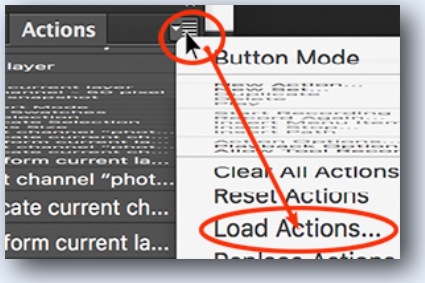
Using The White Marble PhotoShop Action

Actions are one of the most useful and timesaving options in PhotoShop®. They consist of sets of multiple steps to create effects, and you play an action from controls similar to video.

Besides the default set of actions that come with PhotoShop, you can record new actions whenever you have a long list of steps you need to use many times. You also can download and install actions created by other PhotoShop users. That's how I obtained the **White Marble** action, a powerful trick I could never have invented on my own.

Download And Installation

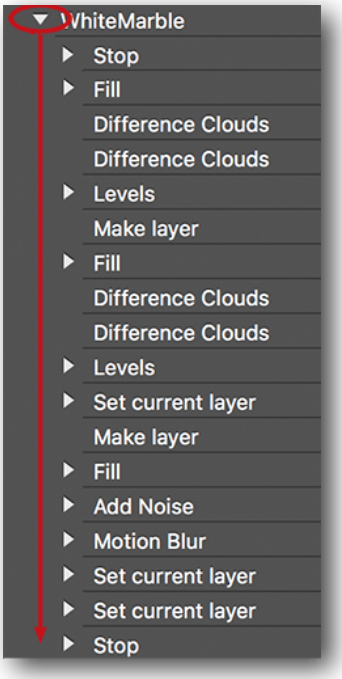
I downloaded **White Marble PhotoShop Action** by Nate Skow (2007) from ShareCG.com. It was free, but I had to set up a free account to download items. Here is the link: https://sharecg.com/v/11106/browse/8/Script/Marble-Texture-Photoshop-Action



To install **WhiteMarble.atn** in PhotoShop, open the **Actions panel**, click and hold the upper right corner (tiny icon, four short lines stacked), choose **Load Actions... from** the menu, and navigate to the downloaded action file.

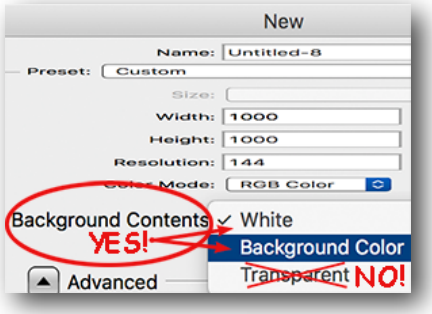
Once it's loaded, you'll be able to choose and run it from the **Actions** panel.

Running The Action



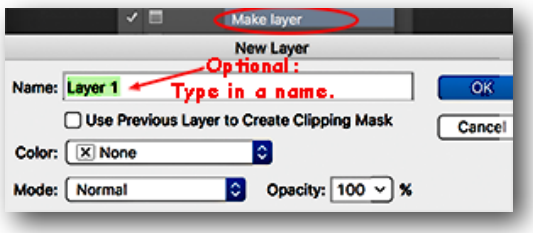
Display the steps in the **White Marble Action** by clicking the **small triangle** just to the left of the action name, and **Select** the **White Marble** name. Also click the triangle beside the first step, **Stop**, which has two parts.

Then click the **Play** arrow at the bottom of the **Actions** panel to start the action. A dialog will open, inviting you to make a new RGB document. Click the **Stop** button to close the dialog, and notice that the selected step in the action goes to **Reset Swatches**. That is where it will continue after you have made the new document.



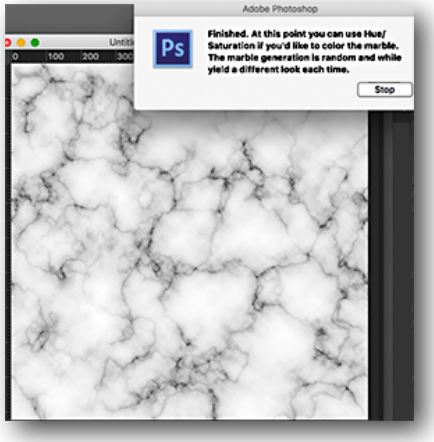
Be sure that the **Background Contents** of your new document are set to **White** or **Background Color**, *NOT* to **Transparent**, or the action will fail and give you an error message ("the selected area is empty") when you click **Play** to resume. If you still get this error, manually set the foreground color to **black**, the background color to **white**, select the first **Difference Clouds** step, and click **Play** to resume (skip **Reset Swatches** and **Fill**). I made my new document 1000 pixels square, but other sizes are fine. Once the new document opens, click the **Play** button at the bottom of the **Actions** panel.

The action will continue until it reaches the step **Make Layer**, when another dialog opens to give you a chance to name the new layer. The document will have rather dark



wiggly lines all over it at this point. Type in a name or go with default name **Layer 1**, then click **OK** to close the dialog.

The remaining steps will execute in a flash, after which a final dialog opens. It says that the action is finished, suggests using **Hue/Saturation** to color the marble, and notes that each run will be different. Clock **Stop** to close the dialog.

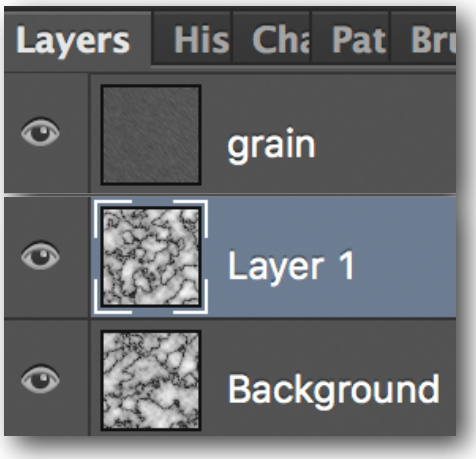


The finished document will now be white with wispy black veins, a very realistic marble texture. **IMPORTANT:** To use the marble texture directly or define it as a pattern, **you must make a merged version**, because what you see at this point is the interaction of three separate layers.

To create a merged layer, while holding down **Alt** (Win) or **Option** (Mac), **Right-click** on any of the three layers in the **Layers** panel, choose **Merge Visible** from the menu that opens. If you hold the **Alt** (Win) or **Option** (Mac) key while you choose this option, a new merged layer will appear, preserving your original three layers. Without the modifier key, **Merge Visible** combines the three layers into one.

How It Works

At the end of a run, you should see three layers in the **Layers** panel. Let's take a closer look, to understand what the **White Marble Action** does with those layers.



Click the **eye icon** to the left of the layer to hide the **Grain** layer (top) and the next layer down (**Layer 1** or whatever you named it), leaving the bottom layer (**Background**) visible. The **Background** layer, which you saw at the point where the action stopped and asked you to name a new layer, probably has a rather thick black wiggly lines. This was generated by the **Fill** step in

the action, which included using **Difference Clouds** twice, and adjusted by the **Levels** step. **Difference Clouds** introduces a random element to the design.

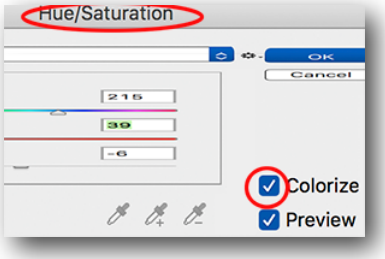
Now click the **eye icon** on the middle layer (**Layer 1** or whatever you named it) to show it again. This layer was created automatically by the action, immediately after the dialog where you could type in a name. Next in the list of steps is a second **Fill** step (again using **Difference Clouds** twice followed by a **Levels** adjustment), but this time the action also sets the layer to **Blend** using **Screen**. This creates a thick black wiggly line similar to the **Background** layer, but the effect of **Screen** (lightens everything) on the two black lines produces a more delicate and wispy texture.

Next click the **eye icon** on the top layer (the action automatically creates it and names it **Grain**) to show it again. Because the action chooses the name for this second new layer, it doesn't stop until the run is finished. It makes the layer and fills it with the foreground color, adds **Noise**, and then smears the dots using **Motion blur**. Finally, it sets the blend mode to **Screen**, making the entire texture lighter and the black veins less distinct. This layer has a very subtle effect, but you can see what it does by toggling the **eye icon** on and off.

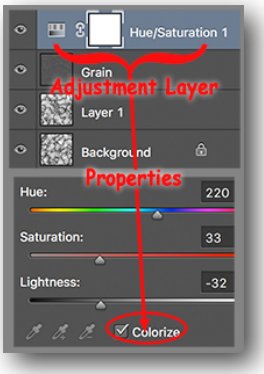
Coloring The Marble Texture

Since the results of each of the **Render Clouds** steps are random, you get a slightly different marble texture with every run. When the **White Marble Action** finishes, it displays a dialog indicating that you can use **Hue/ Saturation** to color the marble.

If you try that, be sure that you have **Colorize** checked, or you won't see any effects. With **Colorize** active, you have the entire spectrum of **Hues**, a range of **Saturation** from gray scale to very intense colors, and **Lightness** from black through all the intermediate shades to white. But there is one more consideration: Do you want to change the **Hue/ Saturation** of the entire texture, or of one or more of the three separate layers?

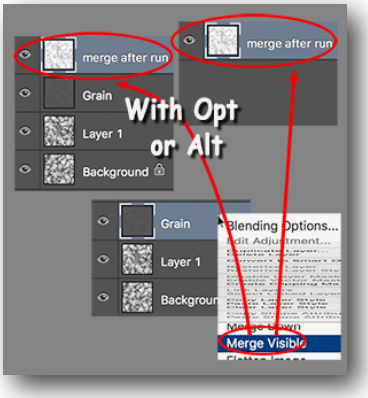


To color the entire texture, you have two choices. You can create a merged layer and use **Hue/Saturation** on it, or you can add a **Hue/Saturation Adjustment Layer** which will affect all three layers. Adding the **Adjustment Layer** is quick and easy, and you can use the **Hue**, **Saturation**, and **Lightness** sliders to experiment without actually changing the texture. Be sure you activate **Colorize** on the **Properties** panel for the **Adjustment Layer**!



Creating A Merged Layer

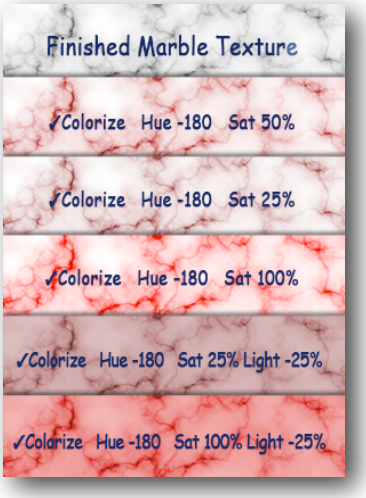
Alternately, you can create a merged layer, using the **Merge Visible** option. While holding down **Alt** (Win) or **Option** (Mac), **Right-click** on any of the three layers in the **Layers** panel, and choose **Merge Visible** from the menu that opens. If you hold the **Alt** (Win) or **Option** (Mac) key while you choose this option, a new layer duplicating the combined appearance of the three layers appears, while preserving the original three layers.



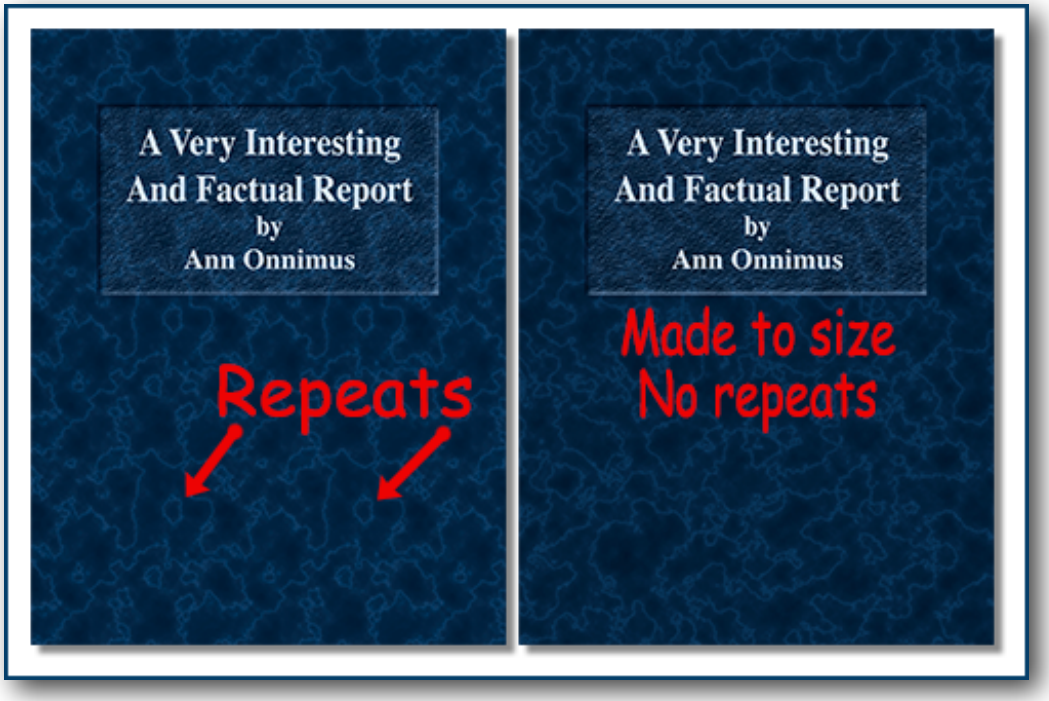
Without the use of the modifier key, **Merge Visible** combines the three layers into one. I like to make several merged layers using the modifier keys to preserve my original layers, and then create several variations using **Hue/Saturation**.

Using The Marble Texture

If you just need one copy of the texture to use as a background, set the document to the size you need, run the action, and you're done. However, if you get a good pattern and then spend some time adding color, probably you will want to be able to use it many times.

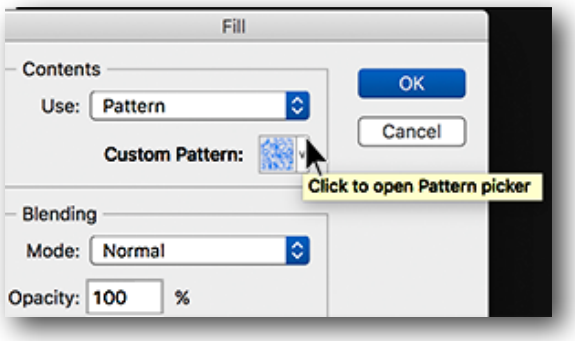


The textures are not 100% seamless, but because of the random designs, they often tile fairly well. (See **UsingTheOffsetFilterForBetterTiling.pdf**



for a method to make a pattern tile really seamlessly.) This means you can use them as fill patterns. To define a pattern, **Select All** of a **merged layer** of the marble texture, and choose **Define Pattern** under the **Edit** menu. Type in a name, and it's a good idea to include the dimensions as part of the name (Example: **White Marble 1000x500**).

There isn't a direct way to scale a fill pattern, so you may want to define several different sizes. Alternately, use the **Pattern Overlay Trick** described after the tips for making variations of the basic action, further along in this tutorial.



To use your marble pattern, select the area or layer you want to fill, select **Edit-->Fill**, and choose **Pattern** from the drop-down menu. Click the **small downward arrow** to the right of **Custom Pattern** to open the **Pattern Picker**, and select your new fill pattern. If you see tiling lines that are obvious, use the technique described in **UsingTheOffsetFilterForBetterTiling.pdf** on

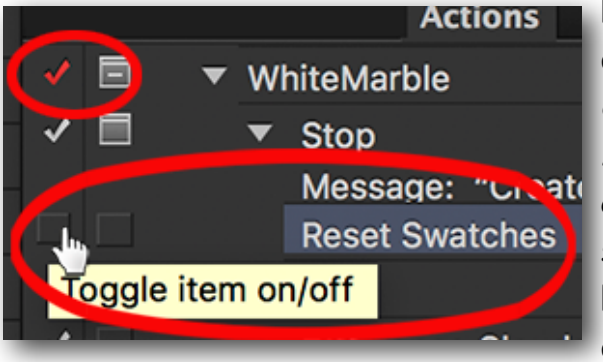
the marble texture before defining it as a fill pattern. The **Offset Filter** makes it easier to hide those tiling lines with the **Patch** tool.

Wait! There's More!

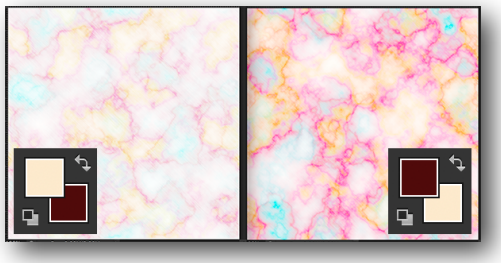
All the marble textures so far have used the default swatches, **black** for the **foreground color** and **white** for the **background color**. That's because the first step after you make a new document and click **Play** to resume is **Reset Swatches**. If you want to test that, fill any color into the new document, and finish the run. You still get white marble with wispy black veins. Of course I took this as a challenge, to see if I could force this action to make multi-color marble.

Start With Two Colors

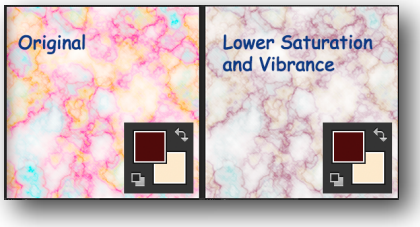
It turned out to be very easy: Just set the desired two colors for the foreground and background, and hide the **Reset Swatches** step and the first **Fill** step in the action. To hide a step in an action, locate a column of checkmarks at the left edge of the **Actions** panel, and **toggle off** the **checkmark** for the step you want to skip (in this case, **Reset Swatches** and **Fill**). Notice that a **red checkmark** appears to the left of the action title, **WhiteMarble**, to warn you that a step has been toggled off.



I performed these additional steps immediately after creating the new document, then clicked **Play** to resume. The action skips the hidden **Reset Swatches** and **Fill** steps, and instead uses the colors you set for foreground and background, creating a multi-color marble texture.



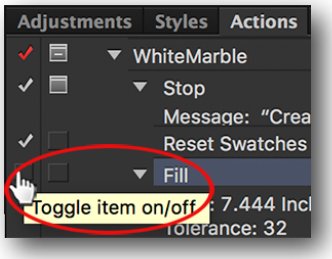
In creating multi-color marble textures this way, I have had the best results if one color is very light and the other color is dark. Because the top two layers are set to blend mode **Screen**, the resulting textures are never very dark, but you do get a lighter texture if

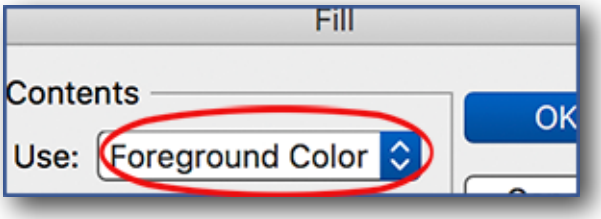


the foreground color is the light color. There is a lot of serendipity in this process, but generally more saturated colors will give you brighter (even garish!) effects. Of course, you can use **Hue/Saturation** or **Vibrance** adjustments to tone down a too-bright texture.

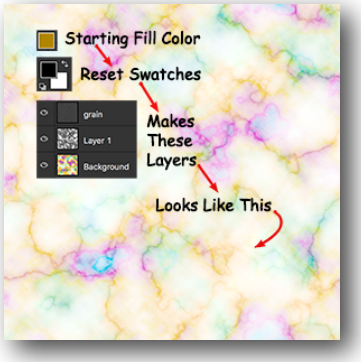
Start With Color Fill

In this variation, you **toggle off** the first **Fill** step, but leave **Reset Swatches** active. Also set the foreground color to whatever hue you want. After making the new document, go to **Edit-->Fill** and choose **Foreground Color** for the **Contents**. Then click **Play** and complete the action.





The **Background** layer will be a mix of various colors, including the foreground color you used as the initial fill. **Layer 1**, the next layer up, will have black veins on white, and **Grain** will be a dark gray, just like in the default action. That's because **Reset Swatches** sets foreground color black and background color white, as in the original action. But because you start with a color fill, the result is wispy veins of various colors on a light background, slightly smudged with the same set of colors.

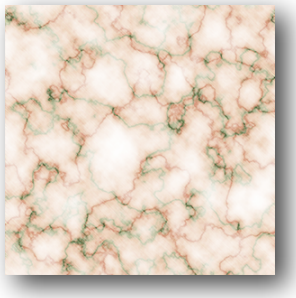


The Sky's The Limit On Variations

The black on white marble textures produced by this action are the starting point for all kinds of variations, with the help of various adjustment layers and blending options. Here are a few suggestions and examples.

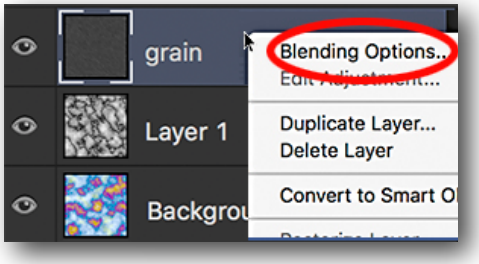
1.Hue/Saturation and Colorize on multiple layers

At the end of a run, an alert message suggests that you use **Hue/Saturation** (be sure to activate **Colorize** if your marble is black and white) to color the

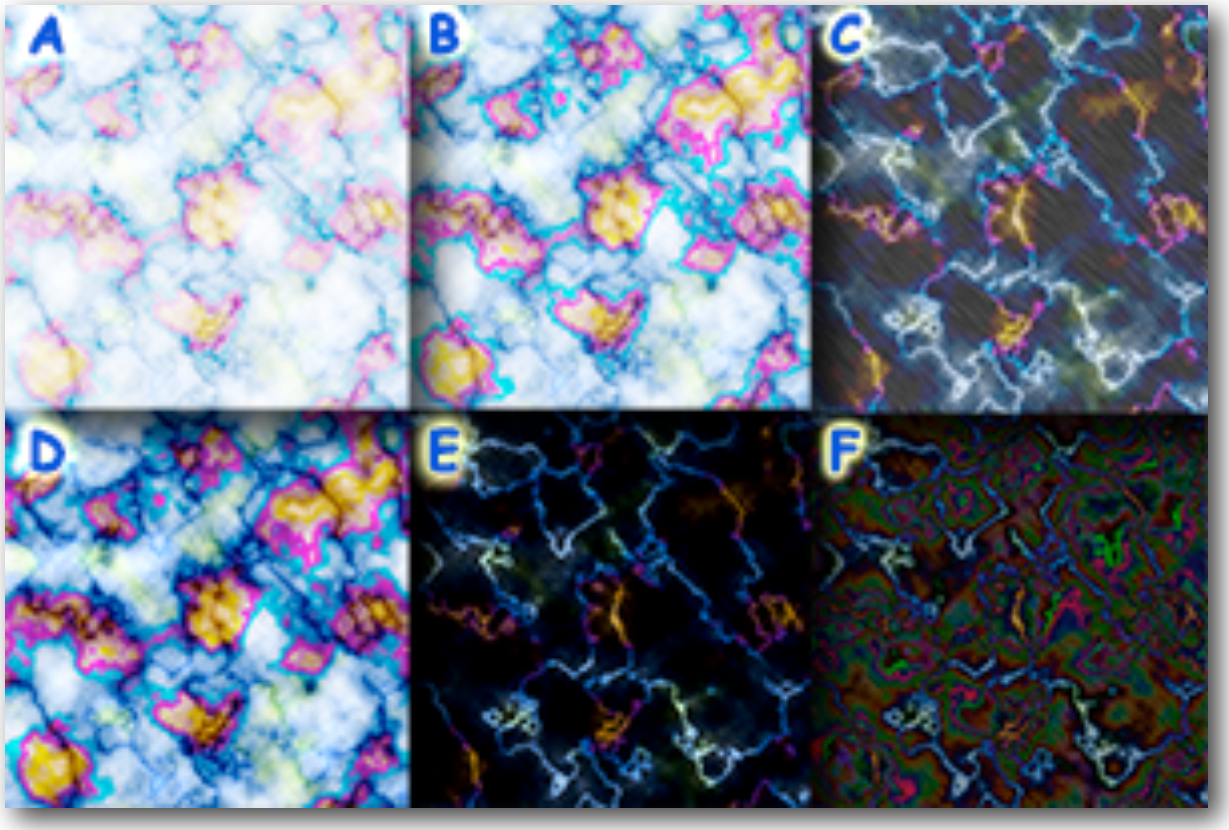


texture, but it doesn't say which of the three layers you should color. I described using **Hue/Saturation** on a single **merged** layer. You also can use **Hue/Saturation** on any of the three individual layers. Better yet, use **Hue/Saturation** on two or all three layers and get beautiful results! This example was a standard run with the default black and white swatches. I used **Hue/Saturation** on both **Grain** and **Layer 1**.

2. Experiment with Blend Modes



Tile (A) in the combined example below started with a background layer filled with a pale blue followed by a standard run, producing this pale texture with wispy blue veins and blobs of faint yellow and pink. The standard run sets the **Blend Mode** of both the **Grain** layer and **Layer 1** to **Screen**, so the result is always rather pale. By changing



the **Blend Mode** of one or both layers (and sometimes adjusting **Opacity)**, you can get many interesting textures from a single run.

Tile (B) Changing the **Blend Mode** of **Layer 1** from **Screen** to **Overlay** darkened and saturated the colors, making the wisps and blobs much more distinct and bringing out some aqua that didn't show in the paler marble.

Tile (C) Next, I changed the **Blend Mode** of **Layer 1** to **Subtract**. Wow, a totally different design!

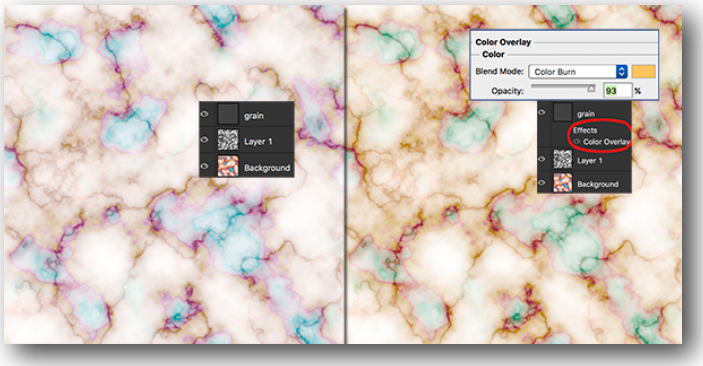
Tile (D) Next I tried changing the **Blend Mode** of both layers. I set **Layer 1** back to **Overlay**, and also changed the **Grain** layer from **Screen** to **Soft Light**. That produced an even more vivid version of the pastel marble, and brought out some green that didn't show previously.

Tile (E) Setting the **Grain** layer to **Overlay** and **Layer 1** to **Subtract** takes out the slanted strokes (caused by **Grain** on the default **Screen Blend Mode**) produces a texture with bright veins on a dark background.

Tile (F) Finally, setting both **Grain** and **Layer 1** to blend using **Difference** creates a wild, colorful design. It sort of reminds me of those reverse-embroidered mola textiles you see in Panama!

3. **Add A Color Overlay**

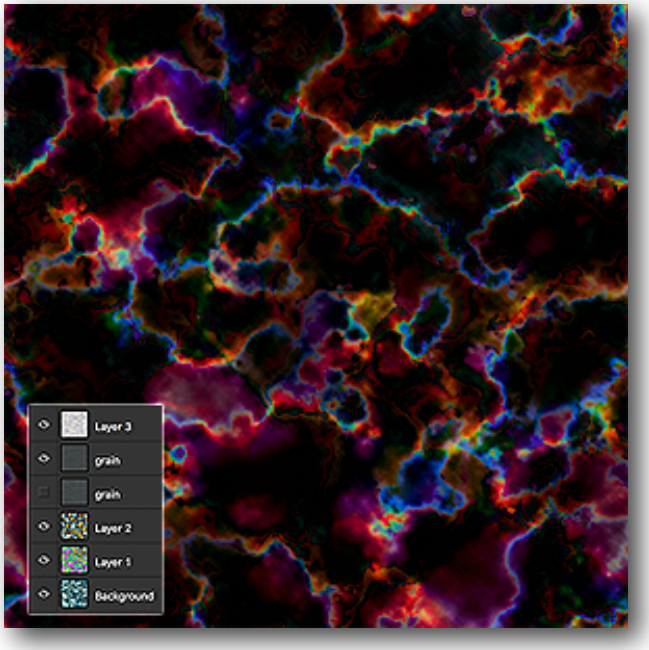
Choose this effect from the **Layer Styles** dialog for either the **Grain** layer or on **Layer 1**. You could even use it on the **Background layer**, if you first double-click the **Background** layer to convert it to **Layer 0**, a regular layer.



If you have the **Color Overlay** at **Opacity = 100%**, it will hide everything under it. Luckily, you can set a separate **Blend Mode**

for the **Color Overlay**. In this example, I added a golden yellow **Color Overlay** to the **Grain** layer, and blended it using **Color Burn** to add a warmer tone to the marble texture. The **Grain** layer itself has a blend mode of **Color**, while **Layer 1** is blended using the default **Screen**.

4. Try A Double Run



Sometimes a **double run** yields good results. That is, after running the **White Marble** action, I immediately started it again on the same document. The result is a second **Grain** layer and a **Layer 2** with dark veins similar to, but not identical, to **Layer 1**. This just gives you more layers to play with!

Since all the added layers initially are set to blend using **Screen**, the first result will probably be almost solid white. But start adding **Hue/Saturation** and **Color Overlays** and you can get some really wild textures, such as this dark and dramatic one. It's also very colorful, because I set black as the foreground color and pale blue for the background color.

This example has two **Grain** layers, the **Background**, and **Layer 1**, **Layer 2**, and **Layer 3**. The extra **Grain** layer and **Layer 2** are the result of a second run of the action. **Layer 3** is a merged layer made after the second run, so it has the same veins as the combination of all the other layers and the pale color of that combination before I started colorizing layers with **Hue/Saturation**.

Starting from the bottom, **Layer 1** has the **Blend Mode Divide**. Yes, this is a good project to try out those blend modes nobody uses! **Layer 2** has the normal **Screen** setting. I decided I didn't need two **Grain** layers so I hid one of them, and the other **Grain** layer is blended **Linear Light**. Then comes the

pale **Layer 3**, but because its blend mode is **Difference**, it causes the pale areas to go black and flips all the colored squiggles to the opposite colors.

5. **Add A Pattern Overlay**
Apply this effect to the **Background** layer (convert to **Layer 0**), **Layer 1**, or to **Grain**. If you blend the **Pattern Overlay** using, **Normal**, it hides what's on the layer. But change the **Blend Mode** of the **Pattern Overlay**, and all kinds of interesting variations appear.

One thing to keep in mind: Adding a second pattern means the result probably **won't tile**, so this trick works best if you know the size background you need and run the **White Marble Action** on that document size. In the following examples, I used other marble patterns for the overlay, but feel free to try overlaying all kinds of patterns. The result may no longer resemble marble, but you might find a wonderful texture that way.

In this composite example, each marble tile is above a tile of the same texture but with **Pattern Overlay** applied to one or more layers. By using various **Blend Modes** for the **Pattern Overlay** effect, it is possible to produce many different marble textures from a single action run. Note that

the **Blend Mode** I mention in the following descriptions is for the **Pattern Overlay**, not the separate **Blend Mode** for the layer itself.

To make the first tile on the upper left, I ran the **White Marble Action** with black for the foreground color, and a light tan background color. Below it is a tile with the identical three layers, but a **Pattern Overlay** using a marble pattern (rust-colored veins) has been applied to the **Grain** layer, blended using **Color**. The result is a subtle mottling, generally warming the pattern.

The next pair of tiles started with the same colors, but switched around so that the tan was foreground and black was background. The lower tile of the pair has a **Pattern Overlay** on the **Grain** layer, like the first pair, but with a different marble pattern (black veins) and blended using **Luminosity**. This is my favorite pair, because it looks the most like a real marble texture.

For the next tile, I used **Hue/Saturation** on both **Layer 1** and **Grain**, producing a pale marble pattern with delicate green and russet veins. (This is the example I described in the first tip on variations.) The dark tile below it, believe it or not, is identical except for a **Pattern Overlay** on the **Grain** layer. The **Pattern Overlay** uses a busy grey-green marble, but the dramatic effect was achieved by blending via **Difference**. It looks more like a beautiful granite than marble, don't you agree?

The last tile in the upper row had white and a dark red as foreground and background, respectively. This generated white marble with red veins. The tile below it has an added **Color Overlay** on **Layer 1** and **Pattern Overlays** on both **Layer 1** and **Grain**. The **Pattern Overlay** on the **Grain** layer is a blue-purple marble pattern. **Layer 1** has a golden yellow **Color Overlay**, and a **Pattern Overlay** blended using **Overlay**. The result is a very interesting marble, a mottled cream with darker veins and hints of multiple colors.

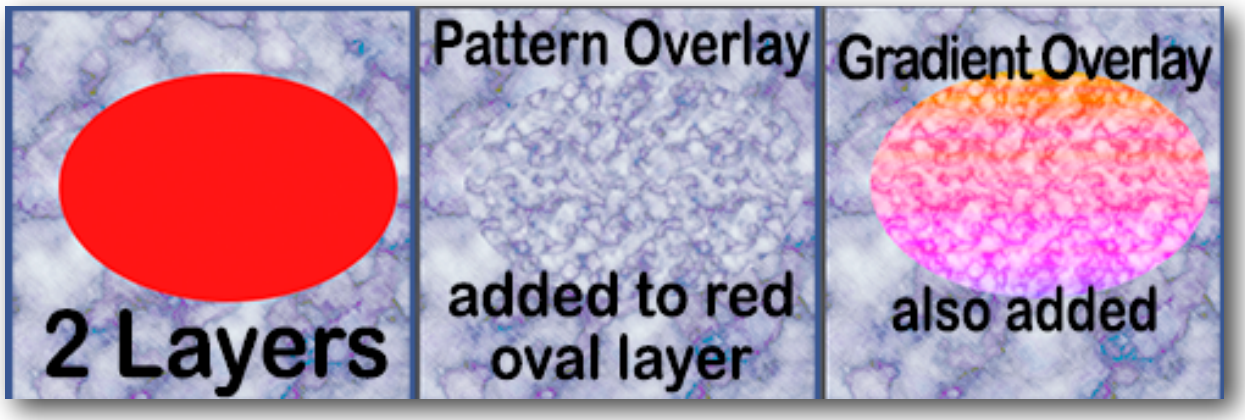
Pattern Overlay Trick

Earlier in this tutorial, in the section on **Using The Marble Texture**, I described how to define the marble texture as a fill pattern. Of course, the same steps would be used to define a pattern from any selected image. Once

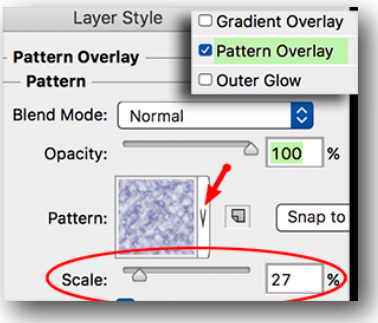
a pattern is defined, you can use it as a fill pattern, either through the **Edit-->Fill** dialog or with the **Paint Bucket** tool.

Notice that the **Paint Bucket** tool gives you lots of options, such as the **Blend Mode**, **Opacity**, **Tolerance**, and whether it is constrained to **Contiguous** areas. One limitation to the **Fill Pattern** function is that there isn't any direct way to scale the pattern. You can avoid that limitation by using a **Pattern Overlay** effect.

In this example, I filled the layer with a purple-veined marble texture I had previously defined as a pattern. I added a new layer, and on it I made an oval and filled it with bright red. To add a **Pattern Overlay** to the layer with the red oval, I opened the **Layer Style** dialog. (**Double-click** the layer or **rt-click** and choose **Blending Options** to open the **Layer Style** dialog.) I put a checkmark in the little square and clicked on the words **Pattern Overlay** to see the settings for this effect.



First I had to choose a pattern by clicking the **V** next to the pattern preview square. For this example, I chose the same purple-veined marble texture I had used to fill the first layer. Then I adjusted the scale of the pattern, in this case making it smaller (27%) to harmonize with the small



dimensions of the oval. Compare the scaled pattern on the oval with the 100% size on the layer below that you can see around the edges of the oval.

Even though the **Pattern Overlay** is superimposed on the bright red oval, all you see is the scaled pattern. By default, the **Pattern Overlay** has a **Blend Mode** of **Normal**, so it completely covers the opaque parts of the layer, whether it's a solid color, pattern, or image. Of course, you can experiment with setting the **Pattern Overlay** to any of the **Blend Modes**, and you can try it at any **Opacity**. You also can add other layer effects along with the **Pattern Overlay**, such as a **Gradient Overlay**, which I tried out using **Color** as the **Blend Mode**.

Keep in mind that a **Pattern Overlay** doesn't change the contents of the layer like an actual fill. Think of the **Pattern Overlay** as something like a suit of clothes that you can put on or take off without changing the body. That's why if you select and copy a layer with a **Pattern Overlay**, you get the original layer contents (the "body" under the clothes) when you paste.

To paste what you see, you must first either make a merged layer to copy. If you have only a single layer with a **Pattern Overlay**, you can choose **Rasterize Layer Effect** from the right-click menu to merge the **Pattern Overlay** with the layer.

Text and illustrations original by Ann Brundige. **White Marble Action** by Nate Skow (2007). These exercises were done in PhotoShop CS6.