Dodge & Burn (Like a Pro)

The idea: Position a layer above your image and fill it with a perfect 50% gray, then set the layer to “Overlay” Blend Mode ... which completely ignores 50% gray. Then paint on that layer with black and white at a low opacity — which perfectly simulates the effect of dodging and burning the image layer below, while leaving all of the original pixels untouched. (Clever, eh?)

Initial Step: Add 50% gray to your swatch palette. This then becomes a color you can grab if you ever need to “erase” any of the dodging and burning you’ve done on the 50% Gray Overlay layer. (Just remember to toggle back to black and white by pressing “D” before you return to dodging/burning.

Creating Your Dodge & Burn Layer: The technique is easy enough, and you should take a moment to use it whenever you are working with an important image. Starts like this ... With your main image layer selected, press this key command:

Apple: Cmd - Shift - N
PC: Ctrl - Shift - N

That will create a new blank layer and pull up the dialogue box below. Use the drop-down menu to choose Overlay as your Blend Mode and check the little box at the bottom that is titled “Fill with Overlay-neutral color (50% gray)“:

Now pull up your Brush Tool (B), grab the default black and white (D), and toggle between them (X) to switch back and forth between dodging and burning as you paint on the 50% Gray Overlay layer. Work at a low opacity (20 to 40 percent) and adjust your brush size with the left and right bracket keys as you lay down your brush strokes. (And if you go too far, just grab the 50% Gray you saved in your Swatch Palette, “erase” over it, then press “D” and start again.)

B Brush Tool (My Favorite Tool of All)

D Default White/Black (sets your Foreground/Background colors, which you will use here to alternatively dodge or burn on your 50% Gray Overlay).

X Toggles the Foreground and Background colors, switching you between dodging and burning.

[] The left bracket makes your Brush smaller, the right bracket makes your Brush larger. When working with the Brush tool, you will often keep your fingers poised over these two keys.