Neon Signs: Old to New, Day to Night

Open an image of an old broken neon sign. Size document to 11 inches wide and 300 dpi.

Create new layer by holding the Alt key and clicking the new layer button at the bottom of the layer pallet. Name it NIGHT.

Change the layer mode to Linear Burn and select Fill with Linear Burn neutral color (white).

From the menu bar choose: Image, Adjustments and Levels. Change the output levels to 172 or a number that creates a “night time” appearance.
Next create a new layer for the neon – name it NEON. The neon will be drawn with the paths tool.

Select the paths tab from the panel.

Next select the Pen Tool. Make sure the Path button is selected in the options bar.
Begin drawing the neon tubes with the pen tool.

After the first tube is drawn, hold the control key and click. This separates the line so a separate tube can be drawn. Tubes can be adjusted and curved by holding down the control key, or you can select the Convert Pen tool and curve the lines as needed.

When all tubes are finished, double click on the Work Path and name it NEON.

Select the black Arrow Tool (Path Selection Tool), hold down the shift key and click all of the paths that should be stroked with neon.
Click back on the Layers tab in the Layers Pallet, make sure the NEON layer is still selected.

Select the paint brush tool and select a size that is slightly smaller than the neon tube, turn the hardness down to 0%. This is important – it gives the light a glow. Make sure the Opacity is set at 100%.

Now it’s time to paint. A light green or blue is probably best, but really depends on the image. Select the desired color. With the path, proper brush size, color and layer selected – hit enter. All of the paths that were selected should be colored now!

This is just the inner core of the neon. Now let’s make the neon glow.

Select the paintbrush again and make the size of the brush much larger. This will be the size of the glow. Next, drop the opacity down to 10% in the options bar. Hit enter, a slight glow should appear, hit enter again and a little more glow appears. Select a medium brush size, somewhere between the small brush and the large brush used and hit enter one more time.
Select the paths tab, click off the NEON path panel - the sign should be lit! But wait, there’s more . . . let’s add neon to another section.

Select the black Arrow tool, select the Paths Tab and click on the NEON path panel and select the individual path you want to stroke.

Select the layers tab and click on the NEON layer. Select the paint brush and choose a new color from the color pallet that matches the new area. Change the brush size to small and change the opacity back to 100% and hit enter. Then, as before, change the brush size to large, change the opacity down to 10% and hit enter, hit enter again. Change the brush size down to medium size and hit enter again to give different levels of neon glow.

Turn off the visibility of the paths by selecting the Paths Tab and clicking away from the NEON path panel.

Now the final steps:

Select the Layers Tab and click on the NEON layer and change the layer blend to pin light.
Now to add some highlights to the neon:

Select the NIGHT layer. Choose a paintbrush with a much larger brush. Hold down the control/D to choose the default colors (white & black) and click to add a highlight.

Done!

The video tutorial can be viewed at: http://av.adobe.com/russellbrown/NeonArtSM.mov