

# **PORTRAIT RETOUCHING CHEAT SHEET: FROM INFANTS TO THE ELDERLY**



Our cheat sheet of professional portrait retouching guidelines, sorted by age groups from babies, to teenagers, to the elderly – what to remove, what to soften, and what to accent.

Whether you're a professional portrait photographer, or the artsy one in the family that handles the photos, many mid and high-end camera owners will at one point or another need to become familiar with the basics of retouching.

This cheat sheet guide is the culmination of things I've found to be generally true during the many years I've spent retouching people professionally. You'll find my tips separated by age group, and they're meant to get you started thinking while working on the subject's face.

As with many "rules" of art, don't be afraid to make your own evaluations as well. These guidelines may need to be modified or substituted, as every subject and portrait is different.

The ultimate goal is to be sensitive to your subject and retouch them with the respect and honor they deserve.

Let's start with some general tips that apply to subjects of all ages and genders.

## IN GENERAL



No matter what age group you're retouching, keep these general concepts and guidelines in mind.

## Do's

- Do soften (but not remove entirely) prominent features such as deep creases, folds, dimples, double chins, scars, and birthmarks.
- Do make a boney face look more graceful by rounding the sharp angles of the lighting and softening the edges between the lights.
- Do retouch oily skin by shaping the edges of the specular highlights and softening the edges of them. If needed, tone the value down a little bit.
- Do whiten teeth, remove stains, and bring receded teeth slightly forward.
- Do fill in hair or remove stray hairs – whichever will look best.



## Don'ts

- Don't change the shape or fullness of the lips.
- Don't remove pore structure or the skin will look rubbery.
- Don't remove character features, only things that can be considered temporary on the face. That means moles are only removed upon request, and only the most distracting or clumped freckles should be removed.
- Don't completely remove vertical folds of skin on the cheeks or the face will look square and much wider. Instead, lift them slightly, lighten the shadows of the folds and darken the highlights on them for a more pleasing effect.
- Don't forget about your subjects' chests, hands, and other flesh areas. It looks strange to see a fully retouched face on an un-retouched body!

# BABIES AND CHILDREN

## GOAL

They are beautiful just the way they are; remove temporary items.

## ADJECTIVES

Darling, Cute, Sweet, Fun, Precious

Do not over retouch and be careful of expression work. Sometimes a baby scrunches up the forehead and it looks like a frown but if you remove it, the baby looks unintelligent.



## **Remove:**

- Insect bites
- Bruises
- Rashes
- Scratches
- Drool if it exceeds being cute
- Forceps marks

## **Soften:**

- Shadows under the eyes only if they are very dark and distracting
- Frowns only if it improves the expression

## **Accent:**

- Pink in cheeks
- Eyelashes – but keep it delicate
- Highlights in eyes
- Wisps of hair

# TEENAGERS

## GOAL

Teenagers want to look like the musicians and models they see online, on television and in advertisements.

## ADJECTIVES

Cool, Awesome, Hot, Powerful, Fresh, Sweet

Study new trends so you can keep current on hairstyles, makeup, and clothing. Look to representations of teens in popular media ie: magazine covers for inspiration and to ensure your approach is an accurately contemporary one.





## **Remove:**

- Insect bites
- Bruises
- Horizontal lines on the lips (makes them look dry)
- Scratches
- Blemishes
- Stray hairs that are not part of a trendy style

## **Soften:**

- Shadows under the eyes 50%, up to 75% on fashion shots
- Shorten trendy hairs enough that they don't overtake the portrait
- Peach fuzz; make it look good
- Blend the edges of the light until the skin looks smooth

## **Accent:**

- Pink in Cheeks
- Highlights on lips
- Highlights on hair, clothing, and jewelry
- Eyes – whites, catchlights, lashes on the girls, deepen top of iris on the boys

# WOMEN 25-45 YEARS OF AGE

## GOAL

Women in this age group want to look confident, polished and bright.

## ADJECTIVES

Smart, Sexy, Beautiful, Confident, Capable

Many women will want to look a bit younger than they are. Look at the hair style and clothing for hints on how far to go with the retouching and keep it within the realm of believability.



## **Remove:**

- Blemishes
- Stray hairs
- Fatigue lines
- Age spots
- Diagonal lines and shadows that project stress, fatigue and anxiety
- Vertical lines around the lips
- Horizontal lines on the lips

## **Soften:**

- Shadows under the eyes 25-50%, shape them gracefully
- Blend the edges of the lighting so the skin looks polished
- Folds of skin on the neck 50%
- Lift droopy skin on the neck and jaw – not too tight, 50%
- Smile lines only if they are very dark
- Shorten vertical lines from the corners of the mouth 50%

## **Accent:**

- Pink in Cheeks
- Highlights on lips
- Eyes – whites, catch lights, iris lashes
- Make up – make sure it's perfect
- Highlights in the hair, on clothes, and on jewelry

# MEN 25-45 YEARS OF AGE

## GOAL

Men in this age group want to look strong, healthy, polished and masculine.

## ADJECTIVES

Strong, Sexy, Confident, Capable, Smart

Be careful not to go overboard on skin smoothing, softening beards and enhancements.



## **Remove:**

- Blemishes
- Stray hairs
- Fatigue lines
- Diagonal lines or shadows that project stress, fatigue or anxiety
- Vertical lines around the lips
- Shaving rash
- Age spots

## **Soften:**

- Shadows under the eyes 25-50% – shape them gracefully
- Contour the lighting slightly; don't go too far
- Folds of skin on the neck 25-25%
- Horizontal lines on the lips if they are deep
- Lift droopy jaw line 25-50%; don't make it too tight
- Smile lines only if they are extremely dark
- Vertical lines from the outside corners of the mouth; shorten 50%
- Beard or stubble – make sure the edges are nice, soften “blue beards” up to 50%

## **Accent:**

- Add a slight amount of pink in the cheeks
- Highlights in the hair
- Eyes – focus on the whites and catch lights, darken the upper eyelid line and the top half of the iris slightly

## **WOMEN AGE 50+ YEARS OF AGE**

### **GOAL**

Women in this age group want to look confident, graceful, and good for their age.

### **ADJECTIVES**

Elegant, Healthy, Independent, Vivacious, Confident

Be especially careful that your work looks believable, as that line is often pushed in this age group. No one is happy with a portrait that doesn't look real.



## Remove:

- Blemishes
- Stray hairs
- Fatigue lines
- Diagonal lines and shadows that project stress, fatigue, and anxiety
- Vertical lines around the lips
- Horizontal lines on the lips
- Bluish veins

## **Soften:**

- Shadows under eyes 25-50% – shape them gracefully
- Age spots 50-80%
- Blend the lighting so the skin looks graceful – do not overdo it
- Folds of skin on the neck 50%
- Lift droopy skin on the jaw line – slightly
- Smile lines if they are very dark – balance them if needed
- Shorten vertical lines from the corners of the mouth 50%
- Soften and shorten crows feet – more work on the ones that pull the face down, less on the ones that bring the face up.
- Make sure the make up is straight and looks good because women in this age group sometimes can not see well enough to apply it well and occasionally use colors that they used to like but are a bit too bright or dark for them at this age.

## **Accent:**

- Pink in cheeks
- Highlights on lips
- Eyes – catch lights, whites, iris, lashes.
- Again, make sure the make up is pretty
- Highlights in hair and on clothes and jewelry



# MEN 50+ YEARS OF AGE

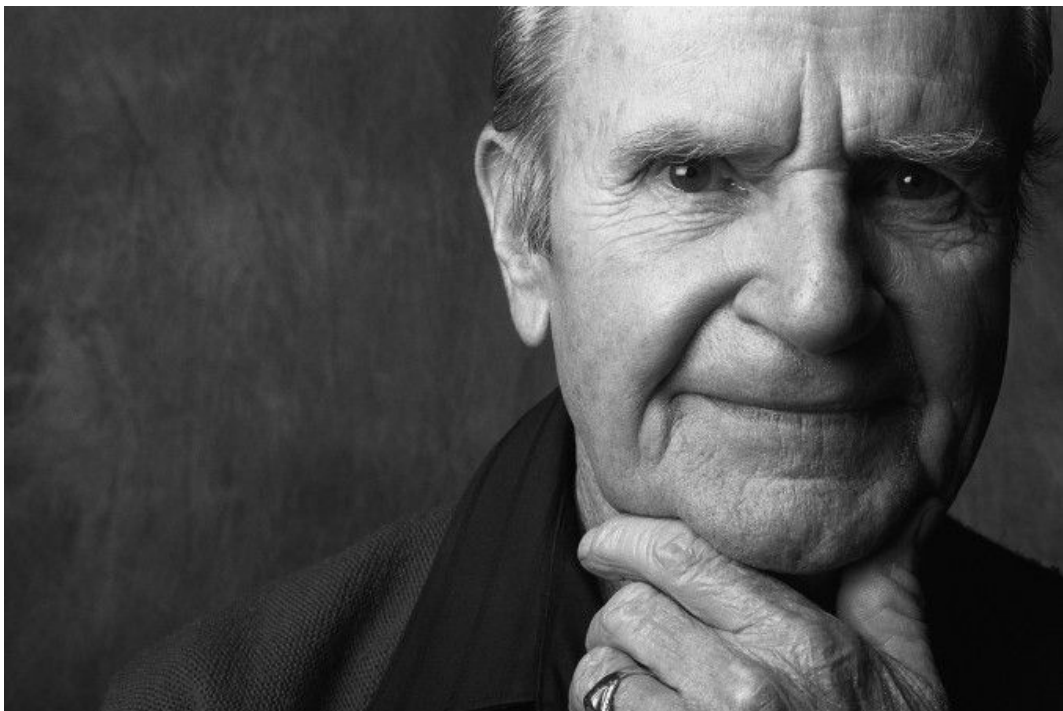
## GOAL

Men in this age group want to look healthy, confident, energetic, and good for their age.

## ADJECTIVES

Healthy, Experienced, Confident, Intelligent

Don't over retouch them; focus on highlights and lines that travel up on the face and body.



## **Remove:**

- Blemishes
- Stray hairs
- Fatigue lines
- Diagonal lines that project stress or anxiety

## **Soften:**

- Age spots
- Shadows under the eyes 25-50% – shape them gracefully
- Blend the edges of the lighting slightly
- Folds of skin on the neck 50%
- Vertical lines around the lips
- Horizontal lines on the lips
- Lift droop neck and jaw no more than 50%
- Smile lines only if they are extremely dark
- Shorten vertical lines from the corners of the mouth no more than 50%

## **Accent:**

- Add a touch of pink to the cheeks
- Highlights in hair
- Eyes – focus on whites and catch lights, darken top half of iris and upper lash line slightly



Jane Conner-ziser is an award winning photographer, digital artist, premier educator and independent consultant. With over 25 years of experience, 19 of them in digital imaging and evolving technologies, the techniques Jane developed for facial retouching and enhancement and portrait painting from photographs are widely emulated by photographers and digital artists worldwide through her classes, online training and educational products. You can learn more on [her website](#).