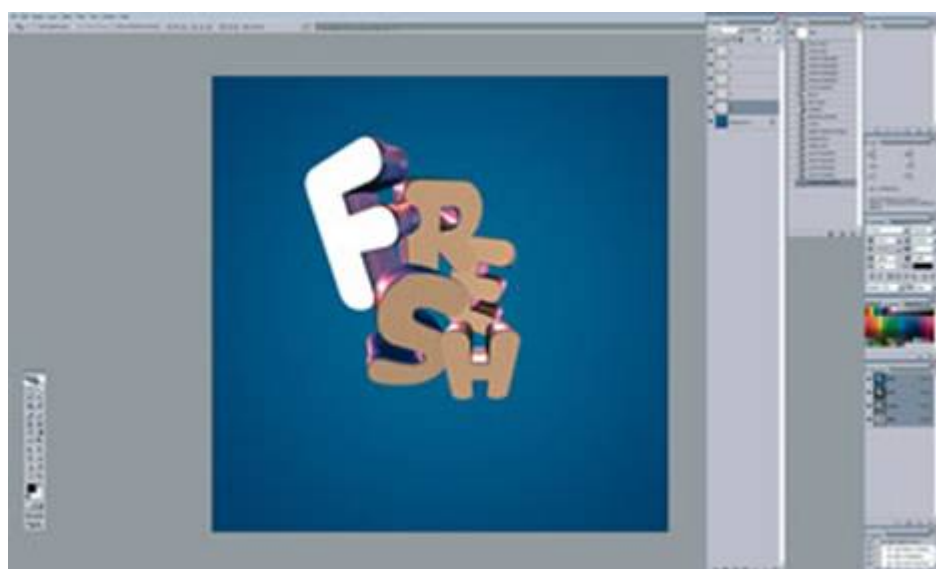


Taking 3D objects into Photoshop is going to get more popular thanks to the latest release of Photoshop Extended. But you don't need Adobe's latest high-end version of Photoshop to create some unique 3D effects - this masterclass works for Photoshop CS and above.

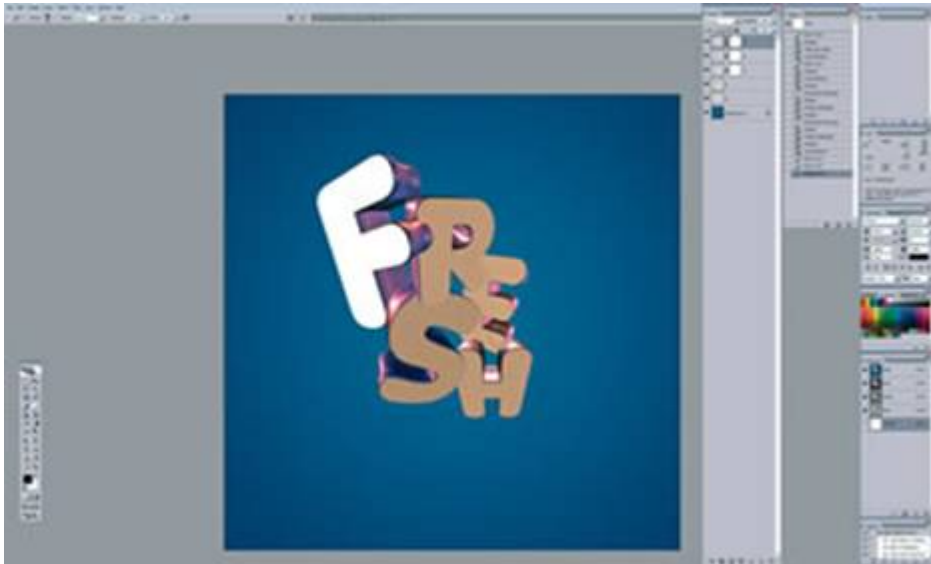
In it, type-effects guru Nik Ainley shows how to create the above image. The key is to create the letters in a 3D package first as individual characters, then bring them into Photoshop for further post work.

Through clever use of Photoshop's masking tools and layers, Nik has created type with characters that weave in and out of each other. The characters' faces also provide a handy canvas for further effects, such as patterns, gradients and lines.



01. Start by producing each letter separately in a 3D program, which Nik did here in Xara 3D, and import them into a Photoshop document. Keep each letter in its own layer, and then arrange them around each other, in whatever way looks good to you.

It might seem odd to create 3D text in this way, but Photoshop offers a lot more control than a 3D program and you will be able to produce a larger than life effect. To save time, the PSD file with the 3D text is included on this issue's CD.



02. One advantage of working in Photoshop is that letters can appear to be both behind other letters while having parts in front of them at the same time. To achieve this effect, you need to mask parts of individual letters to make it appear that they're behind others.

To mask part of a letter, start by adding a layer mask to the appropriate letter. The next step is to select which letter you want to appear in front - in the screen above, we're making the E appear as though it's partly in front of the H.

Select its outline by Ctrl+clicking on its layer thumbnail. Using the brush tool, brush black onto the H's layer mask. It should now appear that the bottom tip of the E is in front of the H. Repeat this for as many letters as you like.



03. Next, you'll start working on the lighting and shadows, starting with adding shadows onto the F. Create a new layer above letter F. To make sure the shadows fall only on the letter, give it a mask.

The shape of the mask must correspond to the shape of the F, minus parts masked off in the previous step. To do this, Ctrl+click on the F layer's thumbnail, then Ctrl+Alt+Shift click on the layer mask's thumbnail to get the intersection of the two. Now select your new layer and add a layer mask. It should be the same shape as your selection.



04. Using a large soft brush - say 70px - brush black onto this layer around the parts of the

letter that should be in shadow. In this case, the top bit that falls behind the R and the bottom that falls behind the S. Repeat this process for each layer and you should end up with a lot more depth.



05. With the shadows on the letters done, now we need shadow on the background. Create a new layer below all of the letters. Select the outline of all your letters, and fill it with black. Run a Gaussian blur on this layer. Now, use a Warp Transform to pull it downwards slightly so it seems that the letters are floating above the background. Blur again, and drop the layer's opacity if the shadows seem too harsh.



06. Next, add some more-controlled shadows beneath the layers to give greater depth. Create a new layer above your first shadow layer and, using a soft 50px brush, add black into this layer. Where you add it is down to what looks good. Add more underneath the base of the letters to give the impression that they're standing up vertically.



07. Now start working on the actual letters. The first step is to isolate the front face of each letter, using either the magic wand or pen tool. When you have a face selected, create a new layer above your letter but below the letter's shadow.

Fill it with whatever colour you want, but make it slightly darker and duller. If you have masked off part of the letter in step 2, you will need to duplicate the letter's mask to your face layer.



08. To style each letter face we are going to use layer styles. The exact settings are really down to personal taste, but the basics are something like this: Inner Shadow: Color dodge, white, opacity 15 per cent, distance: 0px, size: 45px Inner Glow: Screen, white, opacity 75 per cent, size 2px Gradient Overlay: Soft light, black to white, opacity 100 per cent, angled to make the letter lighter at the top, darker at the bottom. Satin: Color dodge, dark grey, opacity 50 per cent, distance: 20px, size: 40px



09. Once you have got something you are happy with we are going to start working on the sides of each letter.



10. Next, you need to change the colours and lighting of the sides, as well as get them to look more consistent with each other.

To do this, you need to use Photoshop's adjustment layers. Start by selecting the outline of the F shadow's layer mask and creating a new gradient map adjustment layer just below the face layer.

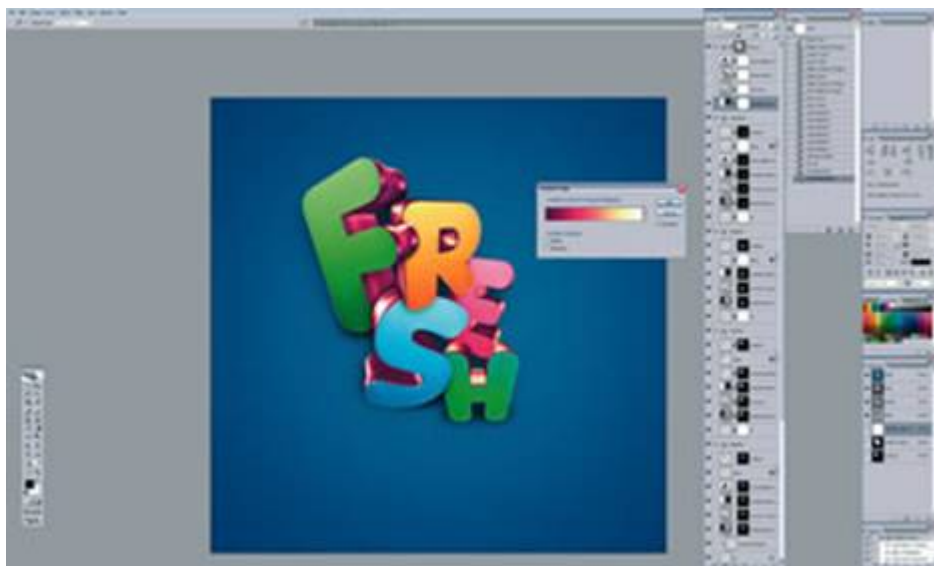


11. Now it's possible to stack additional adjustment layers above and below the layer created in step 10 to change the lightness, contrast and colours as much as you like. Next, copy the adjustment layers onto each other letter and go through making small adjustments

to get a more consistent colouring.



12. To give a little extra gloss, run Filter > Artistic > Plastic wrap on the body of each letter with the settings Highlight strength 14, Detail 1, and Smoothness 14. After each filter is applied, fade it to a soft light blending mode (Edit > Face).



13. Now to bring all the colours together to give a more harmonious feel, add some adjustment layers right at the top of the image. Start by applying the same gradient map as before using a soft light blending mode at 50 per cent opacity.



14. Try different adjustment layers to get the right colours and balance. Add curves layer to lighten it, a photo filter layer to add more red, and a colour balance layer to add more orange.

Add as many or as few as you like to get the effect you want. As a final tweak, mask all these adjustment layers so that they didn't have so much of an effect on the background colour.



15. From here you can do as much or as little as you want. Add more details to each letter, add more highlights and shadows, change the colours, whatever you can think of. This example has a few more details, but you can take it much further.

Nik Ainley

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