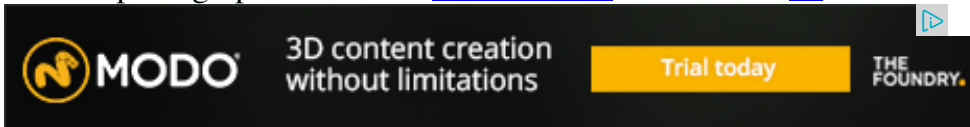




## Basic Photo Reflections

In this Photoshop tutorial I'll show you how to create realistic reflections on water already present in your favorite photographs. Posted In [Photo Effects](#) | Comments [28](#)



### Step 1

Let me begin by saying just a few things about this effect. First and foremost, this is one of those techniques that's better kept to yourself when showing off your amazing photos to your friends and fellow photographers. For some reason, even in this day and age, the digital work a photographer does is looked down on as cheating by others... so mum's the word.

Secondly, if you plan to show or print photos using this technique, make sure you go the distance to make the photo completely convincing. Any small inconsistencies will immediately give you away as an imposter, and lets face it, none of us want that.

So pick a photo with a nice straight (or at least relatively straight) waterline. If you've got a shoreline that has big jogs and variations this technique becomes much more tricky and often impossible. I chose this photograph I took in Slovenia a few years back. I've always liked the composition, but hated the rough water so much I never printed it.



## Step 2

The first thing I always do when working with a photograph is to duplicate the Background layer by pressing Command-J (PC: Ctrl-J). Keep in mind that although you're viewing a small web sized version of the photograph, I'm actually working on a full sized 300ppi image.

With the Background layer duplicated and the duplicate selected, let's break out the Rectangular Marquee tool (or the selection tool of your choice) and select all the water. Then press Command-Shift-I (PC: Ctrl-Shift-I) to invert the selection (effectively selecting everything that's not water)



### Step 3

Press Command-J (PC: Ctrl-J) to duplicate only the selected area onto a new layer. Then lets go ahead and flip our new layer which we'll name "Reflection 1" upside down by choosing Edit>Transform>Flip Vertical from the main menu.

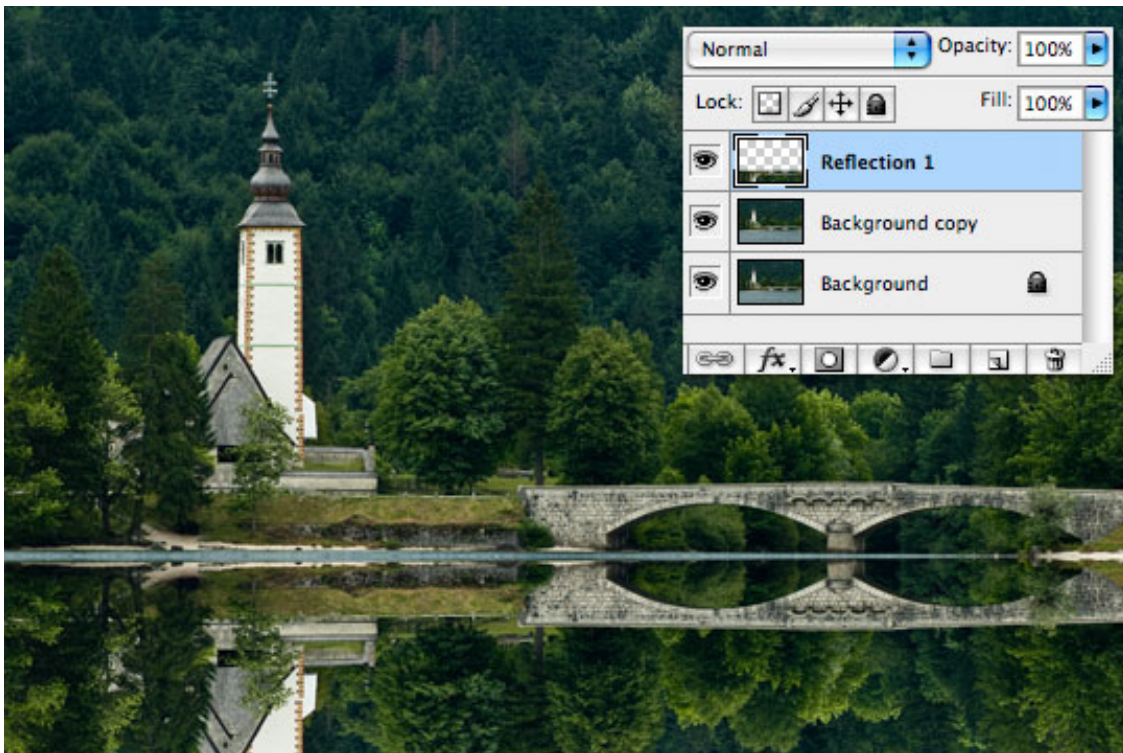
Now of course this won't look right at all.





## Step 4

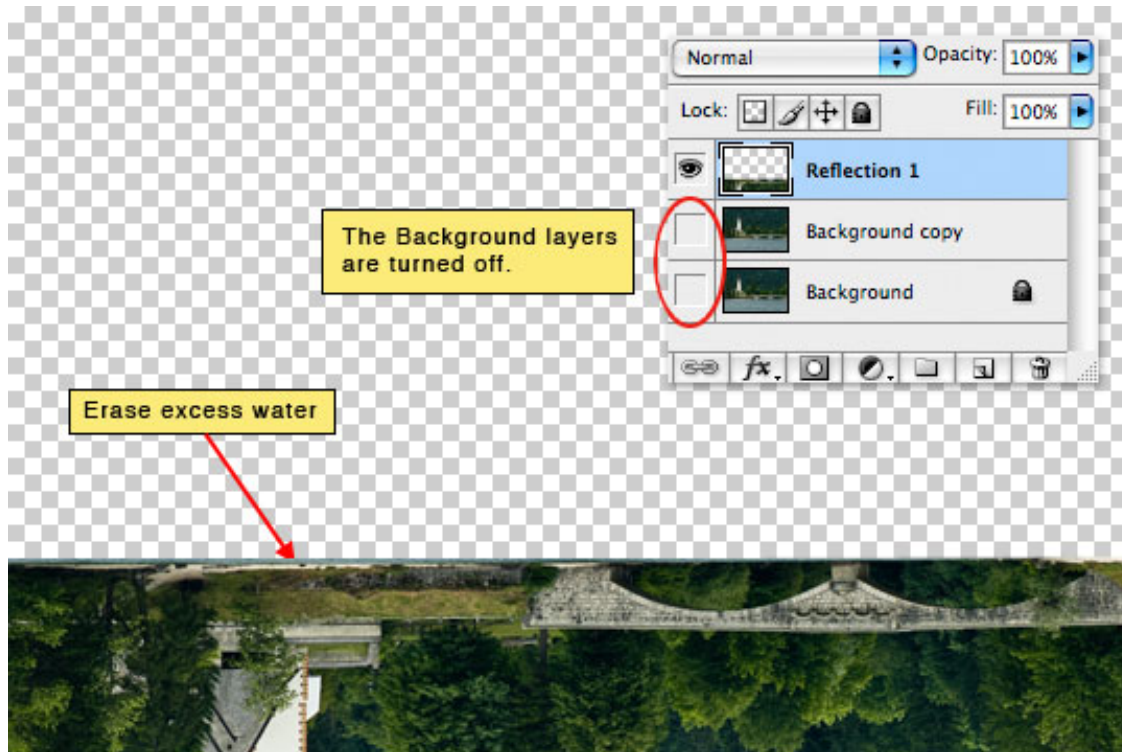
Grab the move tool by pressing V on your keyboard and while holding down the Shift key drag the inverted image down until it's positioned in where the reflection should go.



## Step 5

As you can see by the little wedge of blue that's exposed between the actual image and my new reflection, either my photo wasn't taken exactly level or the shoreline drifts a little bit. I'm going to go with the shoreline issue because of course I never shoot crooked.

If we turn off the two background layers ("Background" and "Background copy") by clicking the little eye icons next to them in the Layers palette so we can see only the reflection layer, I can then select and delete that little wedge of water that remains in my "Reflection 1" layer. I used the Polygonal Lasso tool, but you could just as easily use the Eraser tool with a hard edged brush and a little patience.



## Step 6

Turn the background layers back on now and you'll notice that we still have that wedge of blue showing through on the layers below. So let's grab the Transform Tool from the main menu, but let's make sure and select Warp (Edit>Transform>Warp).

Then simply drag the points on the corners and the bend handles of the warp tool until the reflection meets the shoreline everywhere. In my case, because I was able to cut out the water in a straight line, I could simply use the Free Transform tool and drag the left corner up by holding the Option (PC: Alt) key and get a pretty good match.





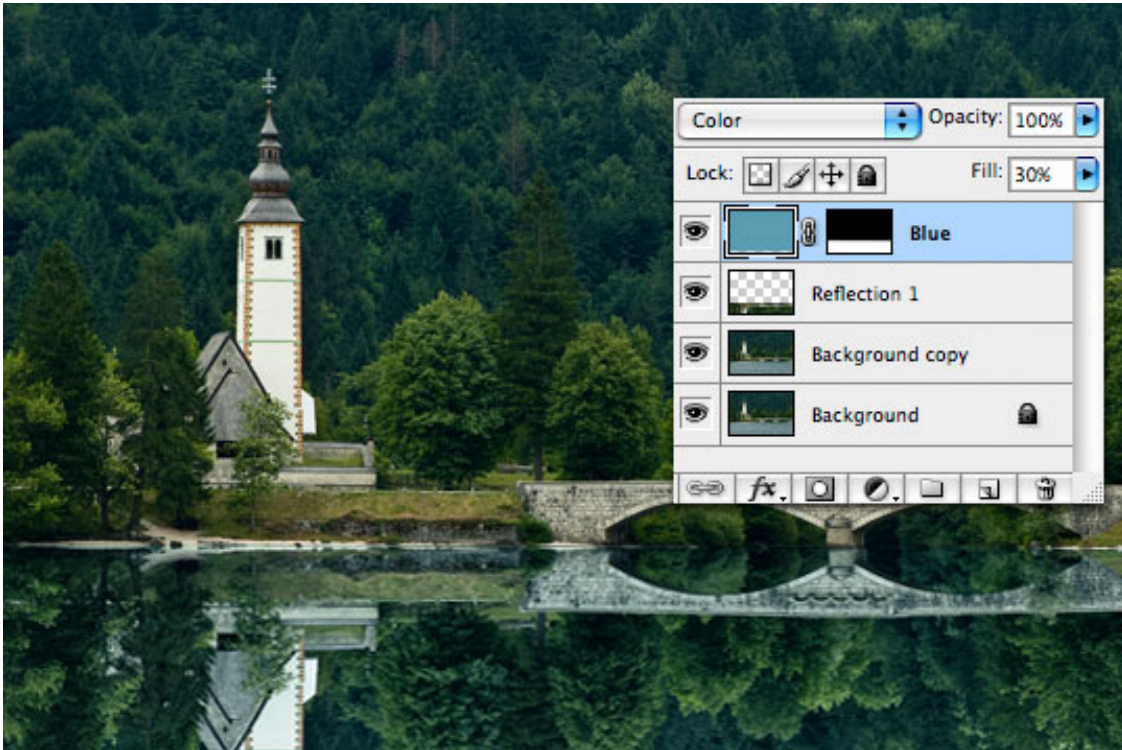
## Step 7

Things are beginning to look like they should, but be careful. Water is never the same color as the world it reflects because of its depth and the ability of water to reflect the sky as well, so let's add a slight blue tint to the water now.

Create a new layer at the top of the document and call it "Blue". Fill the layer with a nice light blue like #5a9cb2.

Now, because we only want this blue tint to effect the reflection we could create a simple Clipping Mask to the "Reflection 1" layer, but in this case we're going to use a Layer Mask instead. Hold down the Command (PC: Ctrl) key and click on the thumbnail of the "Reflection 1" layer to load it as a selection, then click the Add Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the layers palette.

Change the Layer Blend mode to Color and the Fill opacity to around 30% to create a nice blue undertone in the water.

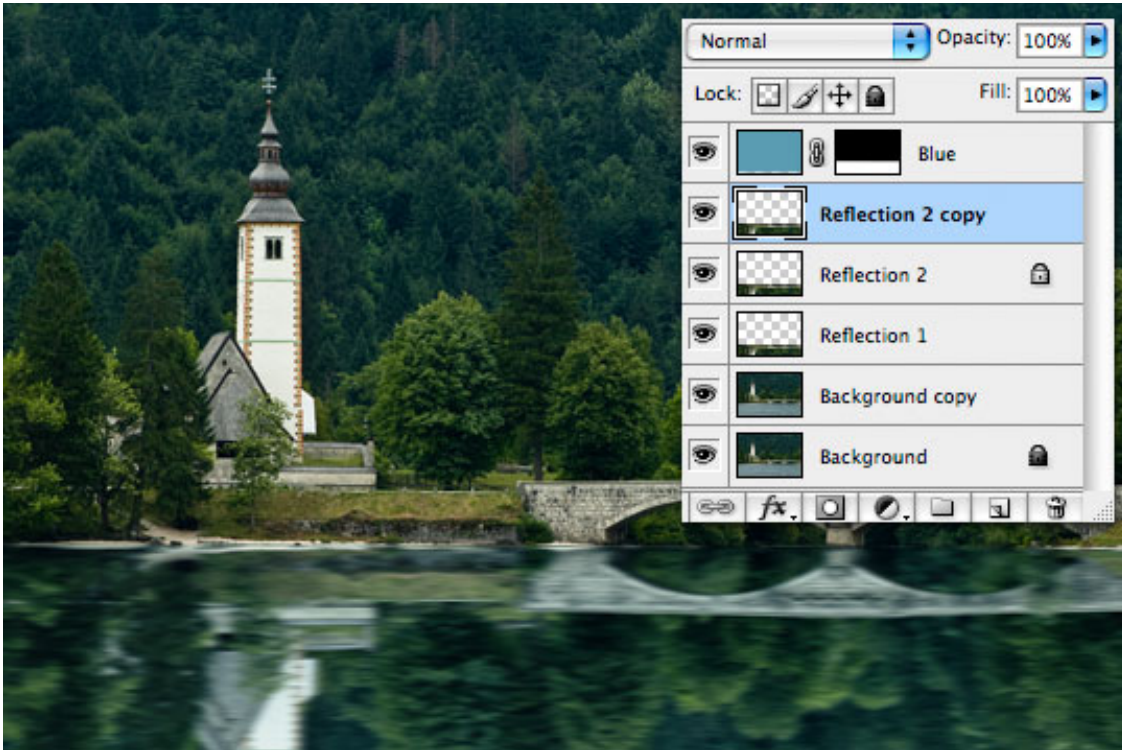


## Step 8

Lets add a little more realism to our water now by clicking back on the "Reflection 1" layer and pressing Command-J (PC: Ctrl-J) to duplicate the layer. Call this one "Reflection 2" and click the Lock Transparent Pixels button at the top of the Layers palette. We lock the pixels because we're about to add a blur to this layer and we don't want the blur to spill over onto the other layers.

Choose Filter>Blur>Motion Blur from the main menu, set the angle to 0 degrees and the Distance to 20 pixels (if you're working on a lower resolution image you may want to reduce the Distance until things just look blurred a little). Press OK. Now repeat the blur by simply pressing Command-F (PC: Ctrl-F).

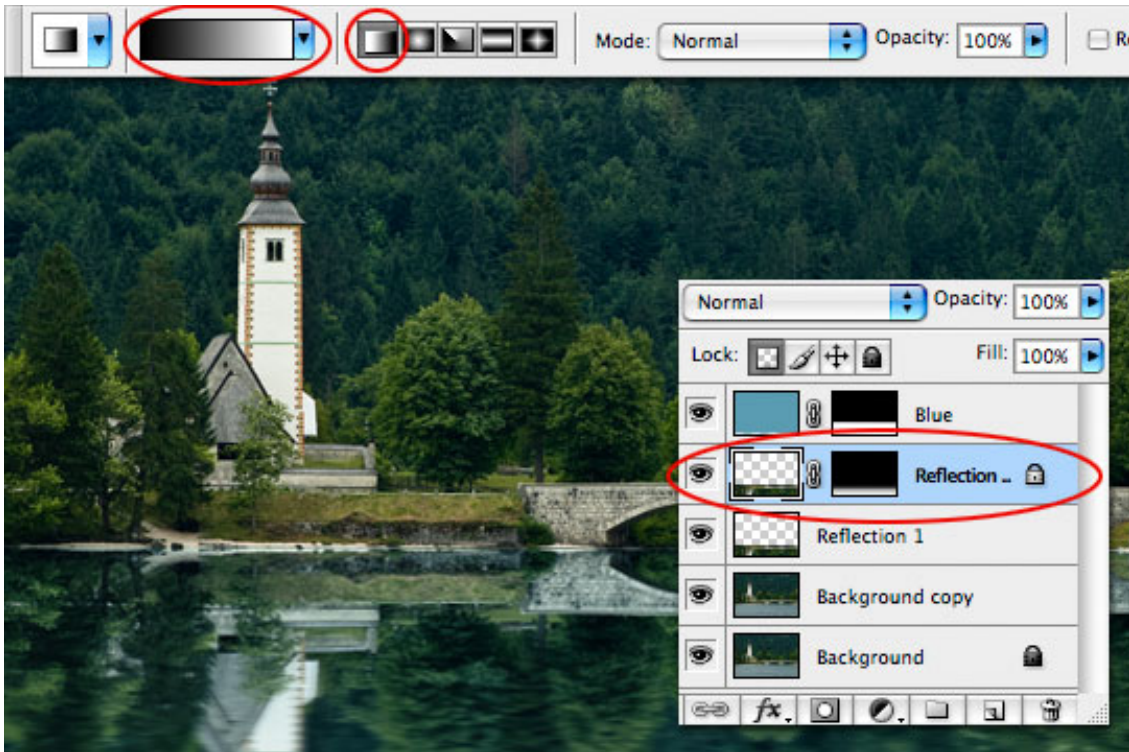
(\*note: pressing Command-F (PC: Ctrl-F) is a great short cut to reapply the last filter used.)



## Step 9

Obviously this blur won't be consistent from the shore to the bottom of the photograph, so add a Layer Mask and grab the Linear Gradient tool set to Foreground to Background, hit the D key to set the reset the foreground and background to black and white, then simply drag a gradient from the shoreline to the bottom of the document. This will make the reflection still look crisp against the shore but as the water comes towards us, the reflection will get a little more blurry.

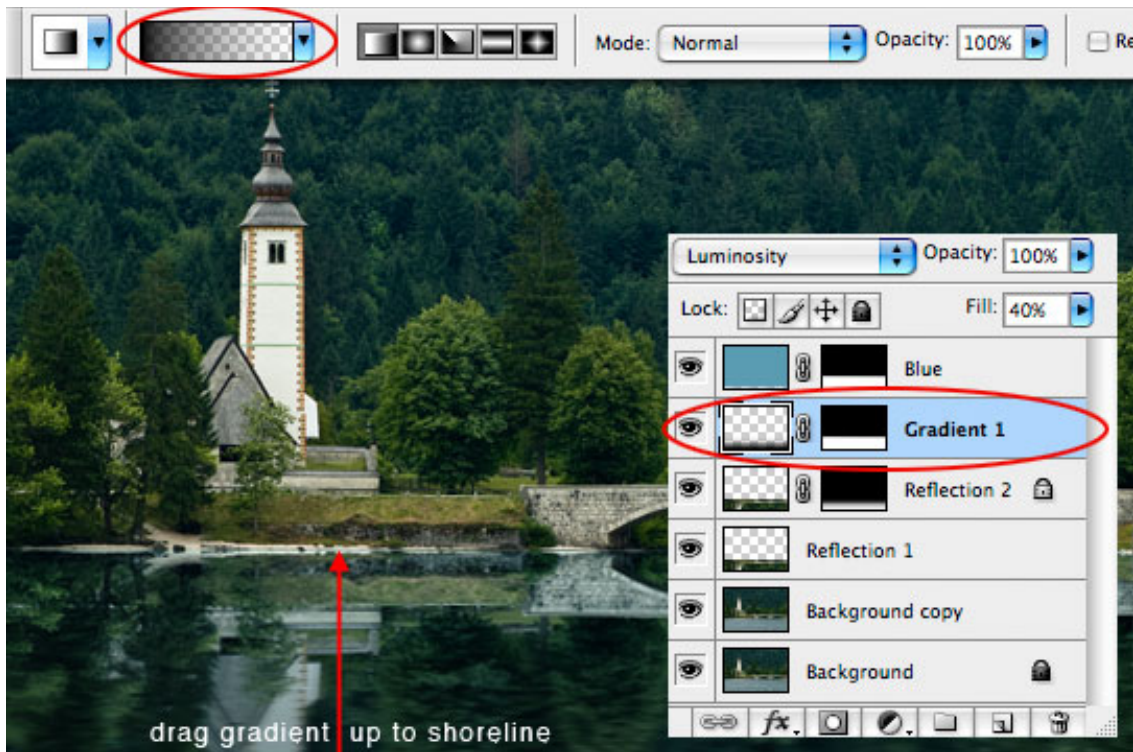




## Step 10

Create a new layer above the "Reflection 2" layer and call it "Gradient 1". Next lets duplicate the layer mask we have on the "Blue" layer onto the new "Gradient 1" layer by holding down the Option (PC: Alt) key and simply click and drag the Layer Mask from the "Blue" layer to the "Gradient 1" layer.

Press G to invoke the Gradient tool once again, choose Foreground to Transparent from the gradient options and drag a gradient from the bottom of the document up to the shoreline. Change the Layer Blend Mode to Luminosity and the Fill transparency to 40%.



## Step 11

You can experiment with gradients coming from the shoreline down and perhaps a highlight reflected gradient in the middle of the water, but at this point the reflection is convincing to the eye and the photograph looks much better than the original.

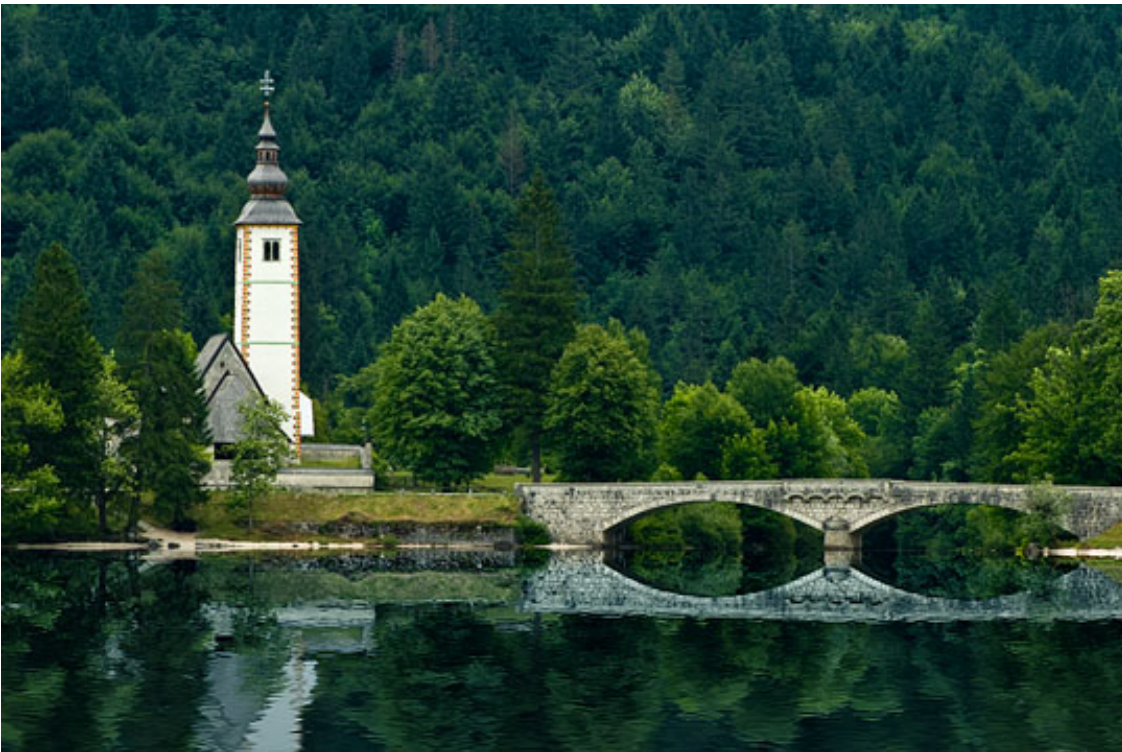
When I'm working to develop a technique like this one, I always have several real life references (ie. actual photos with reflections) to pull ideas from to create the most realistic and true to life representation possible.

You know that I usually don't include a .PSD download in my [PHOTO EFFECTS](#) category, but because of the many layers, layer masks and blend modes used in this tutorial I'm including a low resolution version of this file for download at the bottom of the lesson. Enjoy!





At this point you can either be satisfied with the level of realism and a nice glassy lake, or you could take it a step further and create a displacement map to mimic the tiny waves and water reflections (which we'll save for another tutorial), and end up with this result.



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