

One of the things that I have the most fun with in Photoshop is to apply filters just to have fun and see what will happen. Sometimes I try am trying to make the picture more realistic by applying filters like Sharpening or Denoise. Many times I do exactly the opposite; I try to alter the picture completely in an attempt to produce a more artistic effect. I use many of the Photoshop filters found under Filter | Artistic, such as Poster Edges and Cutout. I can waste a lot of time playing with them but the filters I like to use most are not Photoshop filters but are made by Topaz Labs. (<http://www.topazlabs.com/>)

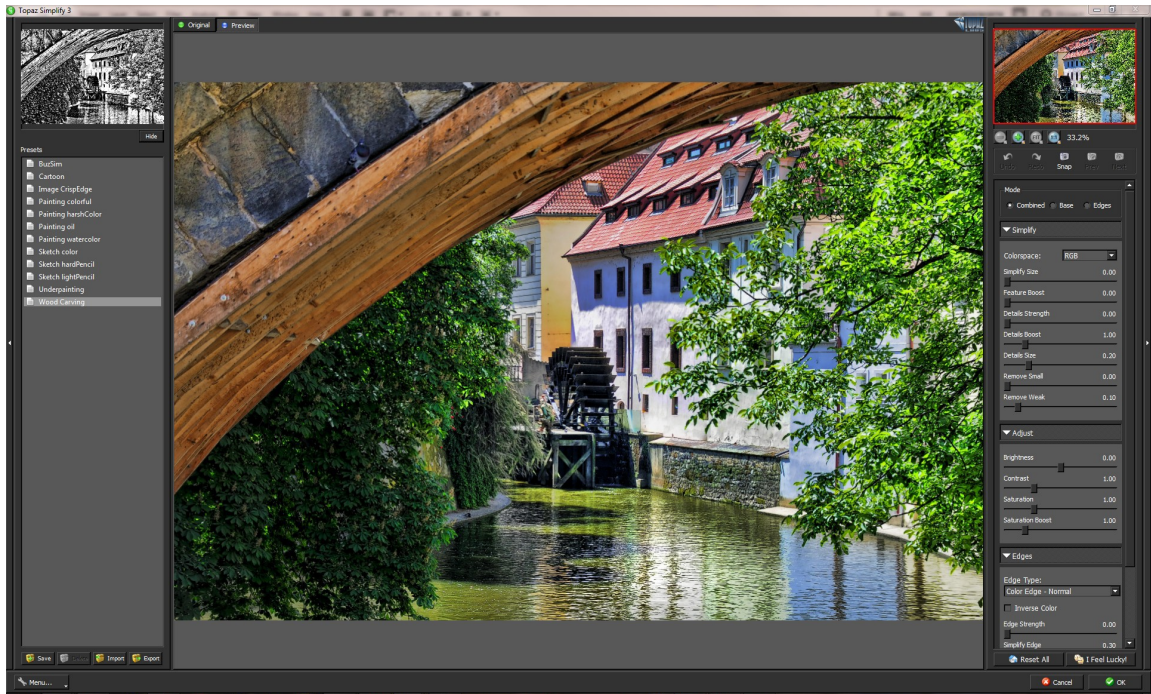
Topaz Labs makes a suite of great plugins for Photoshop, which can be purchased individually or as a bundle. According to their website, the filters are described as follows:

- Adjust - Infuse your images with dynamic color, detail and exposure.
- B&W Effects - Create high-impact black and white photography.
- Clean - Take control of extensive smoothing and stylized edge capabilities.
- DeJPEG - Fix JPEG artifacts and drastically improve the quality of web images.
- DeNoise - Completely eliminate noise with the best noise reduction tool available.
- Detail - Manipulate detail and sharpen with absolutely no halos or artifacts.
- InFocus - The simple sharpening solution that recovers detail and enhances clarity.
- LensEffects - Simulates a wide range of lens, filter and specialty camera effects.
- ReMask - The fastest way to mask or extract a subject from its background.
- Star Effects - Make Light stand out with Star Effects which offers a more intuitive and simplified way to add creative star and lighting enhancements to your images.
- Simplify - Create a variety of stunning painterly and artistic effects from photos.

Many of the things that you can do with these filters can also be done, for better or worse, by other means with Photoshop, but, a few of them I find quite unique, such as Adjust and Simplify.

Topaz Simplify

First of all, don't forget to apply any filter on its own layer. That way you can determine which parts of the image are to be affected by the filter by using either a selection or a layer mask. And, if you apply the effect to the whole image, you will be able to modify the effect with the opacity slider.



Topaz Simplify

Click Filter | Topaz Labs | Simplify to get started. The Simplify Window is very easy to use. On the left is a list of presets, and on the right sliders for fine tuning. I start by cycling through the presets. As you hover over a preset, the preview in the upper left will show you what the image will look like. Click on a preset to choose it and the effect will be applied to the larger image in the middle. Then adjust the sliders on the right to modify the effect. The image can be resized so that you can work on smaller parts of it, by using the controls in the upper right. If the image is too large to fit the screen, you can move it around by clicking and dragging on it. To toggle back and forth between the original image and the altered image, just click on. There are also buttons on the upper left to do the same thing. If none of the presets suit your eye there is a button on the lower right called “I Feel Lucky” that will randomly alter the sliders. You can really waste some time here. When you are satisfied with the result, click OK and you will apply the effect and return to Photoshop. Here is the same image altered using different presets:



Topaz Simlify BuzSim



Topaz Simplify Wood Carving

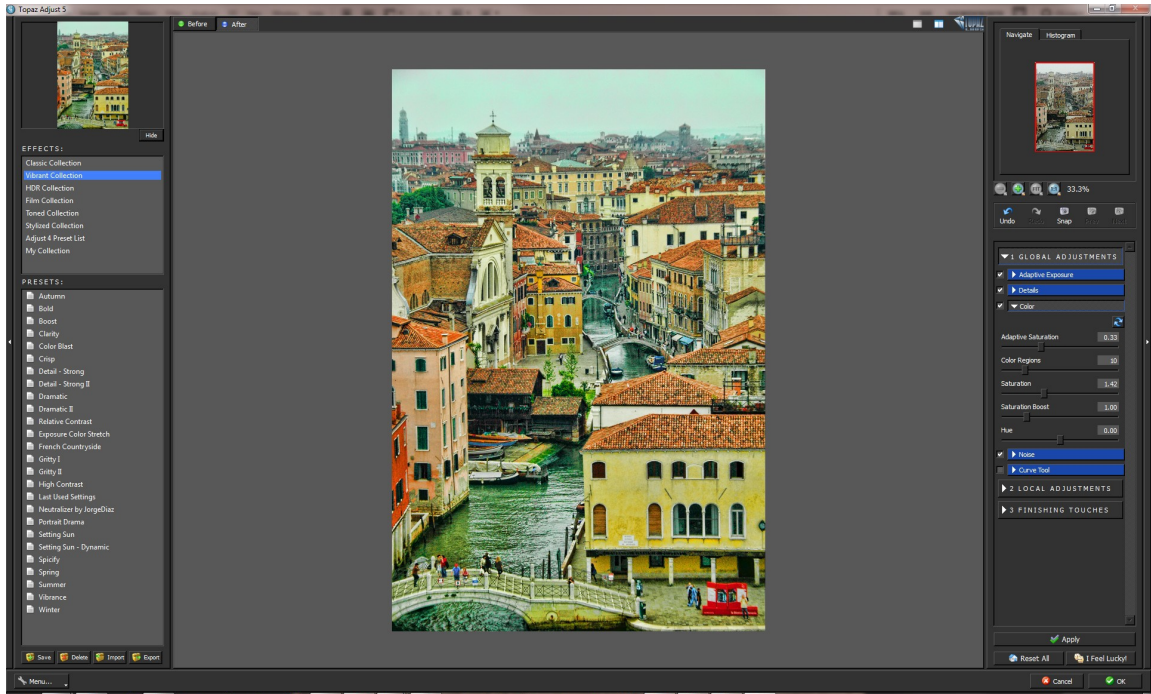
Topaz Adjust

My favorite filter by far is Topaz Adjust. It is set up much like Simplify, with presets on the left and sliders on the right. There are so many presets that they have been grouped into categories. The sliders are also hidden in drop down menus. Here is a picture of Venice, Italy on a gray day. It is kinda washed out and lacks punch.



An overcast day in Venice

But just applying Topaz Adjust with the Spicify preset, and a little more brightness and saturation, located under the Adaptive Exposure Drop down menu, and it comes to life.



Topaz Adjust with the Spicify Preset

If you would like to apply more than one adjustment at the same time, there is a button on the lower right side labeled “Apply”. That way you will not have to leave this window and reenter it to apply the second effect. After I applied the spicify preset, I applied the details filter. With a little dodging, burning and cropping in Photoshop, I am ready to print.



Ready to Print

Topaz Adjust can make some really dramatic differences in the image. I use it on most of my images. I spend hours just playing with them. You can even make your own presets. You can change your images a lot with these filters, or at least have some fun trying.