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PHOTO MANIPULATION

# How to Create Realistic Water Drop Reflections in Adobe Photoshop

by [Kirk Nelson](#) 30 Jan 2015 5 Comments



93



164



6





What You'll Be Creating

As part of our series on creating custom [Photoshop Brushes from Scratch](#), I published a Quick Tip on how to capture and create custom water drops and turn them into brushes in [Adobe Photoshop](#). If you missed that, please take a moment and read through it here first: [How to Create Custom Water Drop Brushes in Adobe Photoshop](#).

This Quick Tip is an extension of that lesson. But here we will use those brushes to create a photo manipulation of realistic water drops.

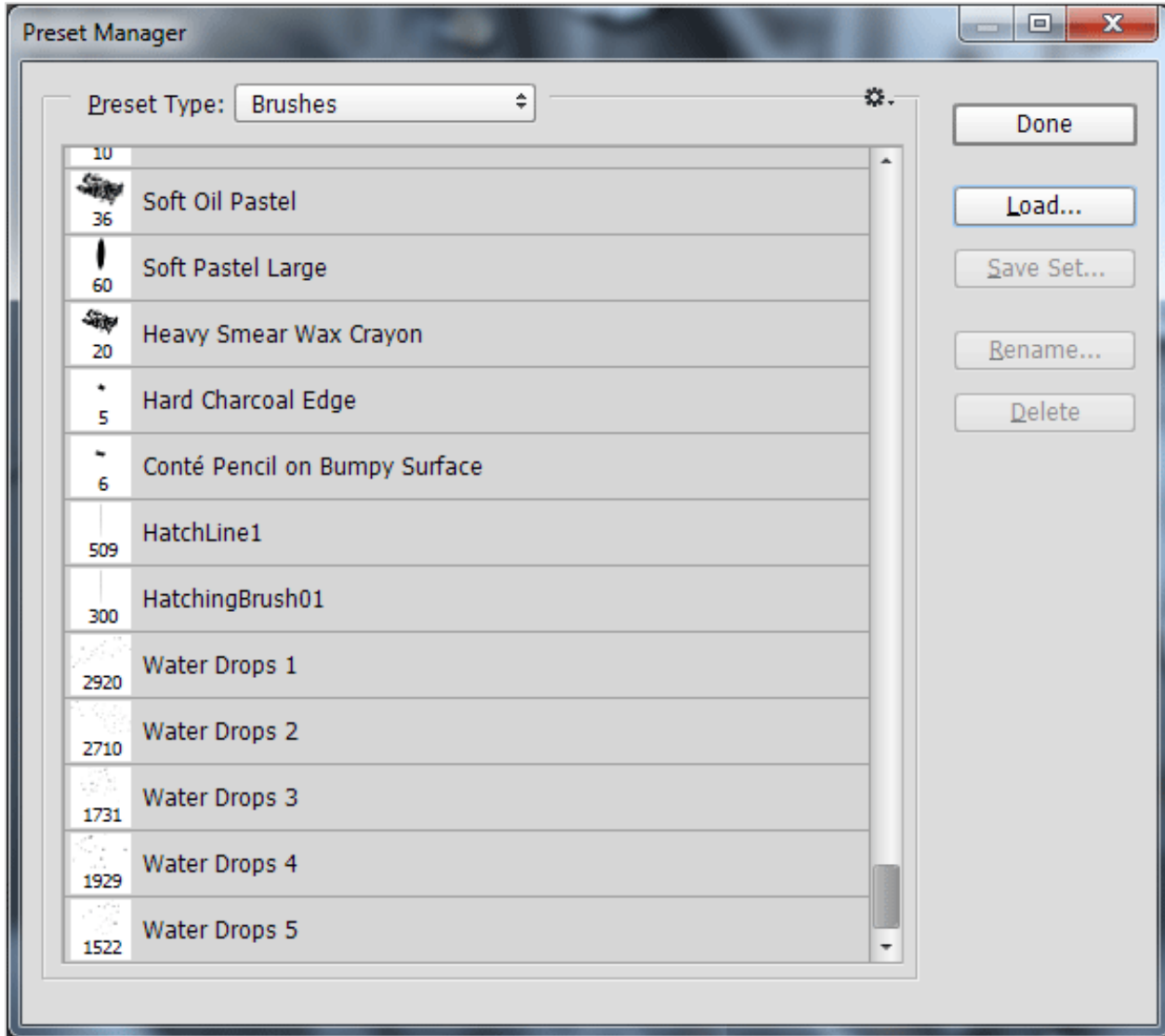
## 1. Gather Resources

To complete this project you will need the water drop brushes from the previous Quick Tip. You can download those with the **Download Attachment** link associated with this tutorial.

You will also need an image to use for the backdrop. Just about any image can work, but the effect is better with one that looks gray and rainy. I used this [Street Scene](#).

## 2. Install Brushes

If you haven't already installed the water drop brushes, go to **Edit > Presets > Preset Manager**. Make sure the **Preset Type** is set to **Brushes** and press the **Load** button. Navigate to the **CustomWaterDrops.abr** file to install the brushes.



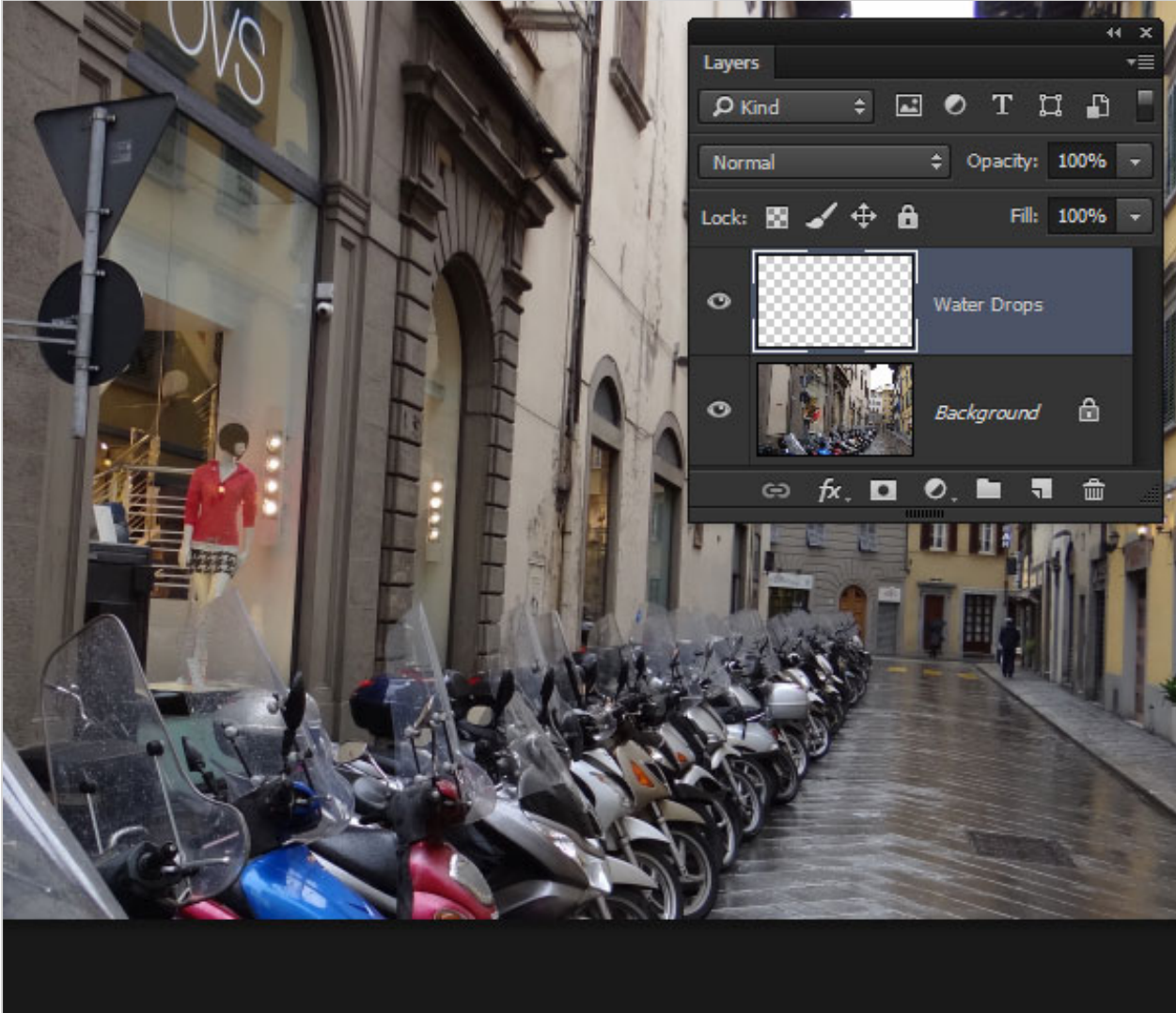
Notice the five new water drop **Brush Presets** in your brush library.

## 3. Add the Basic Water Drops

The idea of this project is to simulate the appearance of looking through a window that has a splattering of rain drops on it. So the first and most obvious step is to create those drops.

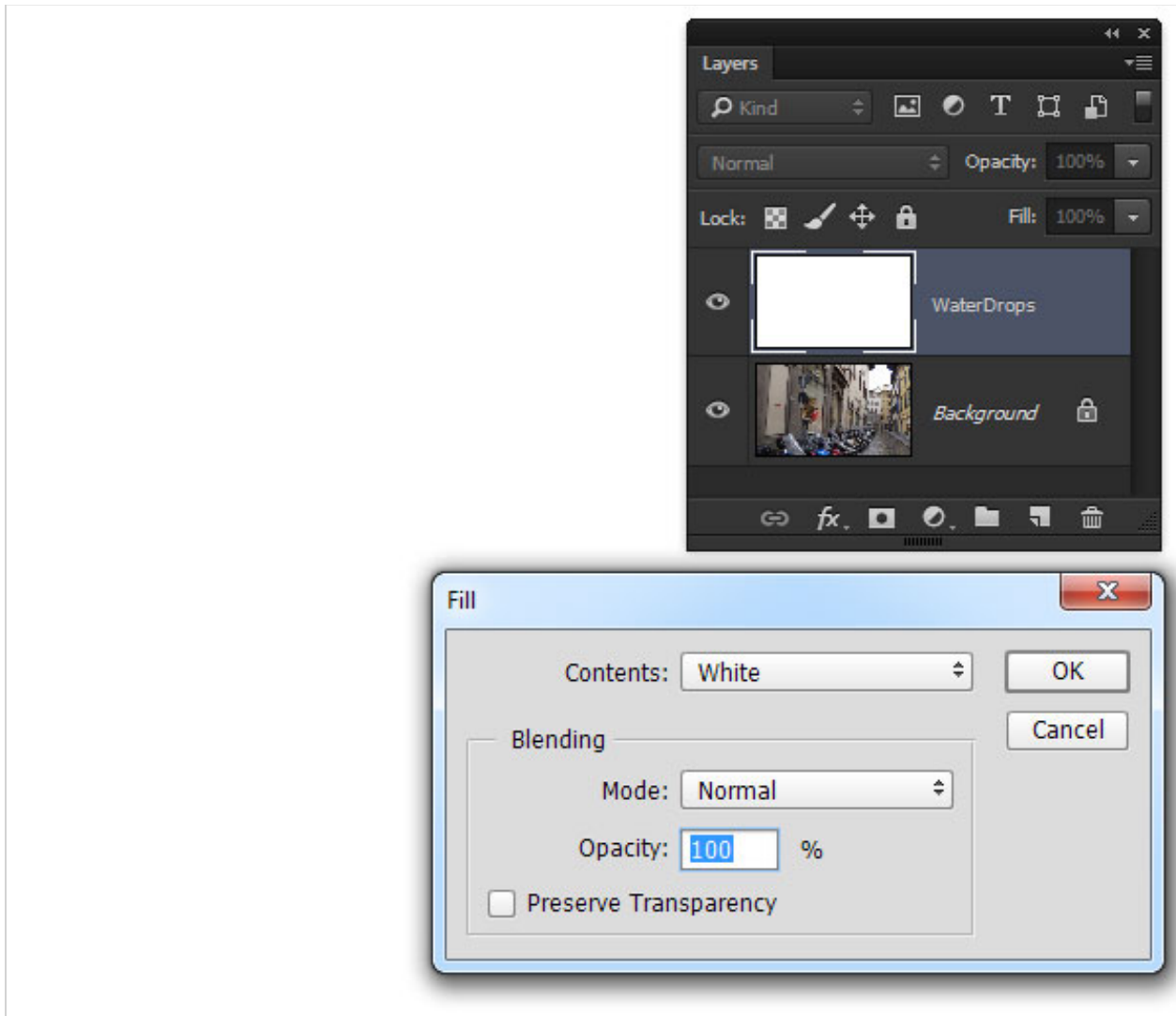
## Step 1

Open the street scene image and add a **New Layer (Control-Shift-N)** called **Water Drops**.

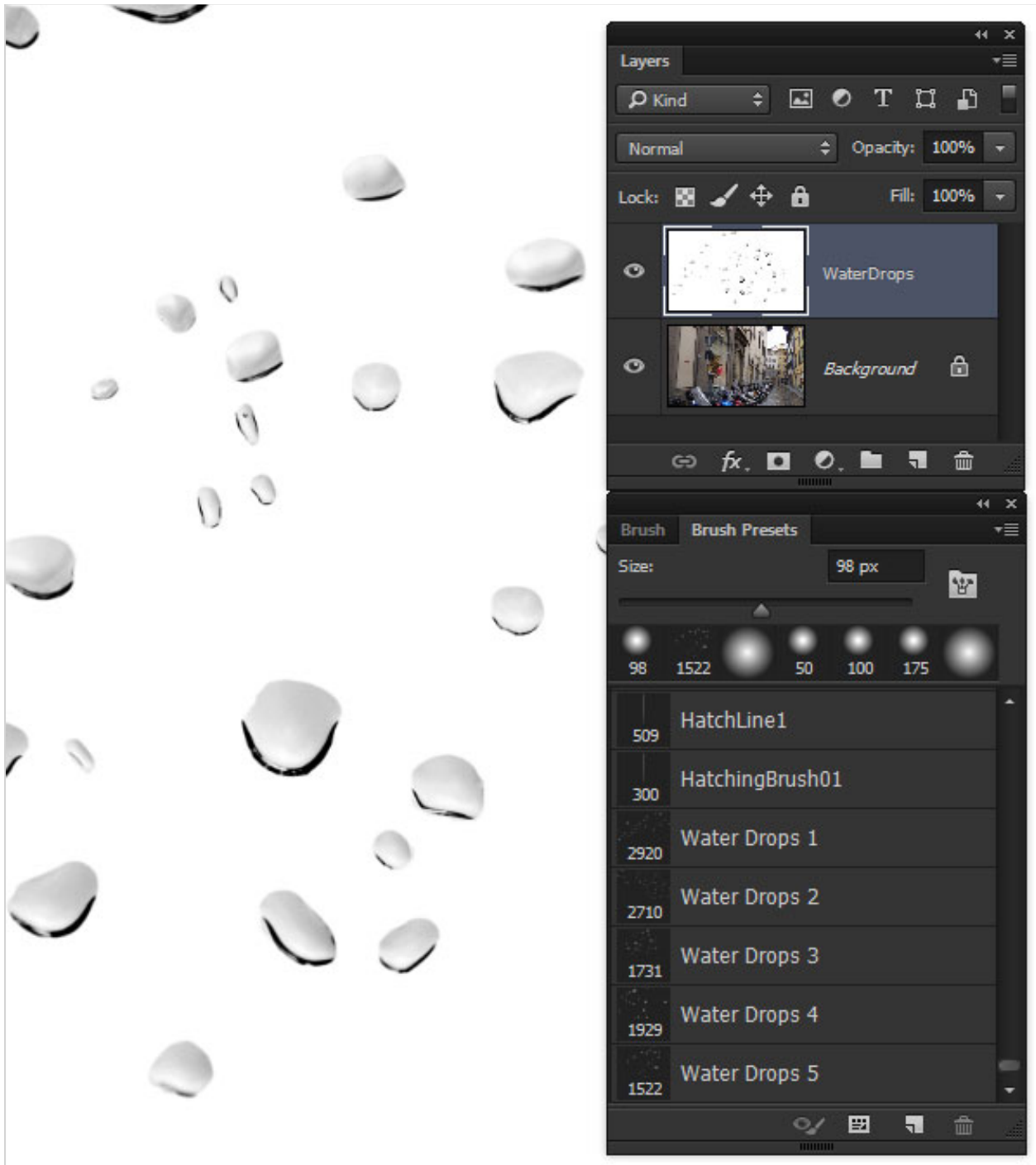


## Step 2

Fill the layer with white by going to **Edit > Fill** and selecting **White** from the **Contents** pull-down menu.



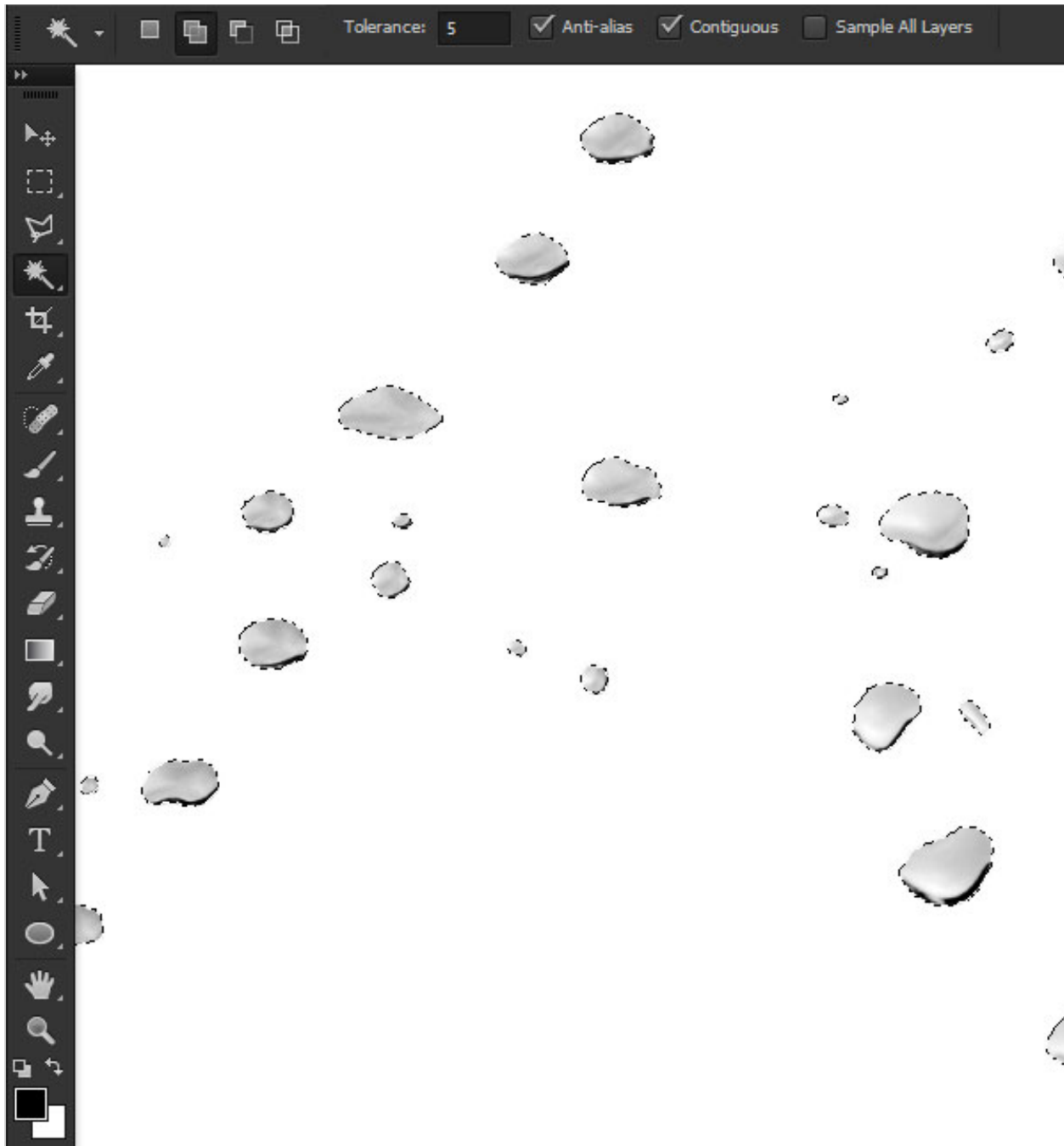
Switch to the **Brush Tool (B)** and open the **Brush Presets** panel. Make sure the foreground color is set to **Black** and use the new **Water Drop Brushes** to add a splattering of water drops.



### Step 3

Use the **Magic Wand Tool (W)** with a **Tolerance** of **5** and the **Contiguous** option enabled. Click on a portion of the white background area to create a selection of the white background but not the water drops.





Create a layer mask by going to **Layer > Layer Mask > Hide Selection**.



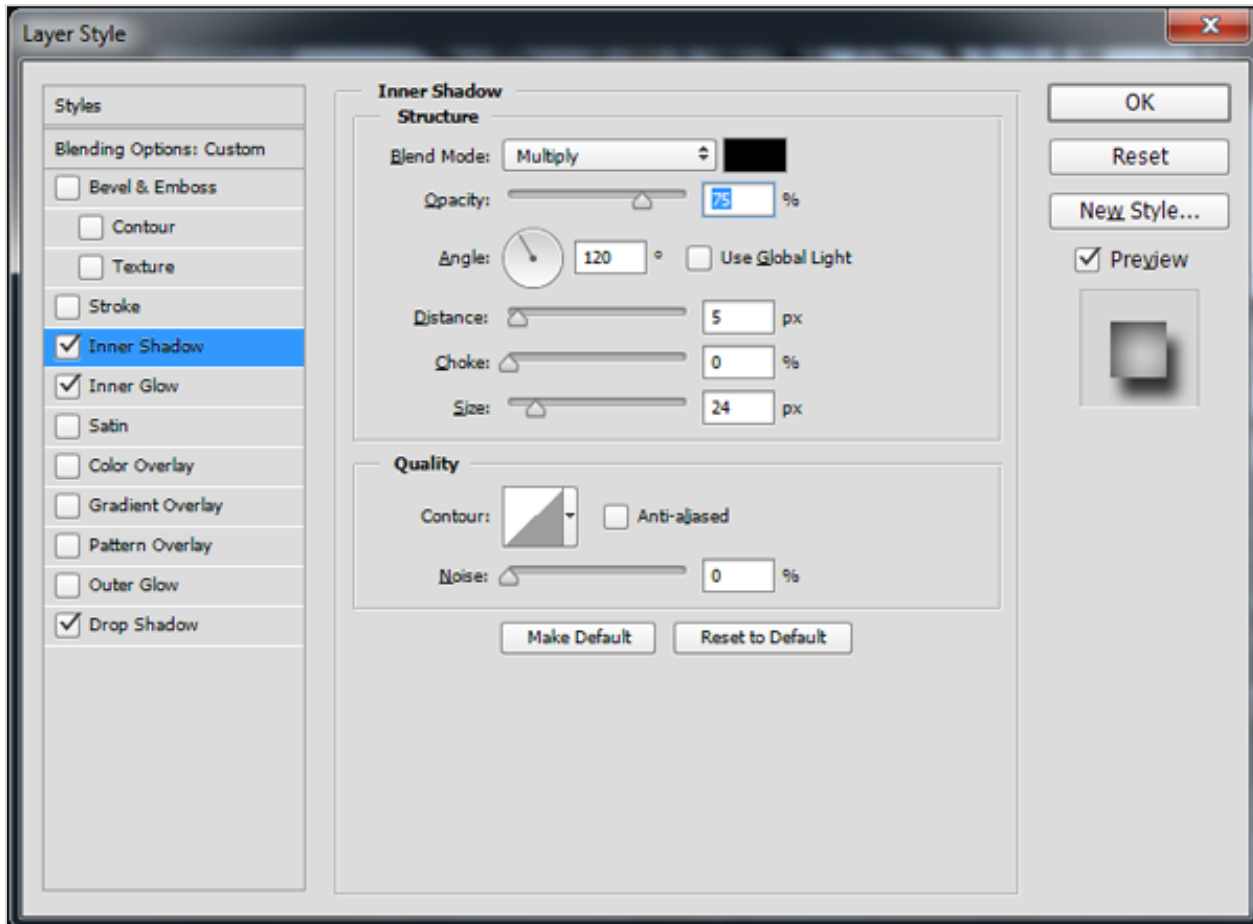
## Step 4

Change the layer's **Blending Mode** to **Overlay**. Then **double-click** the layer to open

the **Layer Style** dialogue box and add the following style settings.

Add an **Inner Shadow** layer style:

- Turn **Off** the **Use Global Light**
- **Size**: 24 px



Add an **Inner Glow** layer style:

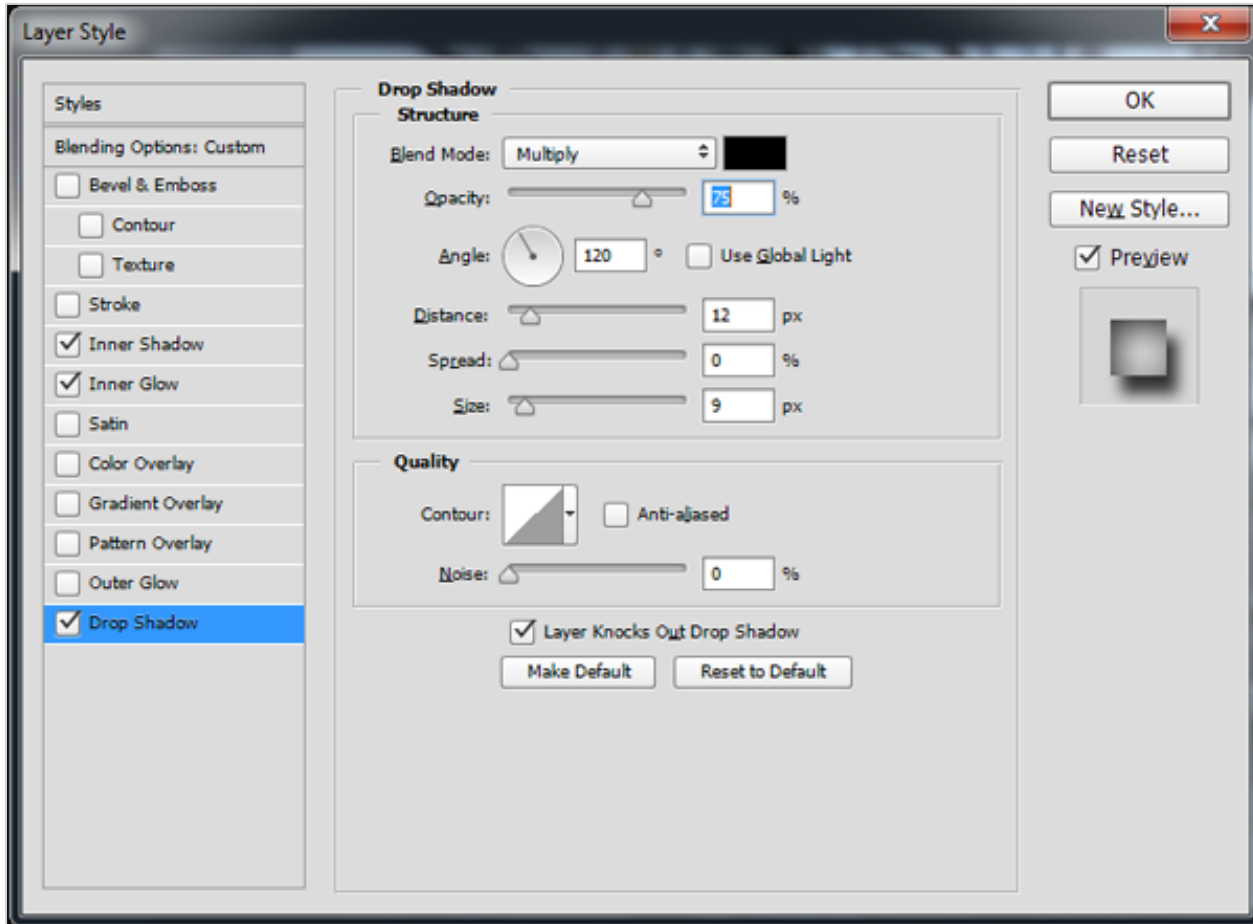
- **Opacity**: 34%
- **Glow Color**: #f2f3f5
- **Size**: 10 px





Add a **Drop Shadow** layer style:

- Turn **Off** the **Use Global Light**
- **Distance**: 12 px
- **Size**: 9 px



So the water drops should now look something like this.

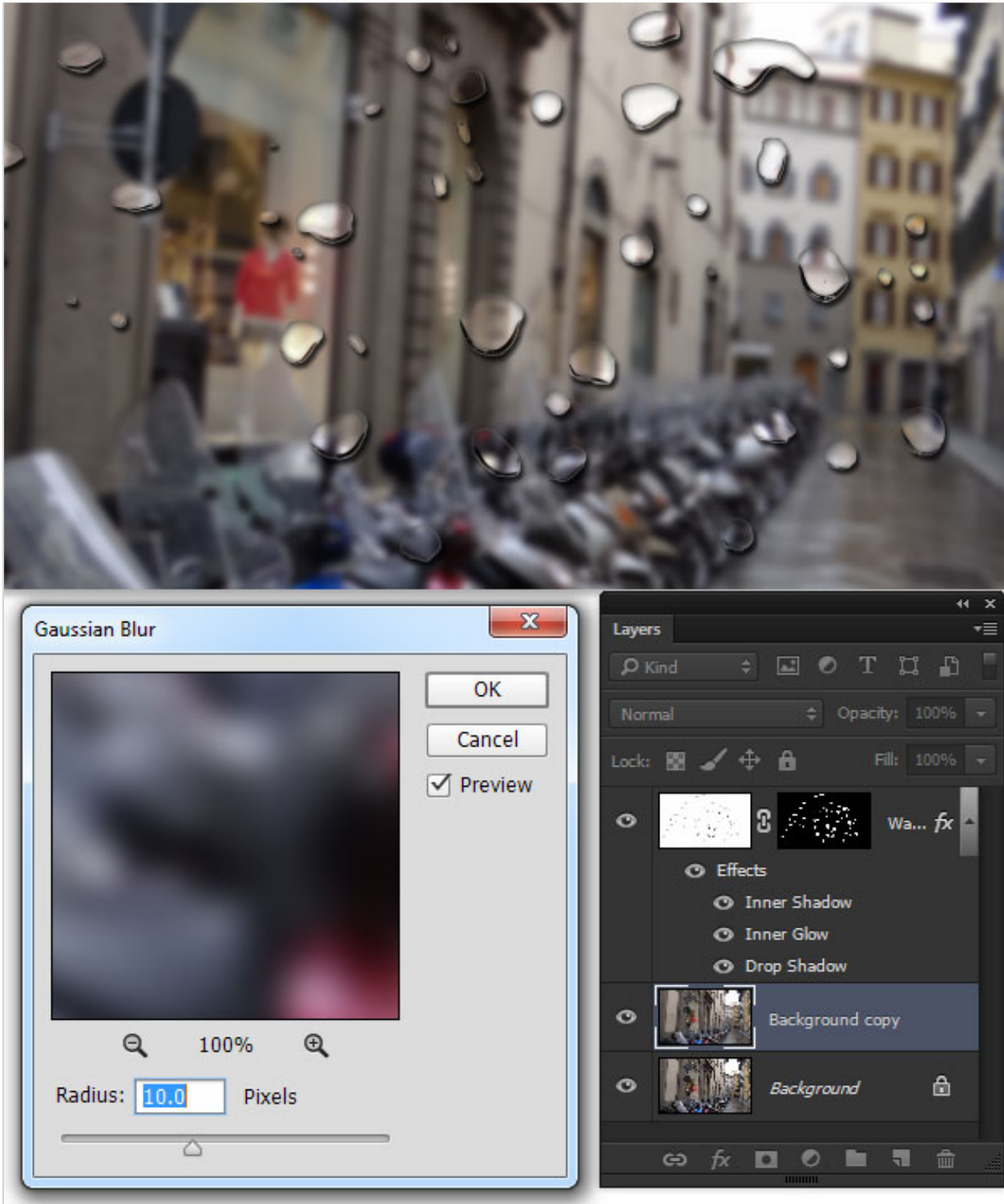


## 4. Create the Background Effect

If this were an actual photograph and the camera were focused on the water drops, the background would be out of focus.

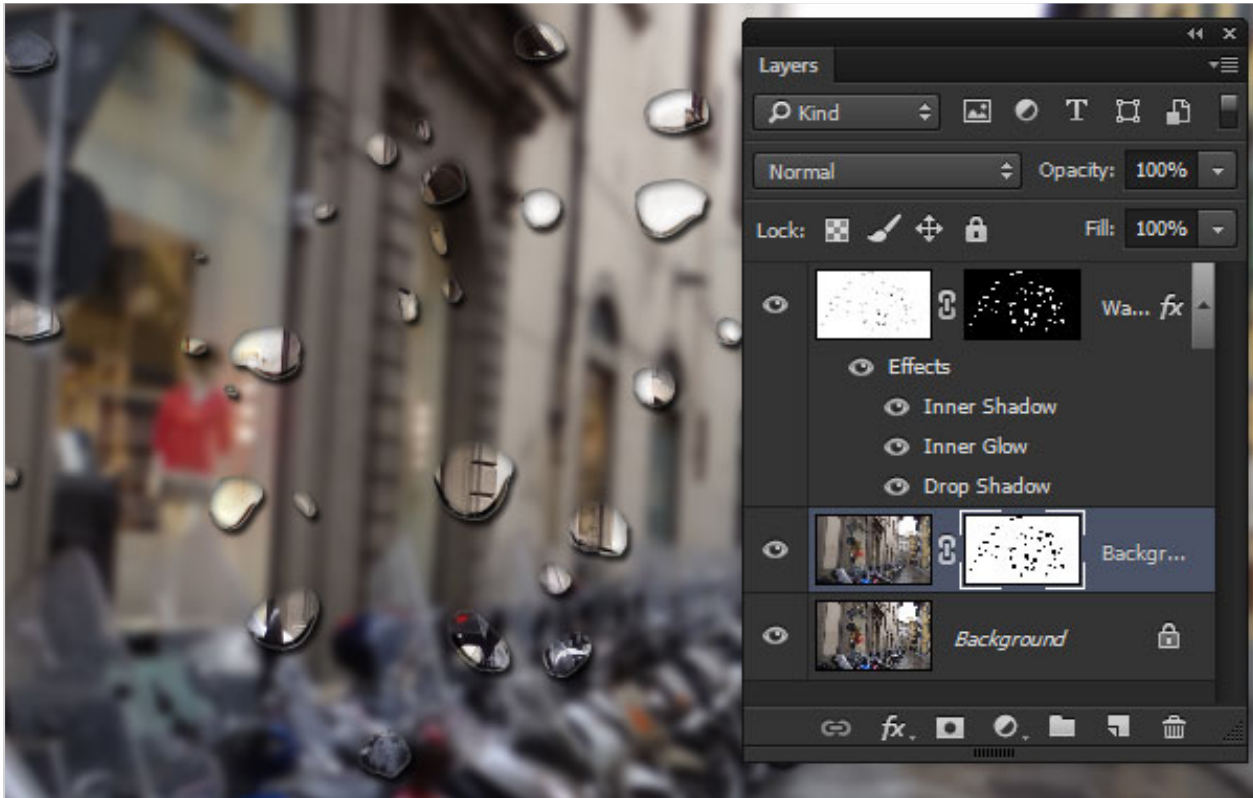
### Step 1

Duplicate the background with **Layer > Duplicate Layer** or press **(Control-J)**. Then run a **Gaussian Blur** filter on the copy. Use a **Radius of 10 px**.



## Step 2

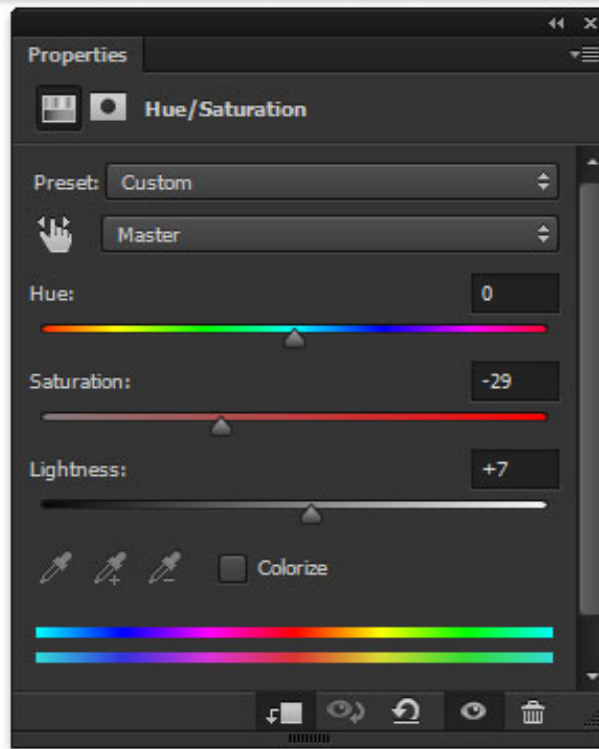
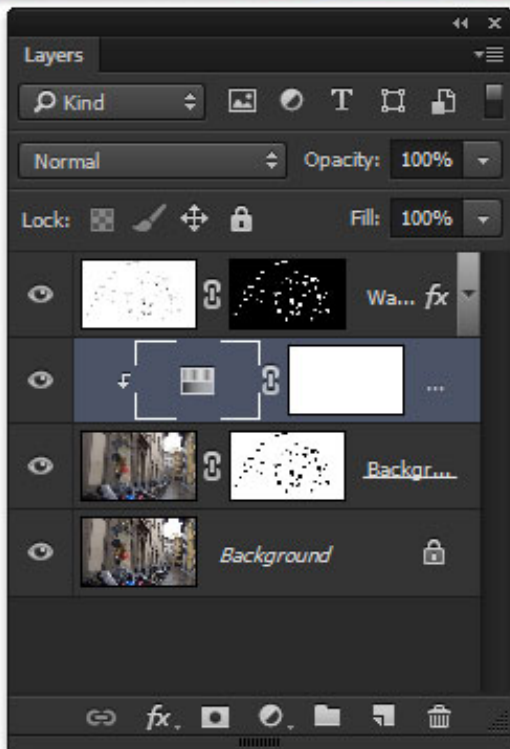
**Control-click** on the **Water Drop** layer mask to create a selection. Then make sure the blurred background layer is the active layer and go to **Layer > Layer Mask > Hide Selection**. Now the blurry effect is removed from the water drops.



### Step 3

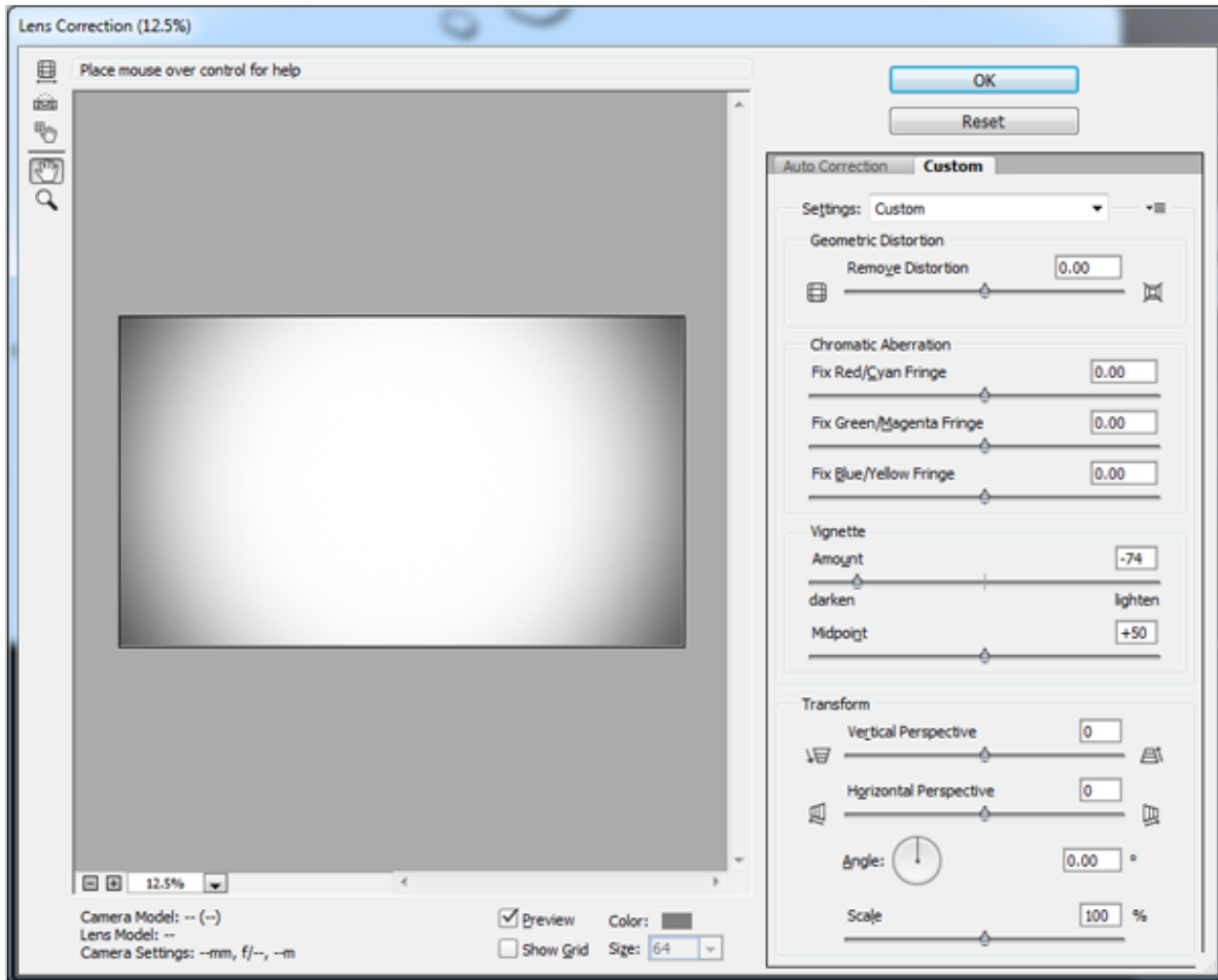
Add a **Hue/Saturation** adjustment layer and reduce the **Saturation** to **-29** and set the **Lightness** to **+7**. Then clip the adjustment layer to the blurred background layer with **Layer > Create Clipping Mask (Alt-Control-G)**.





## Step 4

Add another **New Layer (Shift-Control-N)** called **Vignette**. Fill this layer with white and set the **Blend Mode** to **Multiply**. Then go to **Filter > Lens Correction (Shift-Control-R)**. In the **Custom** tab, slide the **Vignette** amount slider down to **-74**.



This will add a subtle darkening to the outside edges of the image.



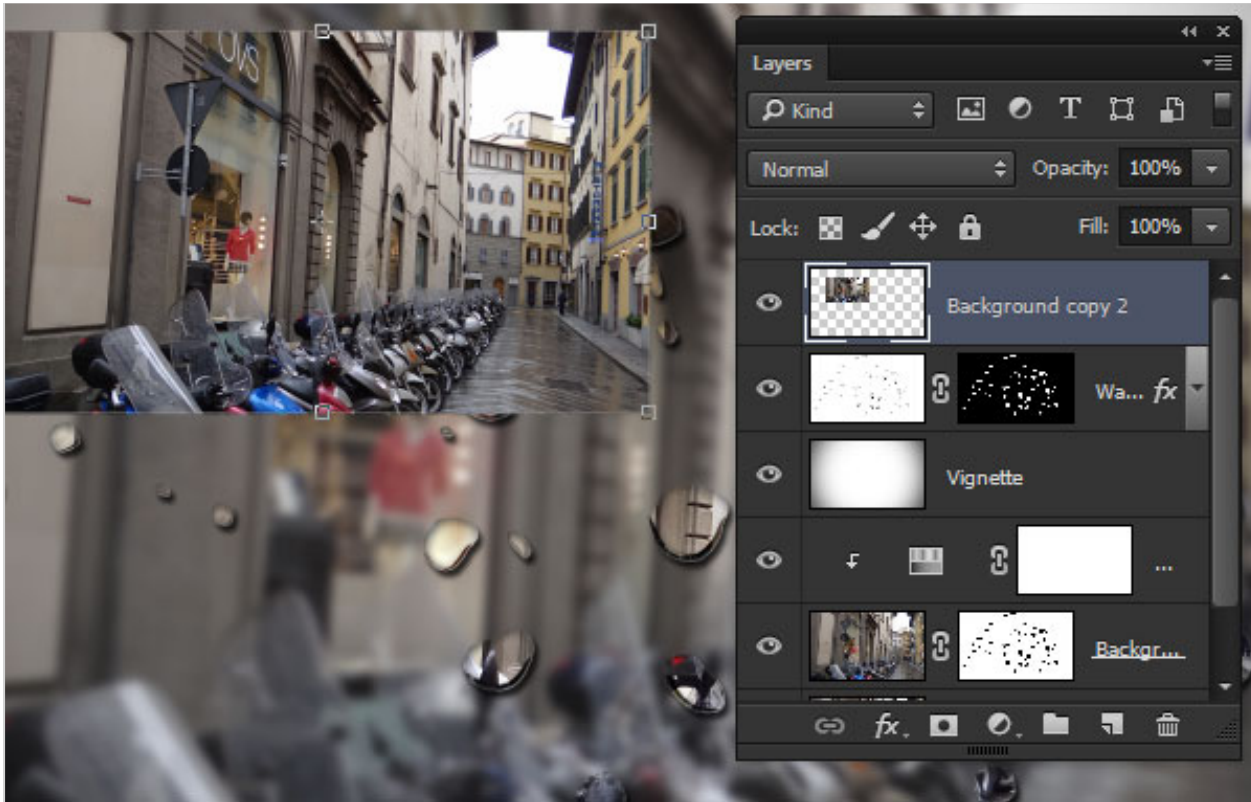
## 5. Add Reflections to the Water Drops

A close study of actual water drops reveals an amazing phenomenon. Each drop contains a full reflection of the surrounding environment. The reflection is distorted due to the curve of the water surface, but it is undeniably there. Adding this tiny detail really helps the illusion become more convincing.

### Step 1

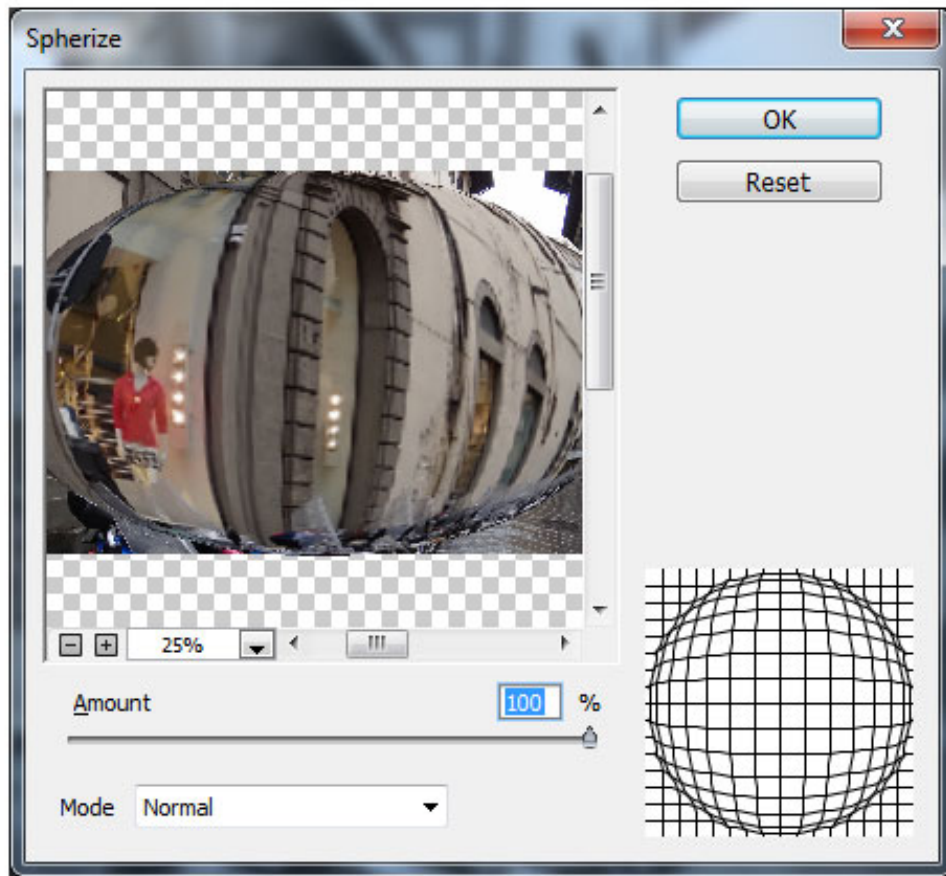
Create another **Duplicate** of the background layer with **(Control-J)**. Use **Free Transform (Control-T)** to **Scale** the copy down to about half the size of the original. Then move this layer up to the top of the layer stack.





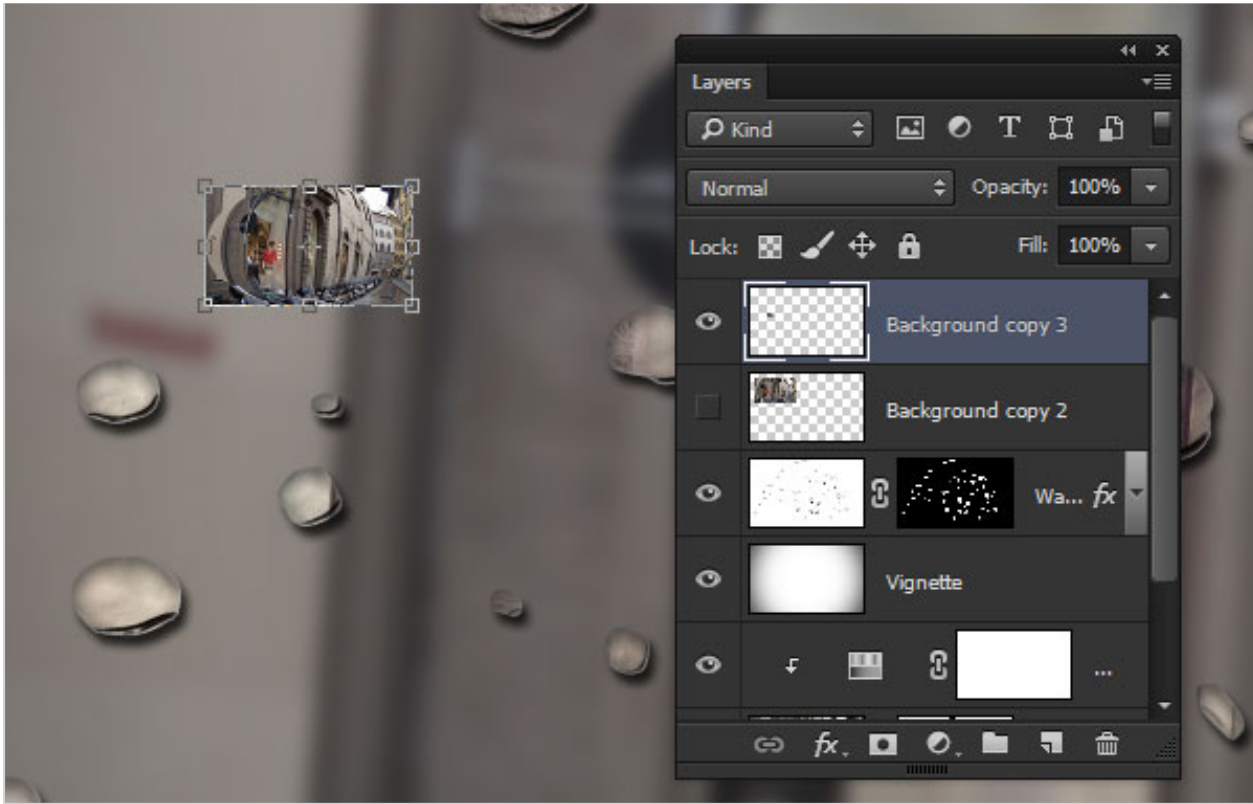
## Step 2

Control-click the layer thumbnail to create a selection around it. Then go to **Filter > Distort > Spherize**. Set the **Amount** to **100%**.

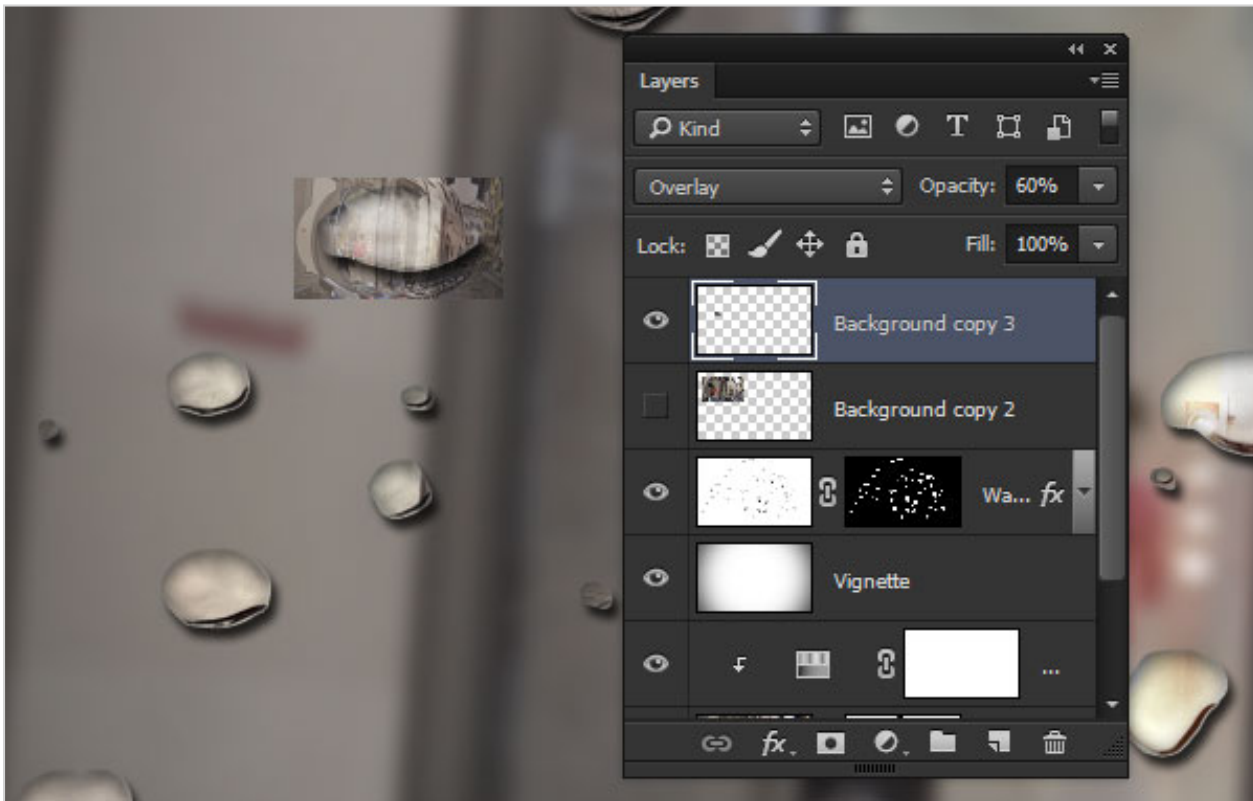


### Step 3

**Cancel** the selection with **Select > Deselect (Control-D)**. Then **Duplicate** the distorted layer with **(Control-J)**. Hide the original layer and use **Free Transform (Control-T)** to **Move** and **Scale** the copied layer to fit over a single drop of water.

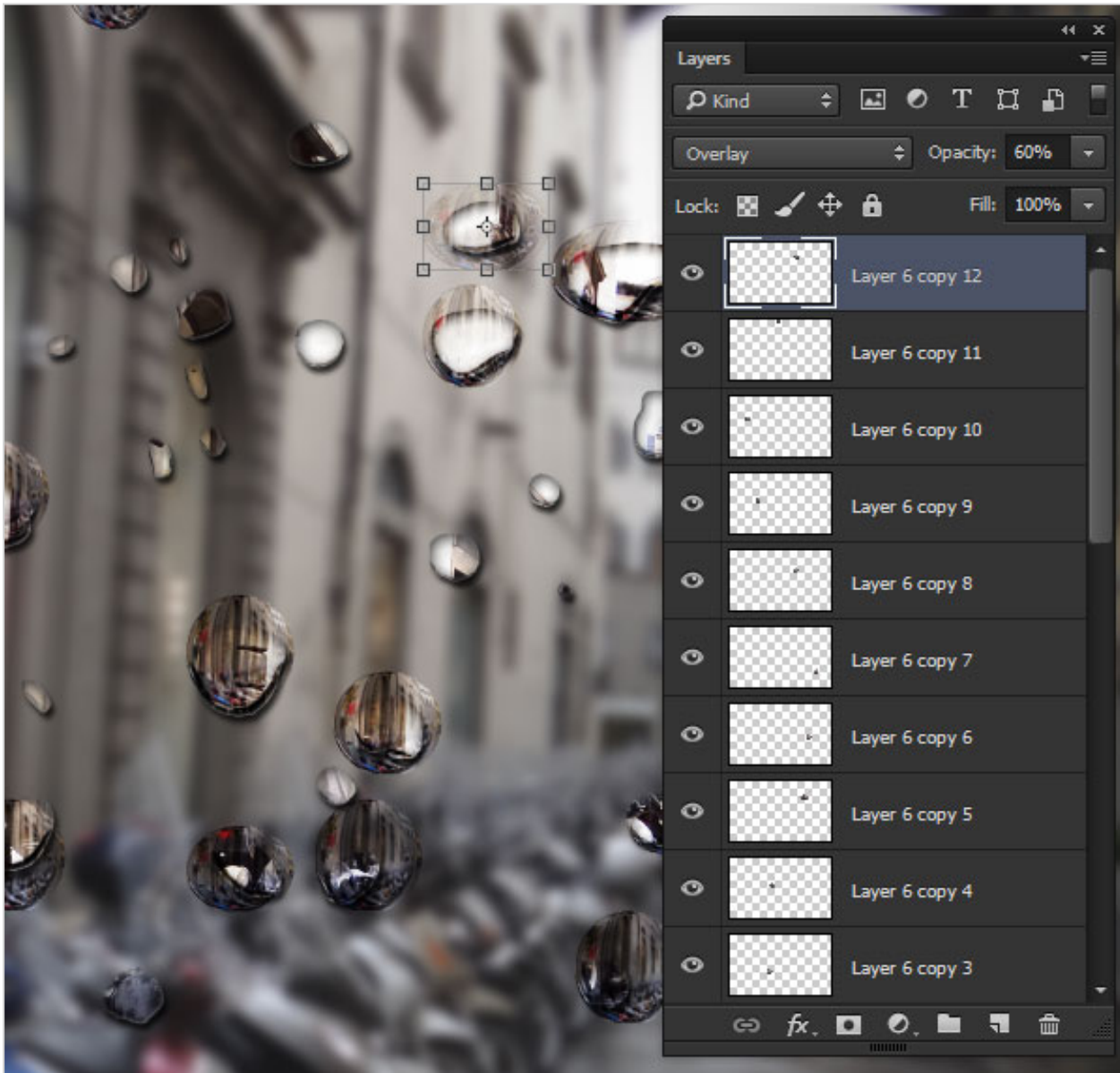


Change the layer's blending mode to **Overlay** and reduce the **Opacity** to **60%**.



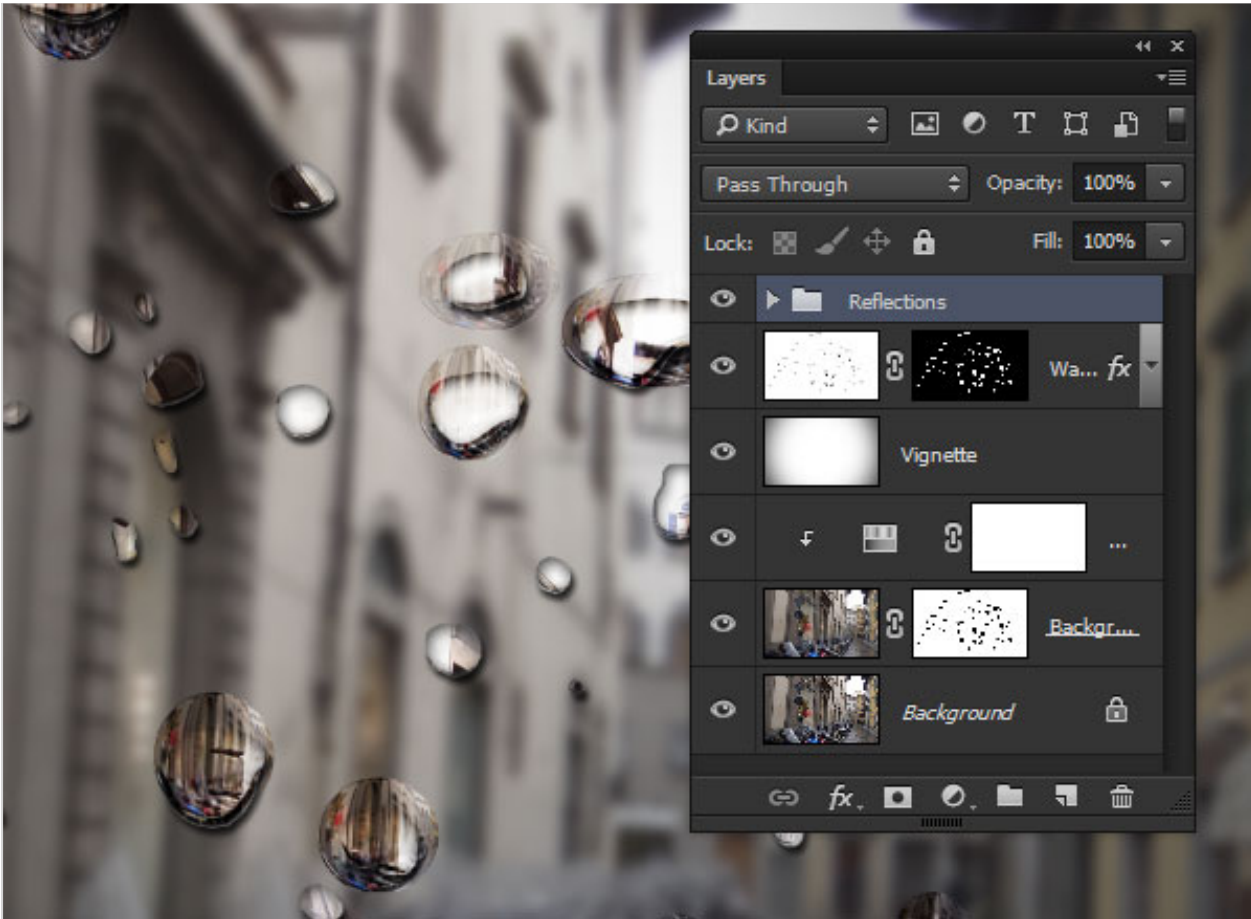
## Step 4

Continue to make copies of the distorted layer until all the larger drops have reflections over them.



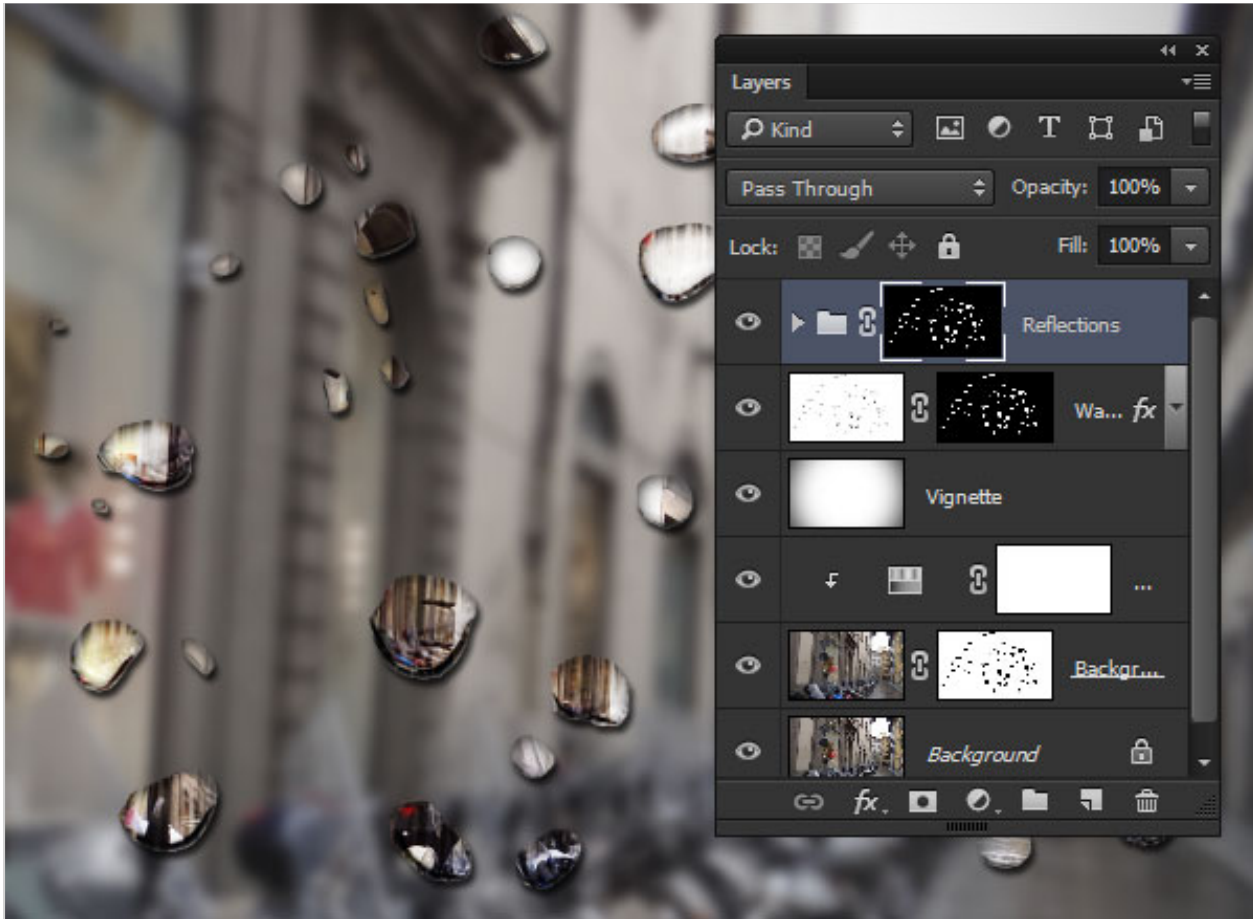
## Step 5

**Shift-click** all the reflection layers and group them together with **Layer > Group Layers (Control-G)**



**Control-click** the layer mask for the **Water Drops** layer to create a selection. Then use the selection to create a mask for the **Reflections** group with **Layer > Layer Mask > Reveal Selection**.

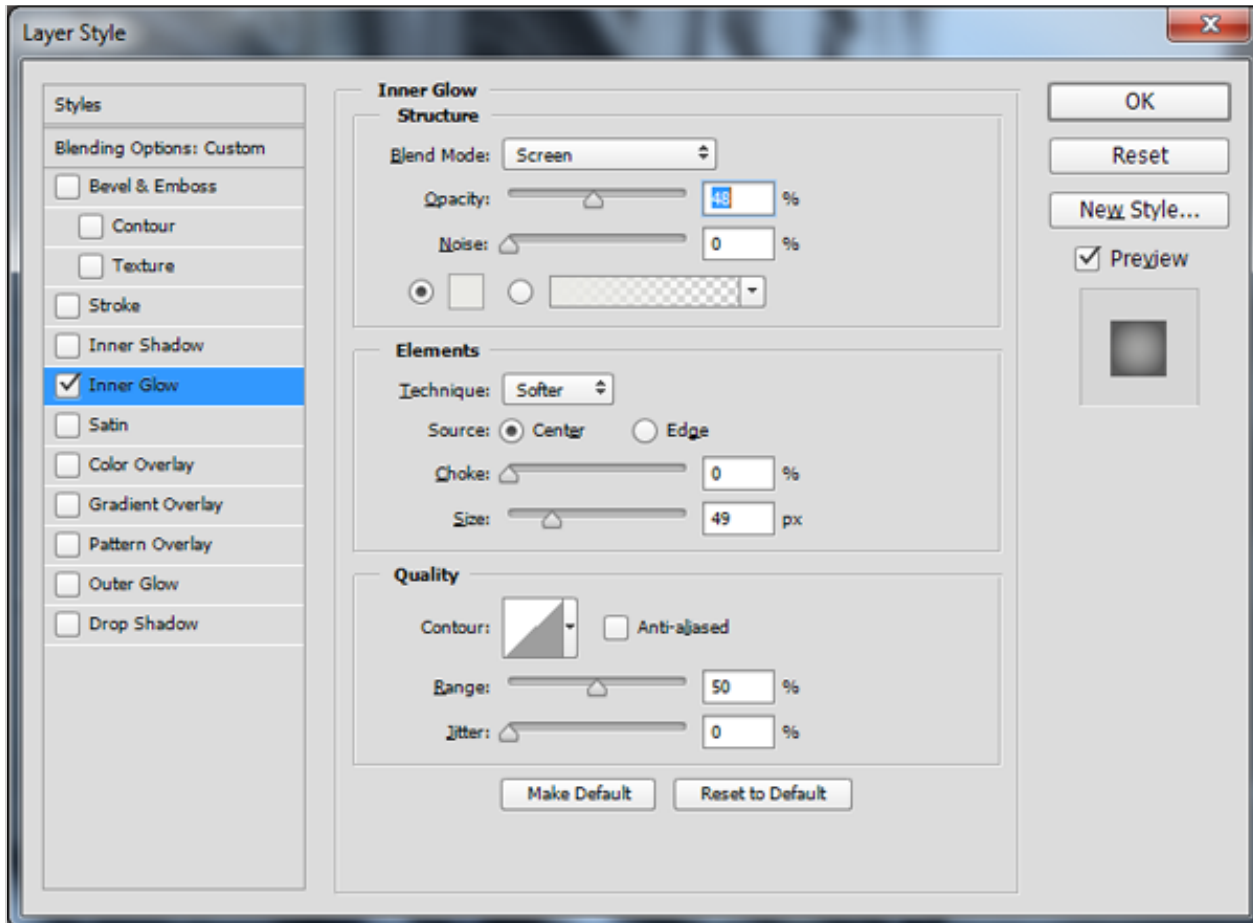




## Step 6

Add an **Inner Glow** layer style to the **Reflections** group with these settings.

- **Opacity:** 48%
- **Glow Color:** #eaeae6
- **Source:** Center
- **Size:** 49 px

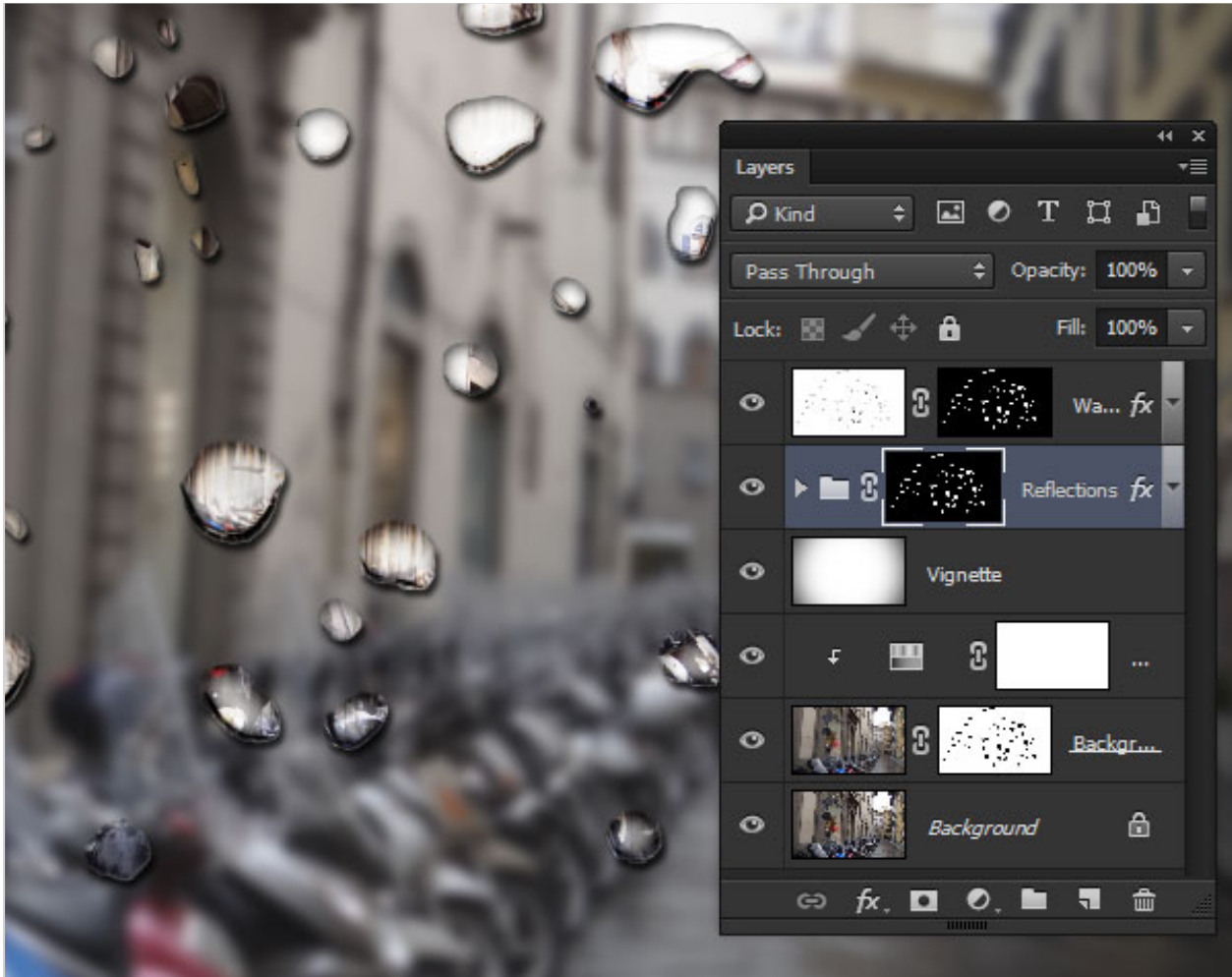


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## Step 7

For a more distinctive reflection effect, move the **Reflections** group beneath the **Water Drops** group.





**Awesome Work, You're Done!**



Keep in mind that the techniques and settings presented here are just one way to approach this effect. These are not magical settings. You should experiment with images of your own and find what works best in your own project.

If you've tried this for yourself, I'd love to see what you've created with it! Add your work in the comments below.

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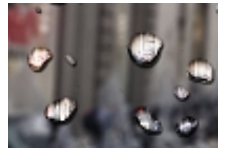
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### About Kirk Nelson



I have been working as an all around graphics geek or “Visual Information Specialist” for the past 17 years around the Washington DC Metro area. With my career spanning across almost every aspect of the design industry, I have worked from web design, to 3d animation, to logo design, to photo retouching.



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