Fig. 3-27 PhotoKit Sharpener has an almost bewildering collection of sharpening options and methods. The Capture Sharpener collection (left) lets you choose the input medium and an effect to apply to that medium. Creative Sharpener (center) has three different tools, each with its own large collection of sharpening effects. Output Sharpener (right) lets you select how the image will be printed out and optimize the sharpening effect for different devices within that category.

PixelGenius PhotoKit Sharpener (http://www.pixelgenius.com)

Photoshop's sharpening tools are pretty primitive and not terribly sophis-ticated. (Picture Window has smarter sharpening tools.) Filters like Unsharp Masking in Photoshop are convenient, but many scripts and actions have been written to try to make them work better; in other words, to do more of the kind of sharpening we want with fewer of the artifacts we don't want.

PhotoKit Sharpener ($100) is the logical outgrowth of many of these hacks. Like PhotoKit, it is a collection of scripts. PhotoKit Sharpener has four collections of effects. The fi rst two collections deal with sharpening the captured image (Figure 3-27). The third applies creative sharpening

Fig. 3-28 Applying PhotoKit Sharpener's Edge Sharpen 3 option to the photograph on the left produces the one on the right. As the Layers window shows, PhotoKit Sharpener applies its changes in layers. With light and dark edges enhanced separately, you can control the influence of each using the Opacity slider. The original photograph remains unaltered in the background layer.

to enhance an image's edges and fine detail. Last, the output sharpening collection tweaks the image just enough to compensate for the softening effects of various kinds of printers and print settings.

The capture sharpening scripts address the modest losses in sharpness that can occur during scanning. Ideally, one would like to restore those losses without exaggerating noise at the same time (diffi cult for true sharpening algorithms like Focus Magic). PhotoKit Sharpener provides a bunch of preset sharpening routines for different kinds of input condi-tions. The plug-in was designed with film scanners and cameras in mind, not print scanning, but many of the algorithms work well for scans of faded prints. The manual clearly explains the purpose of each scanning choice, so you can intelligently decide what will work best with your print scan. For example, the negative film scan settings do more to minimize grain enhancement than positive fi lm scan settings, so they'd be preferable for working with noisy print scans.

The sharpening is applied in separate layers for highlight and shadow sharpening and each layer's sharpening selection masks are preserved (Figure 3-28). You can change the strength of the sharpening by adjust-ing the opacity of the layer, and you can control where it's applied to the scan by modifying the layer mask. For example, if you want a stron-ger edge effect and less sharpening in broad tonal areas, a simple Curves adjustment to the mask will do the job.

Different printers soften image detail in different ways, so PhotoKit Sharpener has many preset sharpening routines to optimize the quality of the output for just about any kind of printing device. Like CurveMeister, this package doesn't really do anything that you can't do by hand. What it does is turn the sharpening expertise of some really talented people into automated scripts, so you don't have to reinvent a wheel that's already been perfected.