REPLACING A SKY IN PHOTOSHOP

There are close to a gazillion (yes, that many!) ways of replacing/inserting a sky in Photoshop. The steps outlined below are for the way I do it. This method is fairly straightforward and is the foundation I use but each situation is different and some may require more processing than I’ve outlined here. I will outline steps for two situations: one involving a straightforward sky replacement and the other for when a sky is reflected on something (I’ll use water in my demonstration).

It is convenient (but not always necessary) to size the sky picture to the same pixel dimensions as the main picture. This is true especially in a picture where the sky represents a large portion of the image.

Case 1

1. Import main image and sky images from Lightroom (or Bridge…for simplicity I’m going to assume from Lightroom).
   1. Highlight the images.
   2. Right click and select “Edit In”
   3. Select “Open as Layers in Photoshop”
2. Make sure the sky layer is on the bottom.
3. Select the main picture layer.
4. Select the “Select and Mask” tool by choosing any selection tool in Photoshop.
   1. Click on “Select and Mask”
   2. From the “View” drop down choose “On Black” or “On White” (either one will provide a good preview of your selection). All other selections can be left as the default.
   3. Change the opacity to around 75%
   4. Make the selection using the selection brush.
   5. Refine the selection as needed by using the “Refine Selection Brush.”
   6. Click “OK,” making sure the output is set to “Layer Mask.”
5. Select “Ctrl I” (Cmd I on a Mac) to invert the selection.
6. Select the sky layer and use the “Move” tool to position the sky.
7. Select the sky layer and create a “Curves Adjustment” layer
   1. Move the left hand most point up or down the “Y” axis until the sky and main pic horizon have about the same contrast.
   2. Use the “Gradient Tool” to introduce contrast back into the top of the sky
8. Select the sky layer and create a “Color Adjustment” layer.
   1. Adjust colors until satisfied
9. Select the main pic layer and create a “Color Adjustment” layer.
10. Select the top most layer and hit “Ctrl, Alt, Shift, E” to clone stamp all layers below.
    1. Select “Filter”
    2. Select “Blur”
    3. Select “Average” to create an average color temp for the entire image
    4. Choose “Soft Light” blend mode; adjust opacity as needed.
11. Continue with normal processing workflow.

Case 2

1. Steps 1 – 8 in Case 1
2. Highlight the sky layer and type “Ctrl J” to duplicate the layer
   1. Move the duplicated layer above the main pic layer.
3. Highlight the duplicated layer and type “Ctrl T” to initiate the “Transform” tool
   1. Right click on the sky image and select “Flip Vertical” and hit “Enter”
4. Use the “Move” tool to roughly position the sky in the reflection.
5. With the inverted sky layer highlighted, reduce the opacity to “0.”
6. Make a selection of the reflection.
   1. For reasons I don’t understand, the “Select and Mask” tool does not work for this.
   2. I typically use either the “Magic Wand” or “Quick Selection” tool utilizing the color picker to select the reflection.
7. Create a mask of the selection.
8. Uncouple the mask and the sky by clicking on the chain link between them.
9. Highlight the sky in the inverted sky layer
   1. Utilize the “Move” tool and position the sky as a mirror image in the reflection
   2. When done, recouple the sky and mask by clicking between them on the layer.
10. Choose “Soft Light” as the blend mode
11. Continue with normal processing workflow.