

## Retouching Pictures with the Clone Stamp And Healing Brush

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Intended for: [pros](#)

Retouching has always been among the more complex edits—one that not everyone was willing to try. But new technologies are making retouching an easy job that almost anyone can do.



Surely it's happened to you: you took a picture and everything looked alright during the shot, but after you opened it on your computer you noticed several problems, such as a branch sticking into the edge of the picture. Using advanced photo editing techniques like retouching, you can easily create a perfect picture with no unwanted objects in the way.

### Is Retouching... Immoral?

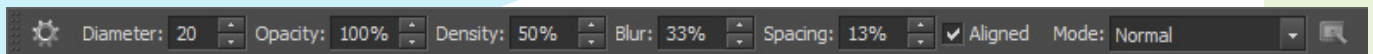
One conservative view on retouching is that it is always an altering of reality, and that a retouched picture is not a "photograph" in the true sense of the word. On the one hand I can understand these purists, as a truly good photo needs hardly any edits, except perhaps for a contrast adjustment. On the other hand, ultimately, there is nothing despicable about retouching.

Even in the days of film photography, retouching was one way to get rid of photo defects (dust, hair, etc.). Then as now, retouching was a process, a series of steps to improve a picture. For film, the steps most often included dodging, following by ink retouching (for black and white photos). In our digital age, retouching can mean practically any operation that somehow changes the feel of a picture—from use of a clone stamp to red eye correction to things like combining two pictures into one.

## Cloning Ones And Zeros

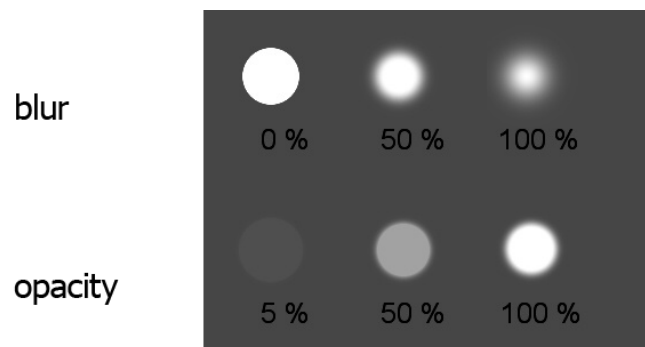
There are two tools you can use in Zoner Photo Studio for the most classic retouching task—removing defects. One is the Clone Stamp; the other is the Healing Brush, added in version 13. They are similar in effect, but there is an important difference between them. While the Clone Stamp intelligently copies one part of a picture onto another, the Healing Brush intelligently copies only the structure in this way, with the coloring coming from the target region instead.

Let's take a look at the use of these tools for removing defects (scratches, unwanted objects, etc.).



The Options toolbar as it appears with the Healing Brush or Clone Stamp active.

To activate the Clone Stamp or the Healing Brush, use their buttons on the Editor's main toolbar (the one along the left). Both of these tools have the same settings available on the Options toolbar: Diameter, Opacity, Density, Blur, and Spacing. To select a source area to use after activating these tools, hold down the Ctrl key. The cursor changes to a bullseye. Click the desired source area. Release Ctrl; the cursor changes back to a circle with the diameter set in Diameter. You can start retouching now. The illustration below gives an example of how Opacity and Blur work.



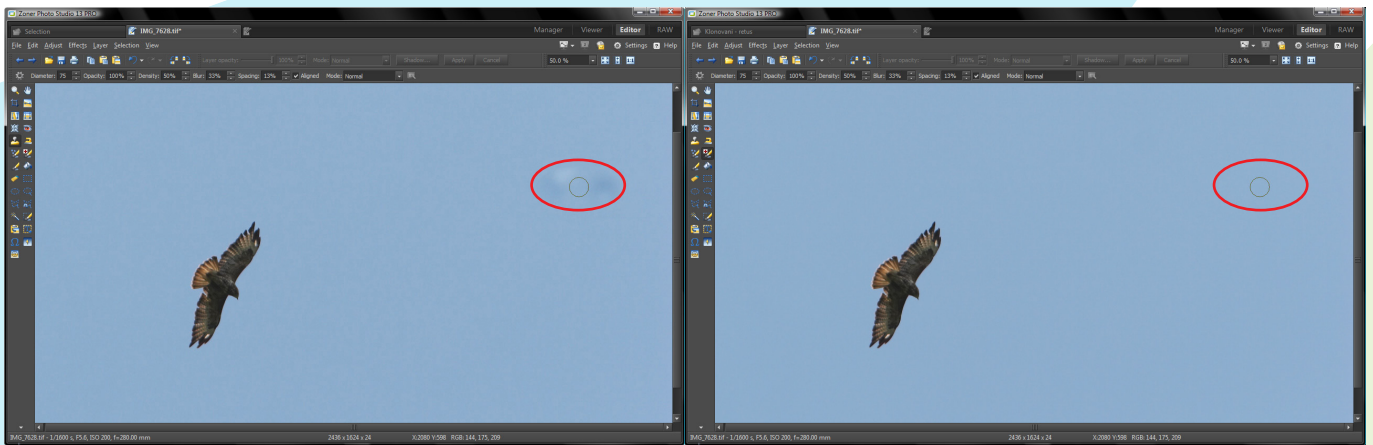
The results of using various Opacity and Blur settings for the Clone Stamp.

## Aligned or No? Stamp or Brush?

When retouching large areas with the Clone Stamp, be very careful not to include any recognizable structures from the source area into the target area. All it takes is e.g. a tiny twig, and even casual observers will notice the retouching.

The Aligned option on the Options toolbar is very useful for preventing this kind of problem. It determines whether cloning always starts from the same source area or whether the source area always moves along with the target area. The latter variant is the most useful for retouching large areas—but again, it opens you up to the “noticeable structure” problem.

For large areas that are all shades of a single color, it is quite hard to “catch” a suitable part of the picture to clone. That brings us to the Healing Brush, which takes care of the shading for you; all you're cloning with it is the source area's texture.



*On the left:* an example of (inappropriate) retouching with the Clone Stamp.

*On the right:* the same job done with the Healing Brush.

Besides removing unwanted objects from a picture, the Clone Stamp is also useful when editing portraits. Anyone in a portrait you prepare will be happy to learn that you've removed their skin defects during retouching. For this type of work it is best to leave the Aligned option turned off and to carefully pick a source area with the shade of skin most similar to the one in the area you're retouching. If you are using a notebook computer for the job, be careful not to tilt the display: a tilted screen can make the retouched area less noticeable for you than it will be for your audience.



The results of using various Opacity and Blur settings for the Clone Stamp.