Green Channel and put 120 into the output.



Finally, Change to the Blue channel and put 100 into the output.



Most skin tones will look pretty good at this stage. Remember this is about the individual channels. We will adjust the RGB main curve when we are done to get the brightness and contrast set.

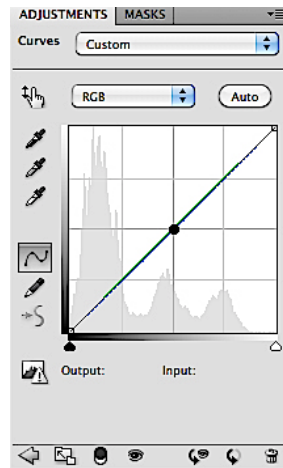
This is where your knowledge of the opposite colors comes in. Go back to the red channel and click on the dot to activate it. At this stage a little goes a long way. Usually one or two clicks will work. With the dot activated tap on the “Up” arrow key two taps and the image will get redder. Tap down it will get less red and more cyan. This image looks great with a couple clicks more of red.

Go to the green channel and click on the dot to activate it. Tap the “Up” arrow key and the image looks too green. Tap the down arrow key past the 120 starting point and it looks good with one click less of green.

Go to the “Blue” channel and click on the dot to activate it. Tap the “Up” arrow key to activate the dot. Tap up one and the image looks too blue. Tap two taps lower than the 100 starting point and the image looks great, less blue and more yellow.



Now that the skin tone color looks good, switch back to the RGB composite channel and click a dot in the middle.



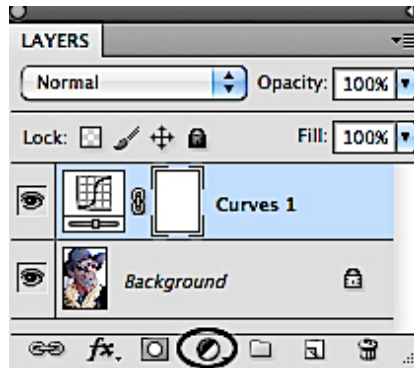
Tap up to lighten, tap down to darken. Remember a little goes a long way. Now that was an image that started out with a good skin tone. This technique will work on problem skin tone also. It's all about setting the initial Red Green and Blue points on the curve in the right spot.

It even worked on this image. This image is way dark and blue. It was under-exposed in shade. Now that's a bad skin tone.



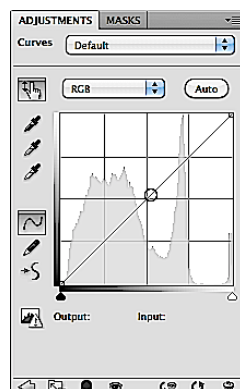
Let's try it out on a totally different type of skin tone.  
Open the Image called Stagecoach Driver

Make a Cures adjustment layer, by clicking on the little black/white circle at the bottom of the layer palette.



Click on the little hand in the Curves box. (CS4 & CS5).  
Older versions don't have the little hand, but can move their  
cursor right out into the image and see the dot on the Curve  
move as it goes over different tones. CS4 and CS5 people need  
to click on the little hand and then move the mouse over the  
different tones.

Move it around the skin tone until you get the dot about here:

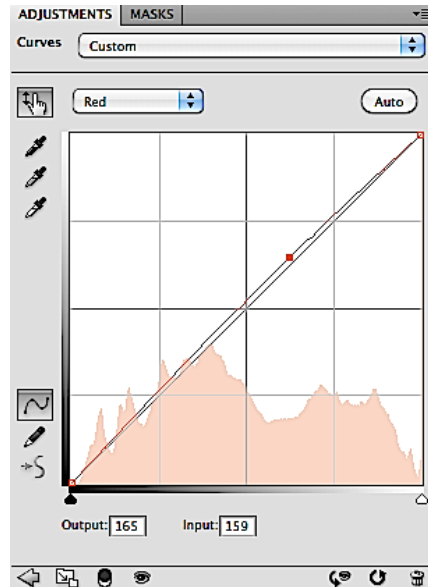


Shift/Ctrl click (PC) or Shift/Command click (Mac) when the dot is  
just above the midtone. This will place the dots on the Red,  
Green and Blue channels.

Remember the Killer skin tone numbers?

Red 165  
Green 120  
Blue 100

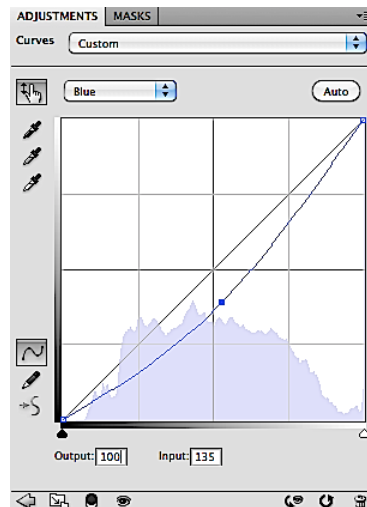
Change to the red channel and put 165 into the output box.



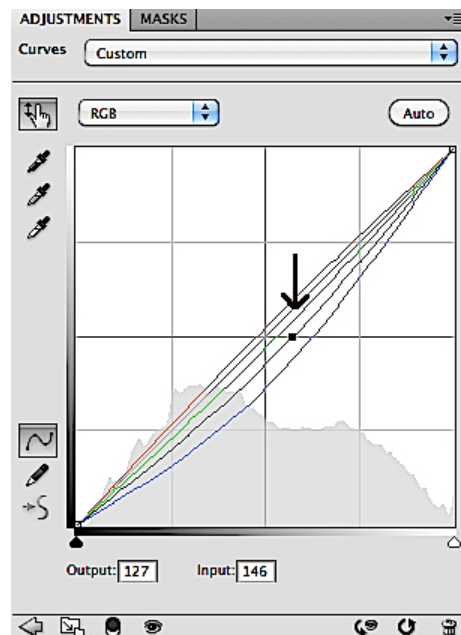
Change to the green channel and put 120 into the output box.



Tip: If you don't see the output box, click on the dot in the specific channel and the output box will appear.  
Change to the Blue channel and put 100 into the output box.



Now change back to the RGB channel to adjust the final brightness. Make sure the little hand tool is activated. Move the mouse around the skin tone until the dot is just above the mid-tone. This is where we started the process. Click and drag down to darken up the image.



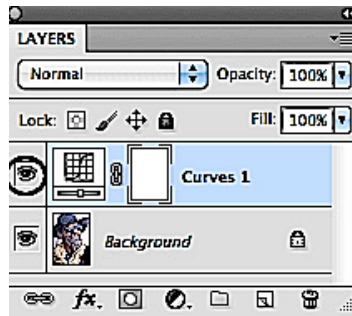
What a nice warm skin tone.

With this technique it's all about this final tweek in each channel. Let's revisit each channel. We can't be a click or two off in either direction at this point.

Go to the red channel. Make sure the dot is highlighted and then tap "Up" one to add some red. Tap "Down" one to take out some red. Repeat the process in the green channel. Tap "Up" to add green. Tap "Down" for less green. Repeat the same for the blue channel.

I ended up with: Red 162 Green 118 Blue 98

As you can see, these are not that far off of the Killer starting point. Each time you tap up 1, the output number changes by 2. Click the layer "eyeball" on and off to see the before and after of the adjustment.



There you have it, my favorite technique for skin tones. All skin tones are different, so there isn't one set of rgb numbers for everybody. Whenever you see a great skin tone, find the spot on the curve just above the midtone and make a note of the rgb numbers. Then use this technique to apply them to your new image.

When you get this technique down, The Killer skin tone numbers will get you within two or three clicks in each channel. As you practice, revisit each channel several times, Click on the dot and tap up or down test your color eye and to get the feel for the opposite colors. All of our Curves adjustments so far have been from the top menu "Image/Adjust. This lesson accessed Curves as an adjustment layer. It is the most powerful way to use Curves, as the adjustment layer has a mask attached. We will go in depth on adjustment layers and their masks in week four.