

why is 32 bit image setting making such a difference?

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With the latest Photoshop's ability to work somewhat with 32 bit images, as an experiment, I decided to convert all planetary 8 and 16 bit images I had from the past to 32 bit, apply unsharp masking and see what would happen. To my surprise, these converted images seem to be able to take, in some cases, quite a bit more sharpening at 32 bit before noise and highlights become problematic. In fact, I have been able to significantly clear up several images simply by converting from 8 bit to 32 bit and then unsharp masking carefully. My question is, why is this? I always figured that once an 8 or 16 bit image was saved that converting up to a higher bit was just a waste of space and of no benefit, but yet I am seeing results.

Thanks,  
AB