

/graphics/produce a character in Photoshop

Fancy creating a character from scratch, complete with different facial expressions, to use for rollover effects? Derek Lea takes you through the process in 19 steps



What you'll build Photoshop's vector tools provide everything you need to make character faces that are sharp and crisp. You'll use shape layers to create a stunning, resolution-independent character and then, by creating additional shape layers and playing with layer visibility, you'll create a range of facial expressions to place within your rollover states

Knowledge needed Basic Photoshop skills

Requires Photoshop CS+

Project time 20 minutes

● **Photoshop has a great set of basic shape tools. When you enable the Shape Layers option while working with these tools, you can create a series of solid-fill colour layers, masked by vectors. Basically, it's a bunch of vector-based shapes on a series of layers. Vectors are superb, because they're efficient in terms of memory and they're always sharp, never suffering from the jaggies which often plague pixel-based images.**

Shape layers and vectors are ideally suited to sharp and bold graphics, like the faces of cartoon characters. In the following tutorial, I'll show you how to build a character from scratch. The beauty of

working with shape layers is that you can duplicate and alter them, and this will allow you to create different facial expressions for your character.

But it doesn't end there, because this is all perfect for web effects like rollovers. You can export different versions of your character into an application such as Dreamweaver, and create a rollover effect that changes the mood of your character instantly. ●



About the author

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Areas of expertise Digital

illustration – Photoshop and Flash

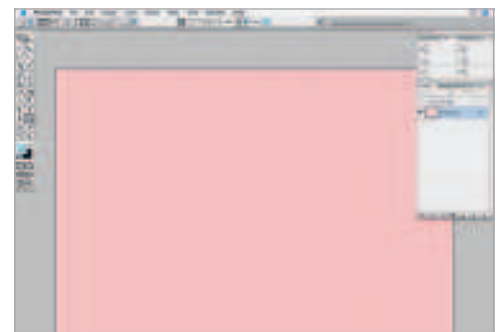
Clients Various ad agencies/mags

Favourite 70s TV show *The Six*

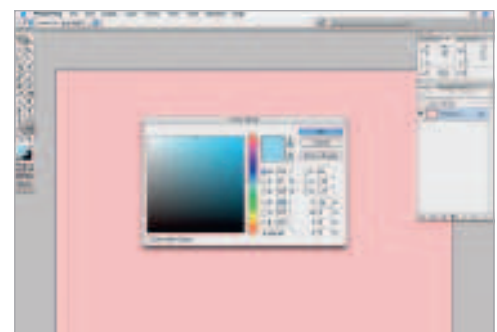
Million Dollar Man

Expert tip Editing shapes

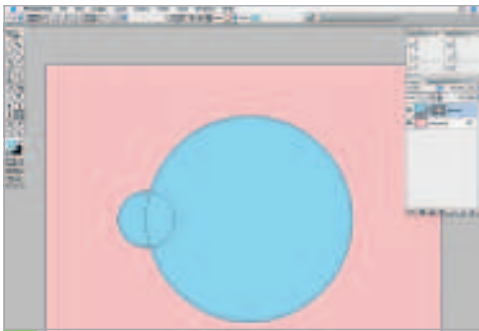
A great advantage of working with vectors in Photoshop is that you can edit as often as you like without causing any image deterioration. Different components can be selected and moved around within any shape layer by using the Shape Selection tool. Also, if you want to alter the actual structure of a shape component, you can use the Direct Selection tool to edit curves, individual line segment or points of any shape. The Direct Selection tool is nested within the same button as the Path Selection tool in the main Toolbox.



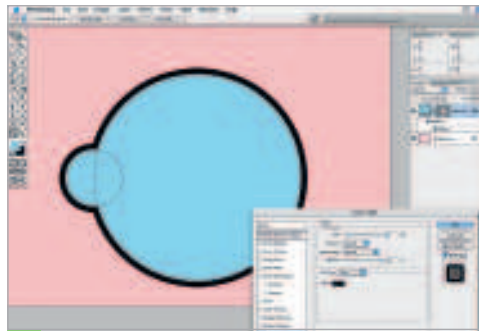
START Create a new file Launch Photoshop and create a new file. Don't worry too much about file size or dimensions, as vectors can be easily resized. Choose a background colour (again, this can be changed later), then click on the shape that's currently on display in the Toolbox.



2 Set up the tool In the Tool Options bar, ensure that the Shape Layers option is selected (far left), then click on the Ellipse tool. 'Create new shape layer' will be the only 'shape area' function available, and it's automatically selected. Click on the colour swatch in the Tool Options bar and choose a blue.



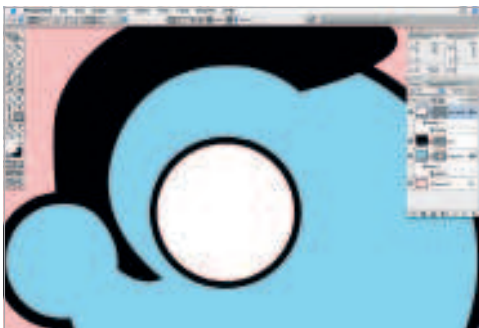
3 Create the head and ear Click and drag while holding down the Shift key to create a large circle for your character's head on a new shape layer. Next, click on the 'Add to shape area' button in the Tool Options bar and draw another circle in the ear area to add it to the current layer.



4 Add a stroke With your shape layer selected, choose the Stroke option from the Layer Styles menu at the bottom of the Layers palette. Add a thick black stroke to the outside of the shape. Now select the Pen tool. Ensure that the 'Create new shape layer' function is selected in the Tool Options bar.



5 Create some hair From the Style preset picker in the Tool Options bar, choose the default style of 'None' to ensure that there's no stroke (like on the previous layer), then change the shape layer's colour to black. Carefully click and drag with the Pen tool to create a closed hair shape on a new layer.



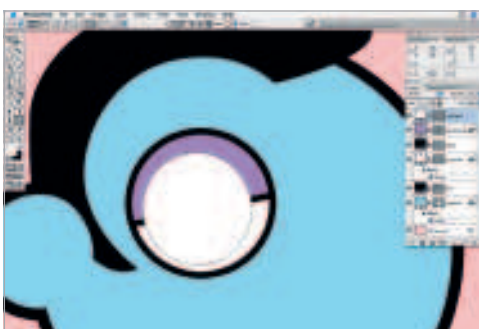
6 Create an eye Use the Ellipse shape tool to create a white circle for his eye. In the Tool Options bar, ensure that you've specified a white colour and that the 'Create new shape layer' option is enabled. Add a stroke effect to this layer too, but make it thinner than the stroke surrounding his head.



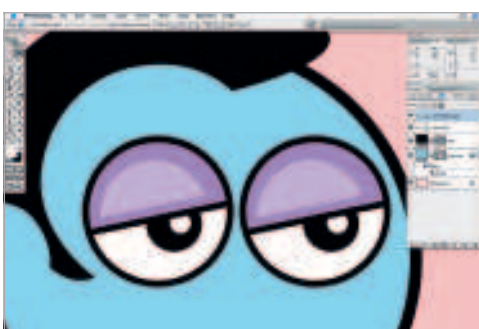
7 Embellish the eye Now use the Ellipse shape tool, set to create a new shape layer, to produce a small black pupil. Remember to set the colour in the Tool Options bar to black. Next, choose the 'Subtract from shape area' option and draw a smaller circle within the black one, punching a hole in it.



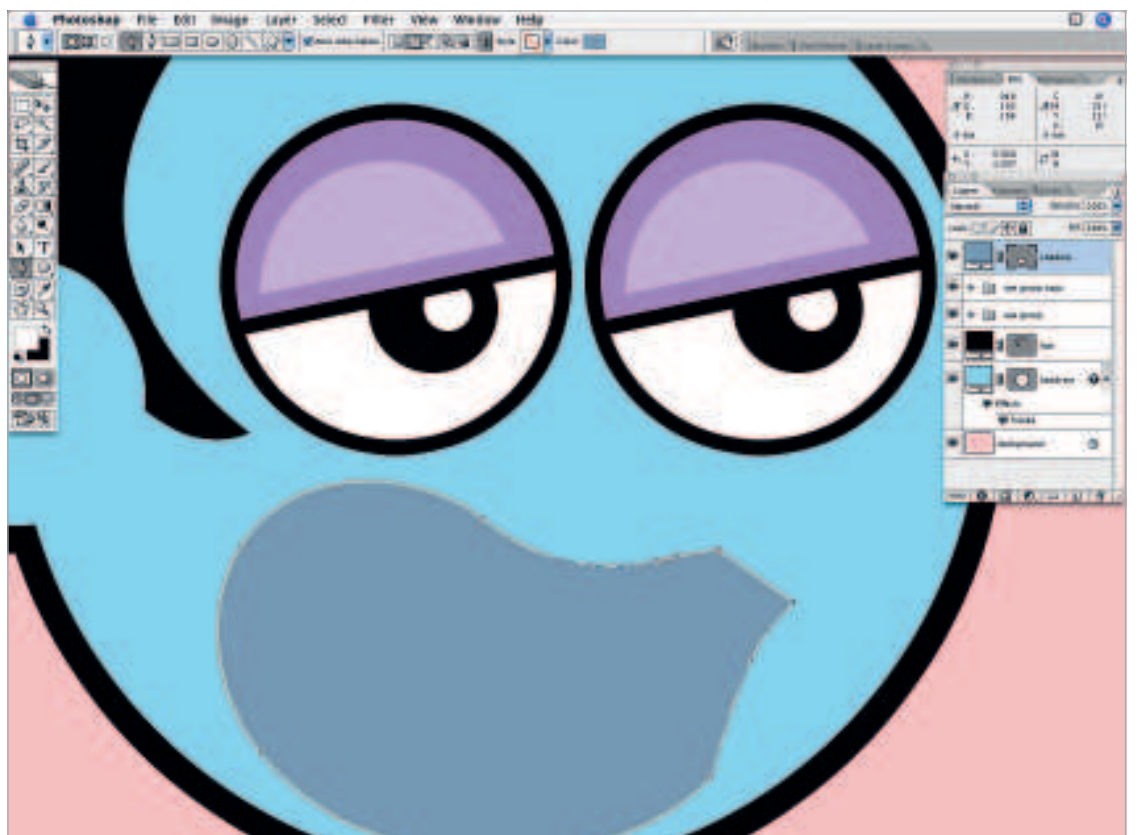
8 Create an eyelid Drag the white-circle shape layer onto the 'Create new layer' button in the Layers palette to duplicate it. Drag it to the top of the stack in the Layers palette. Select the Rectangle shape tool. With 'Subtract from shape area' enabled, draw a rectangle across the circle's bottom half.



9 Add a highlight Choose Edit > Free Transform Path and rotate the rectangle slightly. Click on the colour swatch in the Tool Options bar and choose a purple colour. Use the Ellipse shape tool, set to create a new shape layer, to draw a white circle, smaller than the eyelid. Set the colour to white.



10 Duplicate the eye Use the method you used for his eyelid to draw a rectangle that chops off the bottom of the white circle. Reduce the layer's Opacity to 38%. Select the eye layers in the Layers palette and group them. Duplicate the group and drag it to the right with the Move tool.



11 Add some whiskers Use Edit > Free Transform to reduce the size of the duplicate group. Now, select the Pen tool in the Tool Options bar. Select the 'Create a new shape layer' option in the Tool Options bar. Draw a closed shape in the area of his five o'clock shadow around the mouth. Set the colour to a dull blue.



12 Create a mouth Again, with the Pen tool set to create a new layer, draw a closed shape that outlines the right side of his mouth. Change the colour to black and select the Ellipse shape tool. Select the 'Create a new shape layer' option and draw a circle at the left side of the dull-blue whisker area.



13 Outline the cheek Draw another circle and enable Overlapping on the first, then enable the 'Subtract from shape area' function. Use the Path Selection tool to move it and Free Transform Path to resize it if necessary, until it creates a kind of thin half-moon shape, outlining the left side of his cheek area.



14 Add a nose shape Repeat this technique a few times to create a series of thin half-moon shapes in his ear and at the corner of his mouth. Use the Ellipse tool with the 'Create new shape area' option enabled to create a nose shape layer. Change the colour to pink and add a black stroke effect.

Expert tip Editing shape layers

You can edit the colour of any shape layers by double-clicking on the shape layer thumbnail in the Layers palette. Double-clicking a shape layer opens the colour picker, enabling you to specify a new fill colour for that layer's shape components. You can edit Layer Styles like strokes by double-clicking on the applied style or the style icon added to that layer in the Layers palette. Double-clicking on a style opens the Layer Style options, from where you can edit your styles. We've applied strokes to certain layers, but when the Layer Style options are open you can add any styles from the list.



15 Create highlights Use the methods you've learned to create a new, smaller elliptical shape layer over his nose area. Change the colour to white. Select the Pen tool and, with the 'Add to shape area' option enabled, draw closed shapes to represent highlights on his hair. Reduce the Opacity to 58%.



16 Alter the mouth You've finished the 'everyday' facial expression, so let's go further. Select everything but the background in the Layers palette and add it to a group. Duplicate the group, disable the visibility of your original group, expand the duplicate and delete the mouth layers.



17 Surprise him Use the Pen tool with the 'Create a new shape layer' option enabled to draw a new mouth shape that looks surprised. Change the colour of the shape layer to black. Find the eyelid and eyelid highlight layers within the duplicate group and delete them.



18 Making faces Have some fun creating new shape layers within this duplicated group. Add shapes around the new mouth and give his forehead some wrinkles – a few details can really change the feel of a face. Use the Move tool to reposition his pupil shape layers so his eyes spin.



FINISH Export your faces You have two groups in the Layers palette. Export the image using one facial expression, then change which group is visible and export the image again, giving you a lovely static image and a different rollover state.