

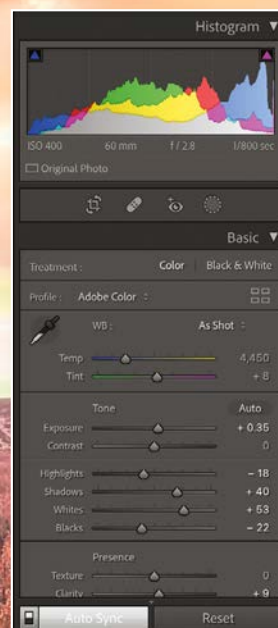
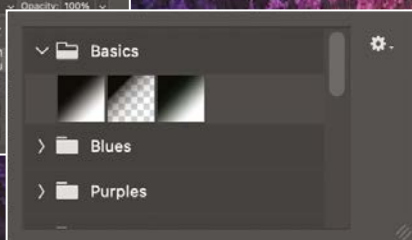
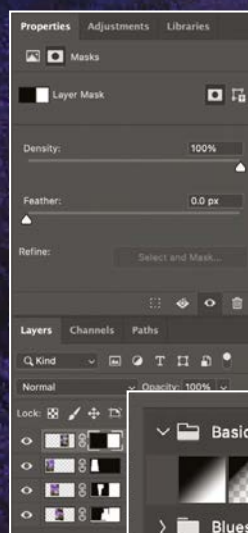
NEW

The Ultimate Guide to PHOTOGRAPHY POST-PRODUCTION

LEARN THE SKILLS TO BECOME AN EDITING PRO

146

*pages of essential
advice, techniques
and coveted
pro secrets!*



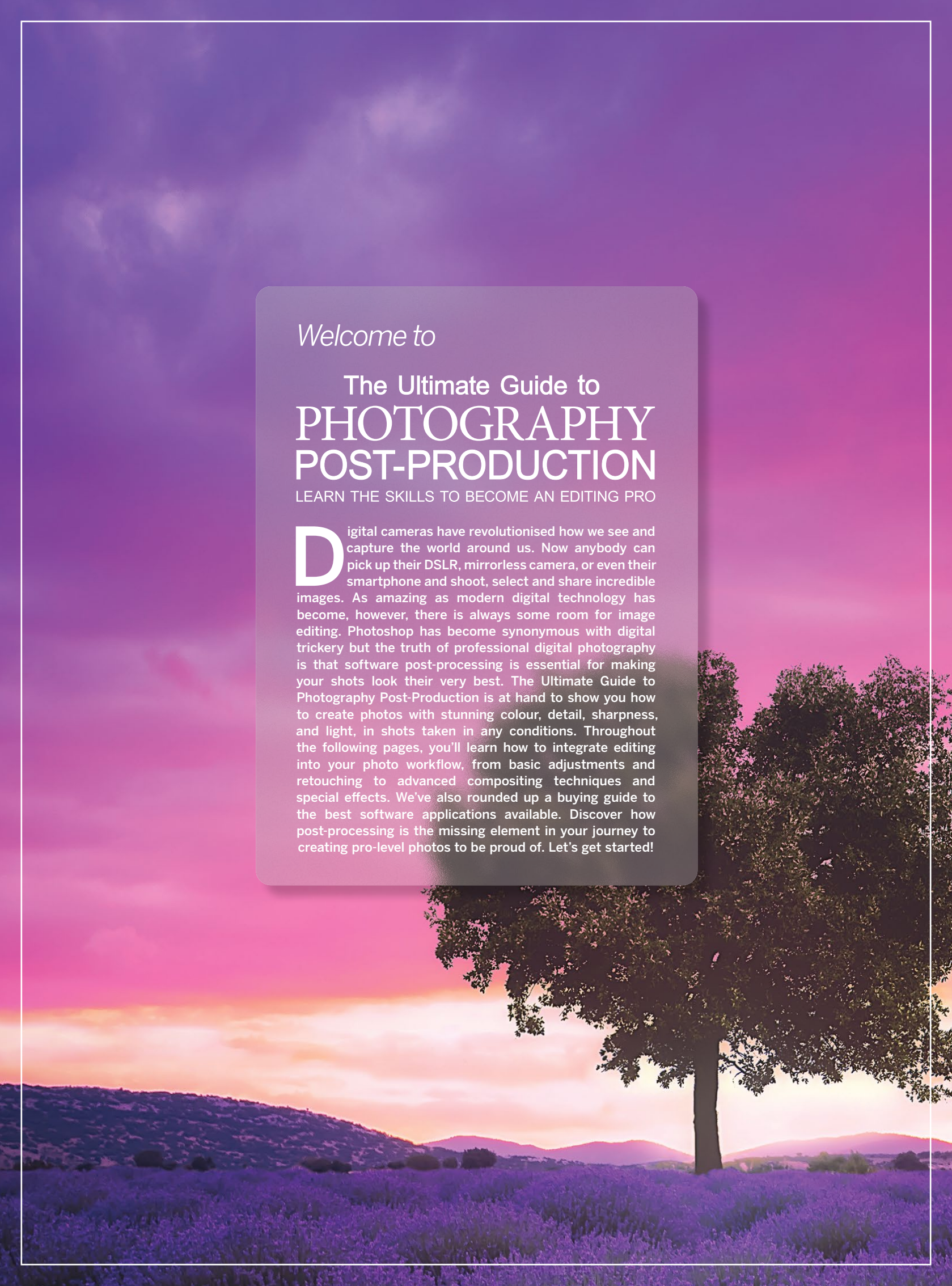
**Digital
Edition**



FIRST
EDITION



PORTRAITS | LANDSCAPES | COMPOSITING SKILLS



Welcome to

The Ultimate Guide to PHOTOGRAPHY POST-PRODUCTION

LEARN THE SKILLS TO BECOME AN EDITING PRO

Digital cameras have revolutionised how we see and capture the world around us. Now anybody can pick up their DSLR, mirrorless camera, or even their smartphone and shoot, select and share incredible images. As amazing as modern digital technology has become, however, there is always some room for image editing. Photoshop has become synonymous with digital trickery but the truth of professional digital photography is that software post-processing is essential for making your shots look their very best. The Ultimate Guide to Photography Post-Production is at hand to show you how to create photos with stunning colour, detail, sharpness, and light, in shots taken in any conditions. Throughout the following pages, you'll learn how to integrate editing into your photo workflow, from basic adjustments and retouching to advanced compositing techniques and special effects. We've also rounded up a buying guide to the best software applications available. Discover how post-processing is the missing element in your journey to creating pro-level photos to be proud of. Let's get started!

「 FUTURE 」

The Ultimate Guide to PHOTOGRAPHY POST-PRODUCTION

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Photographer
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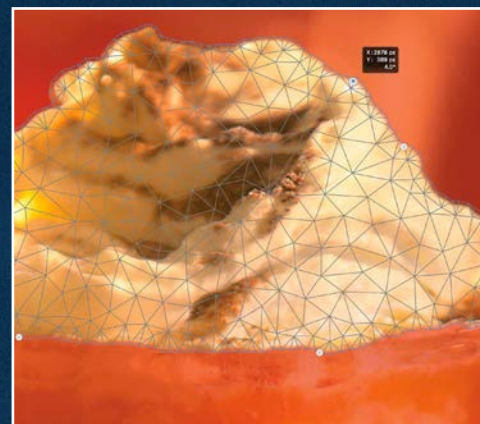
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© James Abbott



MASTER NEW SKILLS

DISCOVER HOW TO CRAFT YOUR OWN SIGNATURE PHOTO-EDITING STYLE FOR SHOTS THAT STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD!

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© Jord Hammond

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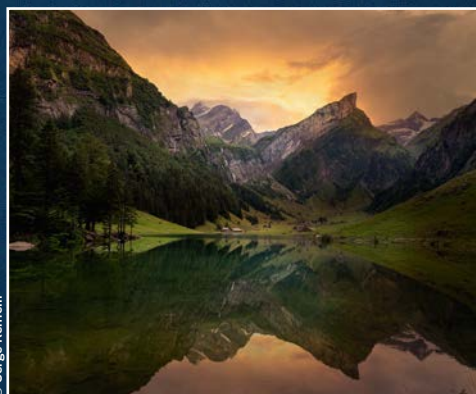
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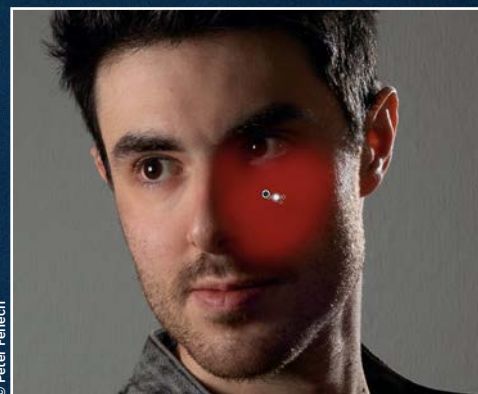
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© Olly Curtis



© Serge Remelli



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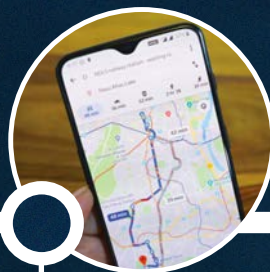
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Plan your editing workflow

Get to grips with the best order for editing photos, from the shoot to the print

PHASE 1

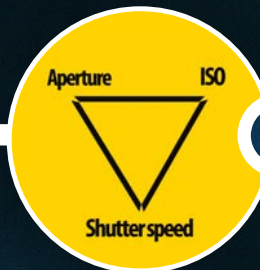


FIND THE PERFECT LOCATION

Use free tools such as Google Maps and Photos to discover the best spots for amazing images. Choose key landmarks and some lesser-known areas, for added interest.

CAPTURE PLENTY OF LIGHT

Use the Expose-To-The-Right technique. Shooting RAW files, increase exposure until just before bright areas turn pure white, to increase image quality. Check the camera histogram for 'clipping' on the right side.



SET COLOUR THEME

Choose the White Balance. For sunset photos pick the 'Cloudy' or 'Shade' option or for indoor photos, use 'Daylight' or 'Fluorescent'. Check your images aren't too yellow or too blue.

CORRECT BRIGHTNESS AND COLOUR

Open your RAW files in your software of choice. Move the Temperature and Tint sliders to adjust the balance of yellow/blue and green/magenta, to match your taste.

PHASE 3



REMOVE DISTORTIONS

Navigate to the Lens Correction tab and select a lens profile for your lens/camera combination, where available. Then move the sliders to further straighten lines in your image.

ARCHIVE YOUR WORK

It's time to save and print your work. Add keywords to easily find images again in future. Crop the image, apply print profiles and send shots to the printer.





© Ray Bilcliff

PICK A TIME

Use apps such as The Photographer's Ephemeris to find out where the sun will be in the sky at each time. Choose one that will give the best lighting for your location.



ARRIVE EARLY

Give yourself plenty of time to get set up and compose the perfect frame of your chosen landmark. Make sure you can safely access the spot when the light fades.

PHASE 2

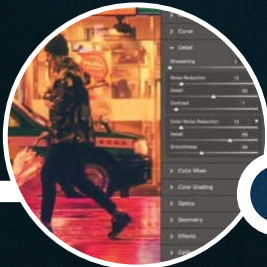
KEEP IT STEADY

Use a tripod to make sure your photos are sharp and free from camera shake. This will allow you to use slow shutter speeds for creativity, such as 1/20sec or longer.



REDUCE NOISE

In low light shots or where you have brightened a photo, there may be grain or coloured dots visible. Move the Luminance and Color sliders until the image looks clean.



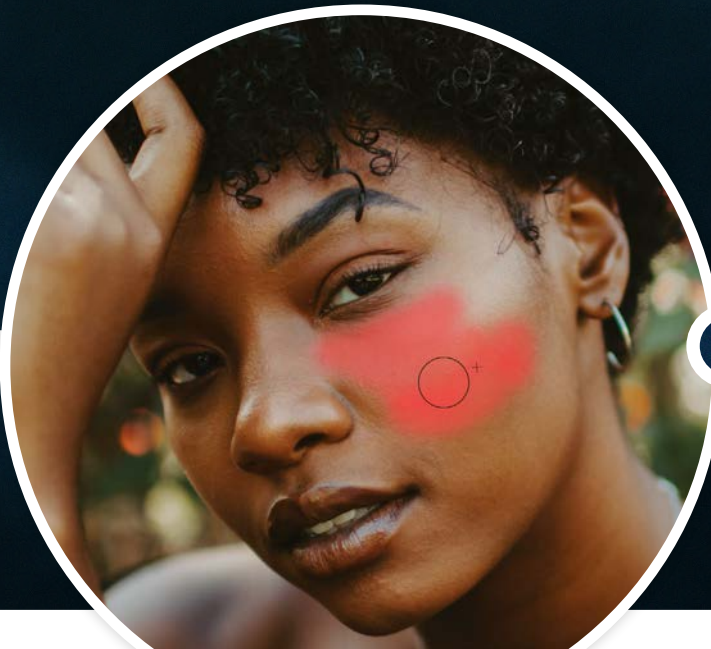
PHASE 4

LOCAL DETAILS

Apply skin smoothing techniques for portraits. Next, apply sharpening using the Unsharp Mask filter or Sharpening Brush, to enhance fine detail and textures. Be careful not to over-sharpen.

REMOVE DISTRACTIONS

Load the photos into Photoshop or a similar software. Use the Clone Stamp and Spot Healing Brush tools to iron out blemishes or distracting background detail, like power lines.





Digital darkroom

Using Photoshop or any of the image-editing software packages available, digital photographers have a vast arsenal of creative tools at their disposal. Post-processing can now be considered to make up half of the total photography workflow

Perfect your PROCESSING

There is a photo-editing application to suit every photographer. Learn to get more from yours

Post-processing of images has become an essential part of the digital photographer's workflow. There are a vast array of photo-editing software packages available, from highly simplified programs for beginners, to high-end specialised tools used by professional photographers and retouchers. Of these options, some clearly lead in terms of popularity and number of users. While choice is often attractive, it can be daunting when it comes to choosing a package to start with and because of the sophistication and variety of tools found in the professional software, it is possible to be left feeling a little overwhelmed. In this guide, we will cover all of the key areas of post-processing in an effort to

help you build a structured and effective workflow, from the essential adjustments such as exposure control and contrast, through colour correction and on to effective image database organisation. Then, once you are confident with the baseline editing techniques we will move on to those 'tricks of the trade' that will make your shots stand out from the crowd, including noise control, next-level sharpening policy and professional-grade RAW file handling. This will give you the confidence to work with any of the most-used software and more importantly, teach you how to make the most of the powerful features at your disposal, without the danger of taking things too far and potentially jeopardising the quality through over-editing.



Why process your images?

The key reasons for editing and how it fits with your workflow

While digital camera technology is constantly improving, people's perception of image quality evolves in equal measure – even non-photographers are now able to recognise when a shot has been 'Photoshopped' and are even aware of when an editing technique has failed. It is therefore vital that photographers recognise the need to develop their post-processing skills, so that they have a rounded skill set and are able to produce quality images in-camera and intelligently process these files with an end product in mind.

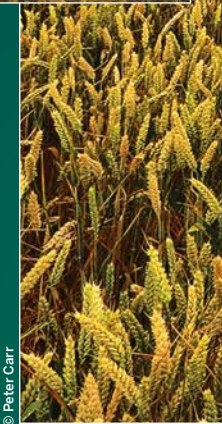
In most cases we will start our image editing with basic adjustments such as brightness and contrast, simple colour correction and sharpening. These are often referred to as 'essential' adjustments, since errors in these areas are the most noticeable if left uncorrected and should be applied to every digital image as standard. Beyond these, most software offer tools to precisely control colour via colour profiles, remove unwanted lens distortions and apply localised edits, which affect only part of an image. Next you might consider using a third-party plug-in – 'satellite' software which can apply further bespoke effects and correct highly specific technical defects. These are optional edits and some of the effects they provide can be created manually, however they are often very powerful and offer great advantages in speed and versatility.

BEFORE



ADJUST GLOBAL CONTRAST

Above
Dramatic sunset
While composition is good, the original image lacked contrast and colours are not vibrant enough. With some careful exposure and contrast adjustments, this scene now shows its full, colourful potential



© Peter Carr

Below

Washed out

Lighting was too uniform in this macro shot. With a crop, curves adjustment and a darkening of the edges using a layer mask, the eye is now drawn to the insect

AFTER



CREATE CONDENSED LIGHTING

BEFORE



AFTER



Adjustment versus manipulation

Image editing has long been steeped in controversy, but is it justified?

There can come a point where more of an image is created in software than in-camera. For some genres like photojournalism, this raises moral questions regarding authenticity, while some argue this is more digital art than photography. However, there is a distinction between adjusting and manipulating an image – creativity should never be discouraged. Photographer Vladimir Kochkin says, “Photoshop is only one of the photographer’s tools – if you opened a photo on a computer, analysed and decided that processing is not required, that means so be it. If you think that the treatment is needed, then it should be imperceptible to the viewer.”

Right

At the extremes

Sometimes creative use of effects produces images that are more impactful than those treated with ‘safe’ editing techniques. Here, Ronny Garcia wanted to create a surreal scene with a fairytale look



© Ronny Garcia

Correct your contrast

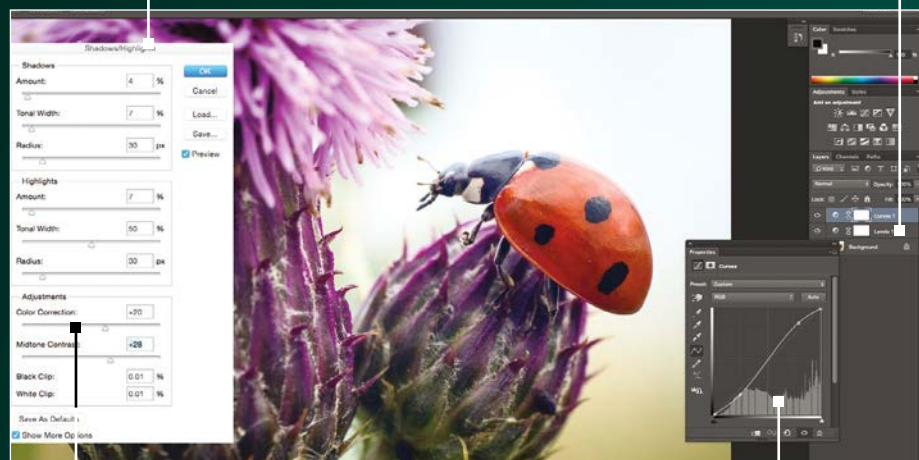
Contrast determines depth and mood in an image – highly important for drama in a two-dimensional photograph

SHADOWS/HIGHLIGHTS

Similar to Lightroom, these sliders in Photoshop can lift shadows and darken hotspots. Tonal Range dictates which tones are affected.

ADJUST LEVELS

More versatile than Brightness and Contrast, pull the input sliders until they touch the histogram for a quick contrast boost.



MICRO CONTRAST EXPLAINED

Global contrast is the difference between brightest highlights and darkest shadows. Micro contrast defines detail, controlled by Midtone Contrast here.

ADJUST CURVES

Highly powerful, Curves allow precise tonal edits. A classic S-shaped curve boosts contrast, while the centre adjusts the midtones.

Control exposure and contrast

Brightness and contrast control can really make or break an image

It is desirable to achieve an accurate exposure at the shooting stage, as this minimises post-processing work and generally reduces the chance of software-induced artefacts like image noise and banding. It also encourages the photographer to be mindful of overexposure and loss of highlight detail, which cannot be recovered at the computer. It is almost always necessary to tweak exposure and contrast, however – contrast is often lacking in out-of-camera shots, while an image that looked accurate on a 3.5-inch LCD screen may seem slightly too bright or dark when enlarged. Furthermore, an 'accurate' shot – one that produces a perfect histogram and ticks all of the technical boxes – may not be the most punchy and attractive image possible; correct does not always mean exciting or dramatic. There are multiple ways of making these edits and often you'll find two or three methods in any given software application, from simple work with the Brightness/Contrast control in Photoshop, to complex Curves adjustments in Capture One and advanced work in Lightroom using the Shadows, Highlights, Whites and Blacks sliders. In addition to this, it is possible to use tools such as the Brush and Gradient tools in Camera Raw/Lightroom and layer masks in Photoshop to perform local adjustments, thereby solving problems or enhancing an isolated image area. This is a vital stage as often an effect applied globally can spoil areas that do not benefit from that change.

Professional photographers often shoot in RAW format, as these files contain all of the image data captured by your camera's sensor. So, unlike JPEGs, which are compressed files, more editing can be carried out before quality begins to suffer. While Photoshop offers more tools for fine retouching work, RAW processing applications now offer enough tools to perform most of your workflow on your RAW files, the other benefit being that this style of editing is non-destructive. This means it is possible to revisit an image at any time and easily alter the exposure again, without degradation.

Whatever software package you use, an appropriate exposure and contrast will define the success of your image.

Achieve a perfect exposure

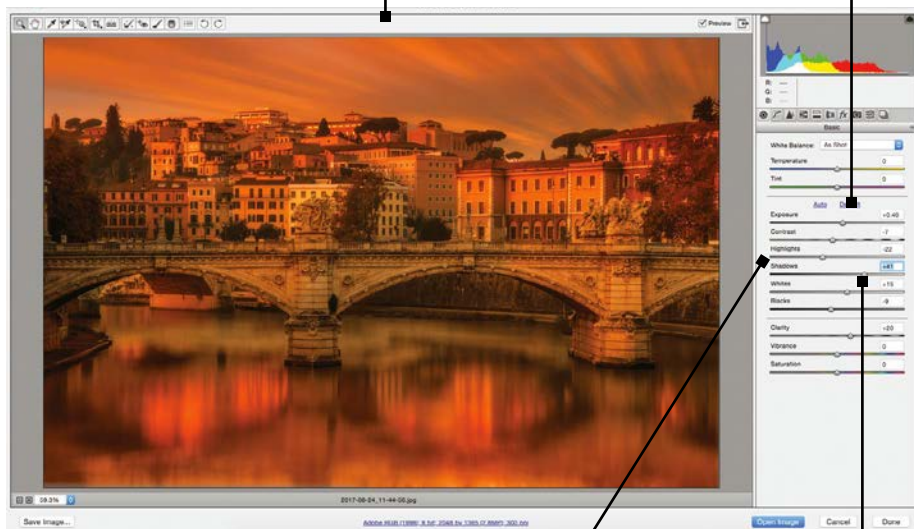
Adobe Camera Raw is a versatile RAW editor, capable of making essential edits to exposure

FAMILIAR LAYOUT

Both Lightroom and Camera Raw share sliders for adjusting exposure and contrast, with both creating similar 'looks'.

EXPOSURE SLIDER

This simple slider adjusts overall brightness, useful for minor changes for the sake of atmosphere or quick exposure fixes.



HIGHLIGHTS AND SHADOWS

Detail is revealed in overexposed areas by dragging Highlights to the left. Drag Shadows to the right to lift dark areas.

WHITES AND BLACKS

Use these to set Black and White points – areas of true black and white that ensure a full tonal range.

AFTER

BEFORE

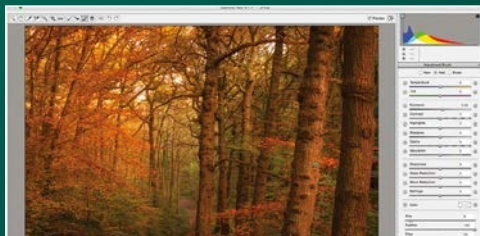
Why local adjustments matter

Make your editing more precise with adjustments to exposure and contrast

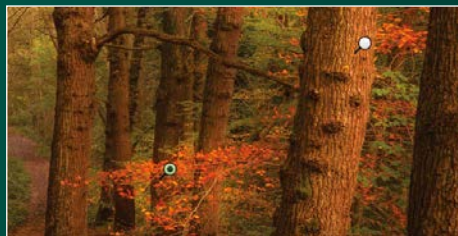
Global adjustments enable us to correct major image-wide issues, but in many cases you'll want to look closer at individual areas that might be lowering the shot's overall impact.

In this image the global exposure is good, but there are some small shadow areas that need brightening and the scene would benefit from some localised lighting effects to add depth.

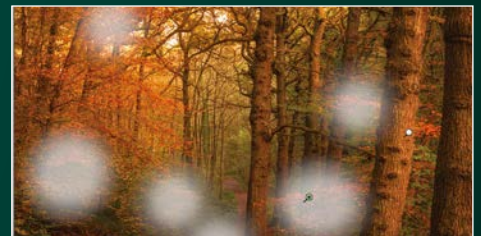
© Peter Fenech



1 Open in Camera Raw Try to perform as many adjustments as possible on your RAW files to future-proof your editing decisions. Capture One also works in a similar way.



2 Use Adjustment Brush (K) Available in both Camera Raw and Lightroom, drag the exposure slider to the right a little and paint with the brush in areas you want to brighten.



3 Check your adjustments Tick the Show Mask box to see if you've spilled over into other areas of the image. Select a pin and click Erase to undo brush strokes.



4 Use Gradient tool (G) The top left of the scene needed a little added exposure and warmth. The Gradient Tool was selected and a gradient drawn down over the area.



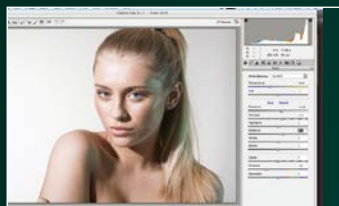
5 Finish in Photoshop You will often find it necessary to move into Photoshop for more complex edits. Working on a duplicate layer maintains a non-destructive workflow.



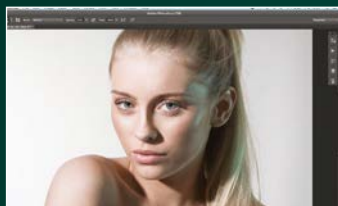
6 Apply local sharpening The edges of the frame are slightly soft. On a duplicate background layer, use the Sharpen Tool to extract some extra detail, leaving other areas.

Advanced portrait post-processing

Photographer Adrian Dewey guides us through the processing of one of his portraits



1 Camera Raw The first stage of my editing process is to open the image in Adobe Camera Raw and make the initial changes. Using the simple sliders I have altered the exposure, shadows, contrast and vibrance.



2 Open in Photoshop Next I will open the processed RAW image in the latest version of Adobe Photoshop CC and using the Spot Healing Brush Tool, I take time to tidy up the skin without losing the skin texture.



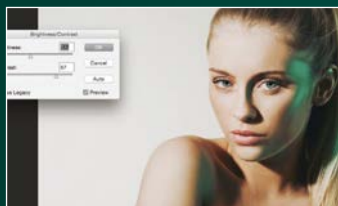
3 Gels As I had used gel lighting I now enhance where the colour hits the skin. Using a soft brush set to Soft Light at 30% opacity, with a colour similar to the gel colour, I go over these areas to make the colour stronger.



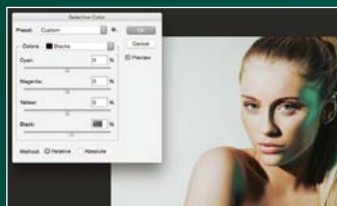
4 Colour balance In Image > Adjustments > Color Balance I use the sliders until I'm satisfied. In this case, with Midtones selected I moved towards the cyan levels, and then for Shadows I went for red and yellow.



5 Actions I use a lot of Photoshop actions, some that I recorded myself, some that I have bought. Here I ran one of my actions, called 'blue fashion', for colour, tones and contrast. It's often a case of experimentation.



6 Brightness and contrast The previous action did take some of the contrast out, so I will go back and alter the brightness and contrast from the Image > Adjustments > Brightness/Contrast option.



7 Selective colour At this stage I just used Selective Color to make the whites more blue and the blacks darker. As a portrait I am happy with the image now, although the photo as a whole needs more punch.



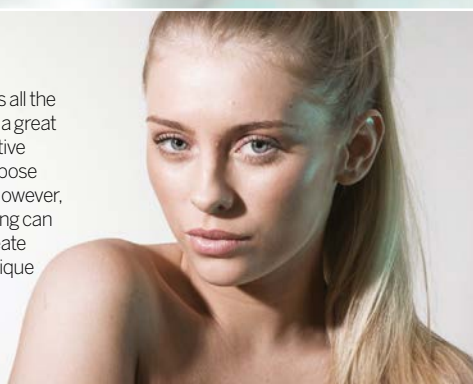
8 Brushes I felt the background was looking a bit dull. Using some 'light' brushes I downloaded, I added some white and blue lights in the background and overlaid the model to make the image stand out a little more.

BEFORE

Potential

This image has all the ingredients of a great portrait: effective composition, pose and lighting. However, post-processing can be used to create something unique

© Adrian Dewey



AFTER

Enhanced in post

I finished by using Unsharp Mask to make the image even crisper, as on portraits I like to see skin texture

Craft colour and tone

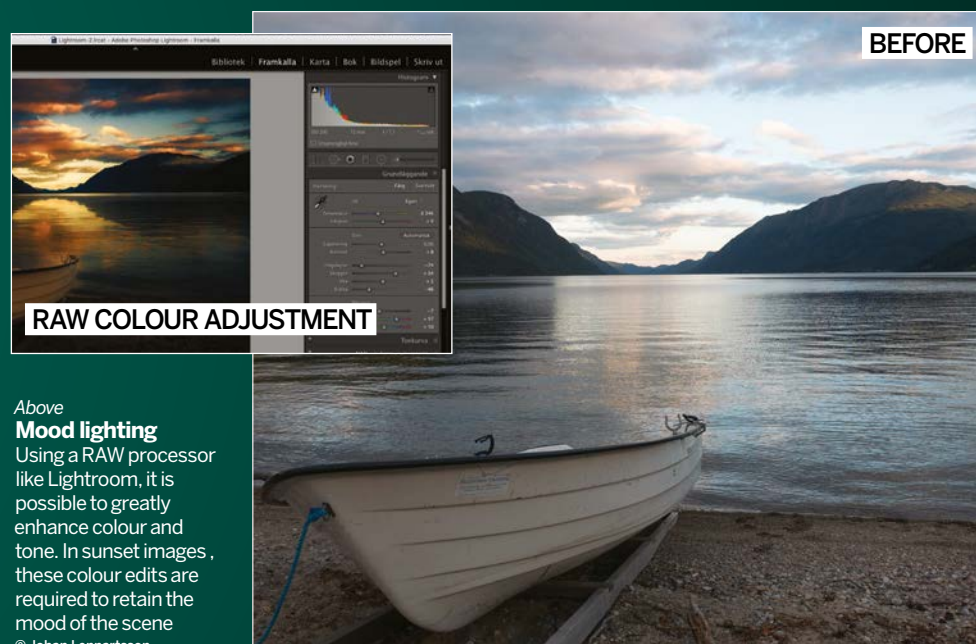
Produce special effects while avoiding the common pitfalls

Colour correction is one area where shooting in RAW provides arguably the greatest advantage, as applications like Camera Raw and Lightroom have the option to change the white balance of an image at any time, just as it is possible to do in-camera. Presets are available that mirror most camera white balance settings, including Cloudy, Daylight, Tungsten and Shade for rapid one-click adjustments, and for more precise alterations sliders are present for colour temperature and tint selections. It is also possible to eliminate colour casts easily using the White Balance selection tool – simply click once with the tool on an area of neutral grey to remove colour bias. Beyond this, highly advanced colour and tone adjustments can be made using Curves, where each of the RGB channels can be manipulated individually. By controlling each of the Red, Green and Blue Curves, the dominance of each colour can be varied to either remove or apply colour casts, for correction or creative effects respectively.

Tone refers to brightness values found in an image (luminosity) and the warmth of the colours present (temperature). When editing either the colour or tone of a shot, it is important to remember that in most cases one affects the other and so they should be considered in unison. When making contrast adjustments (altering tonality) colour saturation is often increased, emphasising any temperature bias. In Photoshop it is possible to avoid this by using the Luminosity layer blend mode on an adjustment layer.



AFTER



RAW COLOUR ADJUSTMENT

Above Mood lighting
Using a RAW processor like Lightroom, it is possible to greatly enhance colour and tone. In sunset images, these colour edits are required to retain the mood of the scene
© Johan Lennartsson

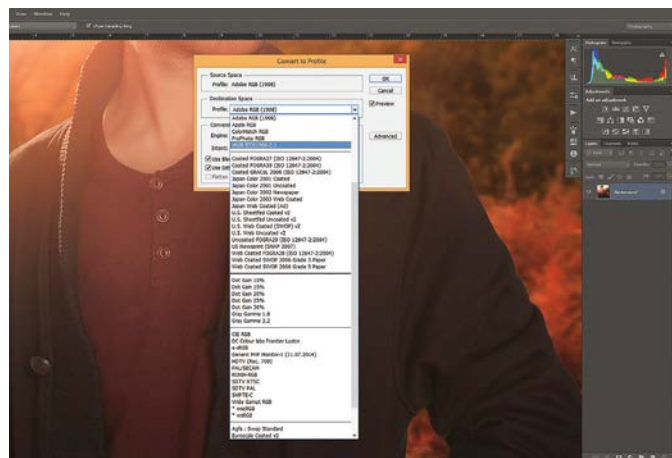
Colour spaces demystified

When outputting an image you can choose several colour spaces, but why do they matter?

A colour space represents the breadth of available colour in an image, with each one having a slightly different gamut – the total number of colour values that can be effectively reproduced. The sRGB colour space has a smaller gamut than Adobe RGB (used by most cameras as default) or ProPhoto RGB (Adobe Lightroom's default). However there are exceptions; when sharing images online it is better to use sRGB for consistent colour, since this is the only space supported by most web browsers.

Choose your space

In Photoshop go to Edit>Convert to Profile and select a new destination colour space. In Capture One follow Export>Variants and choose an ICC Profile under Recipe. sRGB is a good multi-purpose choice



Know when to stop

Part of developing a professional post-production workflow is recognising when you've gone too far

There is a disadvantage to having so many editing packages at your disposal, each with a vast number of tools. Sometimes it is useful to combine effects for creative reasons, but you have to be able to define the point where further adjustment will

degrade the final image. A useful technique is to lower the opacity of any effect you've applied or even turn it off completely, then gradually increase it again to see how or if it benefits the image. If you're unsure, you've probably reached that critical point.



Top In need of improvement

The tones and colour of this image are pleasant, but could do with some boosting. There is little depth and the colour doesn't accurately recreate the real-life hues

Middle Over the top

This shows unrealistic saturation, introduced partially through aggressive Curves adjustment and an unnecessary application of Vibrance. The changes have also accentuated noise



Below A correct balance

In the final shot there is an equilibrium of depth, drama and realism. The clouds have added shape and impact, but the colours are easier on the eye and noise is less pronounced

AFTER



Add the finishing touches

Take these final steps to guarantee viewers see your work at its best

If you shoot in JPEG format it is possible to select the level of sharpening that is applied to your images in-camera. This is quite limiting however, since these changes are non-reversible and so any over-sharpening is difficult to eliminate. This is an especially inconvenient problem because the amount of sharpening an image requires is influenced greatly by its output destination – images bound for the web often don't need as much sharpening applied than those destined for print. The same principle is applicable to noise reduction, in that it is better to have full control at the post-processing stage. In Adobe Lightroom and Camera Raw, the level of sharpening is controlled by the Amount slider, Radius handles the softness of the effect and Detail enhances fine textures. Capture One has a similar set of sliders, but the Threshold slider determines how pronounced an edge has to be before it receives sharpening – low values include more flat tones and higher settings limit sharpening to high-contrast edges. This is useful for minimising noise in flat areas. This equates to the Masking slider in Lightroom and ACR. The Unsharp Mask tool in Photoshop is effective when sharpening for print; try sharpening a duplicate layer (Layer>Duplicate) and changing the blend mode to Luminosity to prevent any colour shifts.

Regarding noise, there are two types: Colour and Luminance. Use the respective sliders in Lightroom/Camera Raw to reduce both, visiting the Detail sliders and Contrast slider to compensate for detail smoothing and flatness introduced by removing noise.

Meanwhile, lens corrections are a staple adjustment to most images. In Lightroom you can apply a lens profile under the Profile tab and customise distortion and vignetting removal for your image, before switching to the Colour tab to remove distracting chromatic aberration (coloured fringing) from high-contrast edges. In Photoshop you can apply lens corrections from the Filter menu, choose a camera and lens profile and apply custom tweaks to all other factors.

While noise reduction, sharpening and lens corrections may be subtle, they can make the difference when submitting your work for commercial use.

AFTER



PERFECT YOUR PROCESSING

The perks of plug-ins

Plug-ins can really expand the capability of your software, so here are some recommendations

There is a plug-in for almost every adjustment you could need to make to an image, and they are often hugely beneficial because they are designed for specific functions – they do a small number of things very well.



HDR EFEX PRO

HDR can be used for artistic effects or versatile exposure balancing. Photoshop has its own HDR feature, but HDR Efex Pro is one of the best third-party options.



SILVER EFEX PRO

The main advantage of this plug-in is the wide array of film simulation presets, capable of producing stunning analogue-like effects for dramatic black and white conversions.



TOPAZ ADJUST

This plug-in is used for enhancing detail and colour in your images. It's a quick and intuitive route to stronger colour and depth, where you can create gritty artistic looks or realistic 'pop'.



ENHANCED MOOD

Above
Added realism
Controlling colour temperature ensures scenes appear realistic – unnatural colour creates emotional barriers between an image and the viewer

© Johan Lennartsson



BEFORE

When should you sharpen?

When you sharpen during your workflow is as important as how much you apply

RAW processing offers the greatest flexibility when sharpening as, once again, it is non-destructive and unfixed. Camera Raw, Lightroom and Capture all offer tools to perform precise sharpening and even make

selective adjustments using brushes and masks. Another useful aspect is that each one allows sharpening and noise reduction to be performed from adjacent panels, so it's easy to find a balance between the two.

When upscaling an image or preparing for print, it also advisable to apply a further round of sharpening, either in Photoshop or by selecting a preset in your RAW application. This ensures crisp final results.



Sharpen for the web

Since online resolution is limited by your computer monitor, less sharpening is generally needed for uploading to online galleries. A simple sharpening application using the settings shown here will suffice for most web purposes.



Sharpen for print

When printing, you want to make the most of your camera's resolution and reproduce as much detail as possible. Sharpen twice in this case, once in Camera Raw/Lightroom then in Photoshop using Unsharp Mask.

Keep your images organised

Devise a logical and structured archiving workflow

It is critical that you keep an organised and structured database. This should be backed up to ensure you have redundant copies of every shot should your main storage location be compromised. It should be easily searchable, so that you can quickly find images later. It is important to remember that once you start with an organising workflow, it is helpful to stick to it from that point on to minimise the chance of misplacing files and creating searching conflicts. For example, when utilising Lightroom to organise your work, it is a good idea to store all images for that collection in a single folder; this feels counter-intuitive if you have been manually sorting files into folders based on date or genre on your hard drive, but it will make it easier for Lightroom to keep track of your photos. If you have some images stored on an external hard drive and others on your

desktop, you may find that Lightroom has missing photos if you remove the external drive from the system. Being sure that all your images are available in synchronisation can help streamline your workflow.

When importing images or outputting an edited version it is useful to add keywords to the files so that you can find them later in your database. If you hope to sell work to publishers or stock image sites, intelligent tagging will make your work easier to find, giving you an advantage over the competition. Add tags in Photoshop by visiting File>File Info, where you can also embed descriptions and copyright information into your files.

Keep your edited images alongside your originals at all backup locations, so you know that you have both safely duplicated and available. With ACR, remember to back up the XMP files, generated when you edit a RAW file.



Above-top Other software options

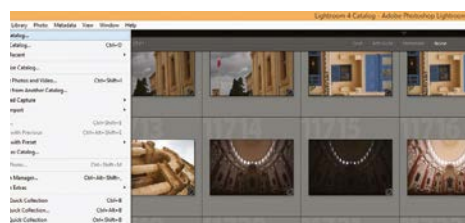
There are lesser-known editing options to consider. The free application Gimp is surprisingly powerful and offers many features found in high-end packages

Above-bottom Endless creative options

Professional digital photographers have learned to make the most of what the medium has to offer. To motivate yourself to creatively experiment, try entering a post-processing contest

Keep your images organised

Use Lightroom to efficiently store, archive and find your images



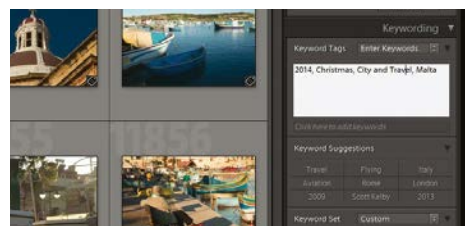
Lightroom archives images in directories called catalogs. You can create as many of these as you need, so it is possible to have a different catalogue for every group of related images you have, such as personal

and professional, photography genres or year. Once you've started using Lightroom, it is highly advisable that you continue to do so for all your image sorting; moving files manually creates synchronisation issues.

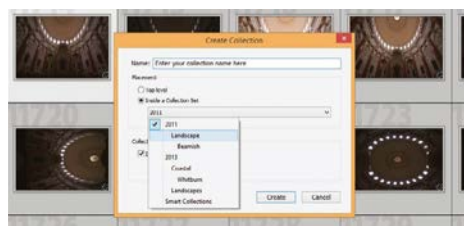
1 Create a catalog Create a new directory for your images and select its destination on your hard drive. This file doesn't contain your images themselves, simply catalog and image file information.

2 Import images Click Import to begin. Choose a source folder, such as an external hard drive or your memory card. Tip: keep all photos for the catalog in a single folder so Lightroom doesn't 'lose' them.

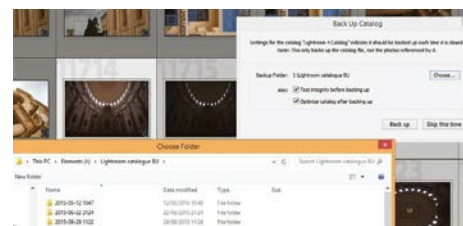
3 Copy, move or add Lightroom can copy or move your images to a new folder on your hard drive, or you can simply add the images to the catalog, leaving them in their source folder.



4 Duplicate and add keywords If copying from a card, select a destination and tell Lightroom to make a second copy to another drive by ticking the box. Add keywords to be applied on import to aid with searching.



5 Create Collections Further organise your images by grouping them into Collections. Select your images, go to Library>New Collection. Collection Sets can group similar collections for convenience.



6 Back up your catalog Go to Edit>Catalog Settings and choose to have Lightroom back up whenever you close the program. Select an external destination, such as a portable hard drive, for the backup.



BEFORE

PERFECT YOUR PROCESSING

Keep your images safe

Storing your images correctly is just as important as how you take them

It is good policy to have at least two copies of every image you take on separate drives. Many professionals have a third copy located at another physical location or in cloud storage. It's best to back up as you import originals and then as you save edited finals. When copying images, always duplicate originals – don't copy copies as this can eventually lead to file corruption over time. Choose hard drives of 500MB or more.



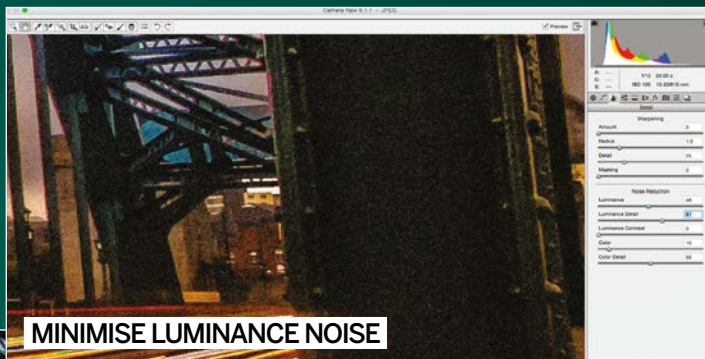
Never too safe

Cloud storage is a convenient way to create off-site backups. Sites like Dropbox or Google Drive offer considerable storage space

Right Noise reduction

Noise in shadow areas can become more pronounced with exposure adjustment. Using noise reduction on RAW files smooths grain in a non-destructive way

© Peter Fenech



MINIMISE LUMINANCE NOISE

AFTER



SECRETS OF EDITING

Learn new skills and follow these tips to improve your photos

There is no question editing is one of the most important steps in the creation of photographs. But whereas post-processing can help create the perfect photo, used in the wrong way, it can also destroy your shot. Today's editing programs open up countless possibilities and, due to the extensive tools and their capacity for change, it's tempting to take it to the extreme. Radical changes can be intentional, but they should underline the characteristics of your photo in a natural way by sticking to the fundamental principles.

Post-processing is almost as important as the process of taking the image itself – never underestimate how much even minimal changes can potentially improve the overall quality of your photo – but you have to proceed

with care and sensitivity. The viewer should never get the feeling that the final photos have been overworked. To achieve pro results from the editing process, you should analyse the image carefully, eliminate distracting elements that couldn't be avoided when creating the photo and focus on existing stylistic tendencies, taking advantage of the software's functions to direct the viewer's eye.

One of the biggest advantages of digital editing is that you can experiment without damaging the original digital files. This means you can learn how to edit to your preferences and create unique atmospheres for storytelling. Take the opportunity to expand your knowledge of tools that aren't in your regular workflow – open up new possibilities for your work and, over time, you will be able to extend your signature style.

Final edit

The main benefit of digital editing software is that you can edit without damaging the original file. Feel free to experiment and develop your style

© Olly Curtis



Adobe RAW vs Photoshop

Understand how and when your photos can benefit from features

It's no secret that photos should be taken in RAW format, as it offers more freedom in terms of creativity. But what are the advantages when it comes to post-processing? Open a RAW file in Photoshop, and it will start the Adobe Camera RAW (ACR) editor.

The application is structured differently, but it's clear that the editing functions are similar to those in Photoshop. The difference is that all functions are visible and changeable at a glance and you can also set some parameters that don't exist in Photoshop. When it comes to optimising your workflow and images, it is important to know the pros and cons of both workspaces.

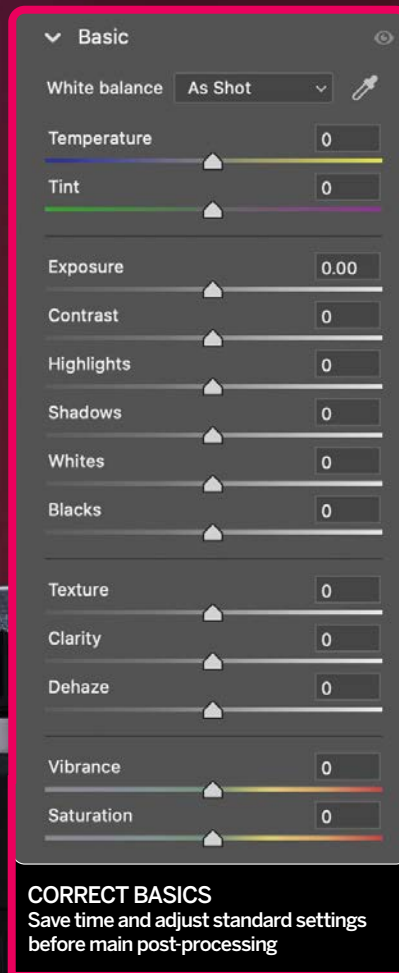
Use powerful RAWs

Try the ACR editor for basic adjustments

The ACR editor can save you a lot of time, allowing you to work in an intuitive way and giving you control over the basic adjustments. The application doesn't work with adjustment layers or layer masks, instead it operates with sliders, which can easily be altered. This makes it simple to use for beginners, though anyone who has already worked with Lightroom will have an advantage as the structure is similar.

The basic image edits are non-destructive and perfect for finding the right settings or experimenting with visual ideas before main post-processing. Bear in mind that settings aren't reversible after the editing process in the ACR editor, so it is advisable to do your basic adjustments here, so you don't lose control over the photo. The most useful tools are colour correction and batch editing. If your original photograph wasn't taken in RAW format, Photoshop has the option to apply similar adjustments using the Camera Raw Filter.

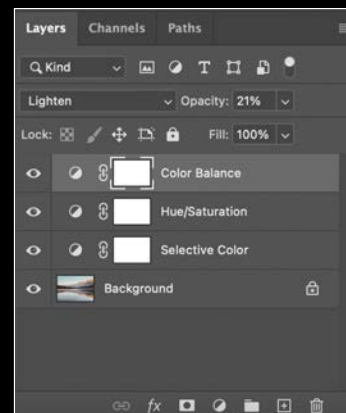
© Oily Curtis

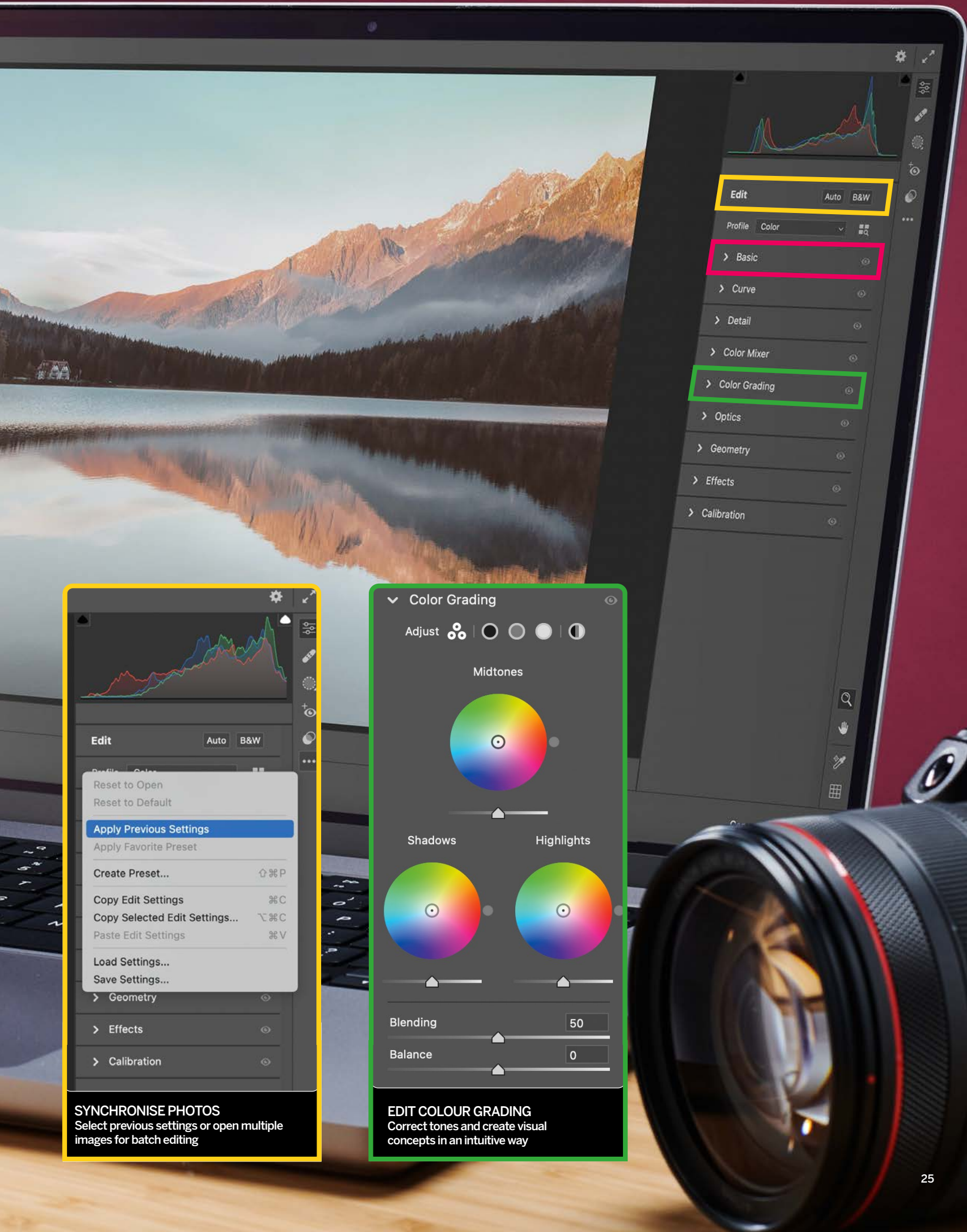


Fine tune in Photoshop

With its almost limitless functions and tools, Adobe Photoshop can be overwhelming for beginners. But with online tutorials and a little bit of initiative, the creative possibilities are endless. Unlike ACR editor, Photoshop works mainly with layers. Each new layer is placed over the original shot and can be removed, copied or edited in its own way. These can be transparent or highlight only selected elements. The big advantage of Photoshop is that you have the option to go back and edit each layer at any time, especially if your previous visual goals have changed.

Different types of layers offer the possibility to create blends of several images at the same time and its range of tools open up new visual possibilities. This makes editing your photographs in Photoshop both easy and interesting. Additional plug-ins can be downloaded from the Adobe website, including a wide range of further brushes, gradients and more.





SYNCHRONISE PHOTOS
Select previous settings or open multiple images for batch editing

Edit Auto B&W

Profile Color

- Reset to Open
- Reset to Default
- Apply Previous Settings**
- Apply Favorite Preset
- Create Preset... ⌘ P
- Copy Edit Settings ⌘ C
- Copy Selected Edit Settings... ⌘ C
- Paste Edit Settings ⌘ V
- Load Settings...
- Save Settings...
- > Geometry
- > Effects
- > Calibration

EDIT COLOUR GRADING
Correct tones and create visual concepts in an intuitive way

▼ Color Grading

Adjust ○ ○ ○ ○

Midtones

Shadows Highlights

Blending 50

Balance 0



Control colours

Adjust colour to create a unique atmosphere

If the white balance has been neglected or your visual targets have changed, post-processing can help correct colours. The most obvious way of doing this is by changing settings in the Camera Raw developer.

However, it is advisable to make the settings only as a starting point, as you will lose control of them during further editing. Since the overall colours contribute to the atmosphere of the shot and affect the viewer, more precise changes should be made in post-processing.

There are several methods of changing the colour, from adjusting the colour balance to using warming or cooling photo filters. One of the most accurate methods is to use the Curve Adjustment Layers, the advantage being that they can always be re-edited and improved at a later stage.

Master skin tones

Learn pro editing techniques to achieve natural results

Achieving true skin tones can be a challenge in itself. Under-exposure can lead to undesirable, oversaturated results, but choosing the right settings will lead to soft results. Every skin tone is different and to achieve a realistic overall result, you should not lose natural colour gradations. Besides white balance and exposure settings, the HSL sliders and luminance panel are your most important tools.

Pay particular attention to orange and red tones, as skin tones are predominantly made up of these. Use RGB values as a guide and starting point. Take advantage of the eyedropper tool to analyse the current settings and choose a reference value for further editing. The lighter the skin tone, the higher the RGB values. In general, the rule is the highest factor is red, then green, followed by blue.

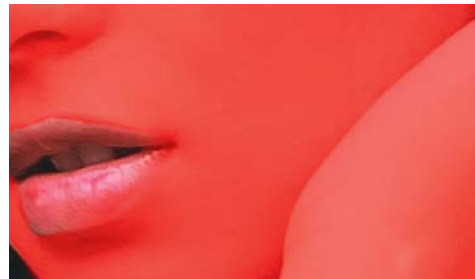
	255, 230, 210
	250, 215, 200
	245, 210, 185
	232, 203, 182
	226, 193, 172
	208, 165, 140
	200, 145, 120
	215, 155, 105
	197, 125, 75
	180, 105, 65
	177, 110, 85
	140, 75, 52
	133, 56, 35
	62, 13, 4
	38, 8, 3

© Dillon Kydd

Skin colours in Capture One How to achieve natural-looking skin tones in Capture One



1 Customise your workspace Drag out the colour editor so you can get an overview of all the settings. Select the skin tone option to access the fine-tuning tools.



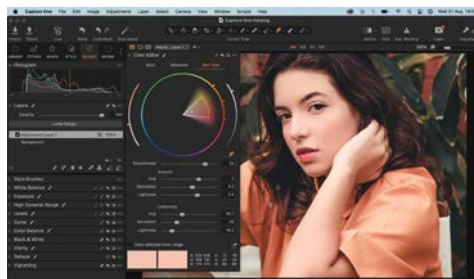
2 Add a layer Avoid adjusting the other parts of the photo by creating a new layer and masking the area with the help of a brush. Don't forget to remove any unwanted areas.



3 Select target tone Hide the mask and then use the picker tool to choose your preferred skin tone. The colour range selection tool will then adapt your reference.



4 Use amount sliders These settings allow you to adjust the overall skin tone within three features. Try different settings to get a feel for your preferred references.



5 Adjust the uniformity It is important to find a balance between natural and uniform settings. Take care not to push them to the limit, otherwise it will look artificial.



6 Analyse results With the before and after option you can compare the original with the final result. Check whether applications have been used too intensively.

Create balanced photographs

Use powerful cropping tools to improve the impact of the subject

In post-processing, there is one important factor that influences the overall harmony of the shot – and that is the crop. Cropping is a powerful tool that can make or break your image and used correctly, we can eliminate any distracting elements in the shot, and direct the viewer's gaze and attention to the main subject. This tool can allow new perspectives and transform your photos into results you may not have expected.

The crop tool must be used with care, especially in portrait and fashion photography, as cut-off elements can impact the end result. Cropping images should be handled strategically – keep the ratio of your intended media platform in mind when doing so.

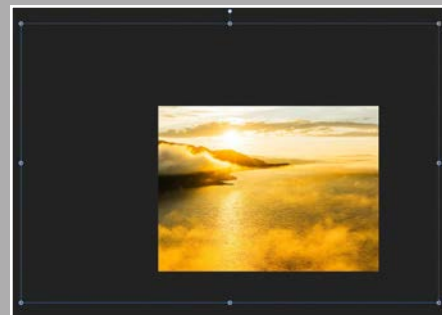
Cropping with Affinity

Experiment with ratios to reveal compositions non-destructively



GO STRAIGHT IN

Unlock the background layer and select the custom ratio mode to stay in your preferred aspect ratio. Focusing on the main subject, use the crop tool and create a section. Once you have found a suitable crop, apply the settings.



GAIN VISUAL OPTIONS

By zooming out of the photo, the outline of the original file becomes visible. Select the move tool and then position the image within the set aspect ratio frame. With the help of the anchor points, it is now possible to resize the photo.



Crop correctly

Follow composition guidelines to achieve harmonious framing

1 Rule of thirds When photographing, main subjects are often placed in the centre. To change this common pattern, horizontal and vertical lines are inserted to split the image in three parts. The main subject is placed along at least one of the four intersections to create more tension.

2 Fibonacci spiral Orientate towards organic forms and place the main element at the end of the spiral. The composed structure directs the viewer's gaze through the picture. This composition is variable, so exploit its potential by mirroring or rotating the spiral to adjust your photo.

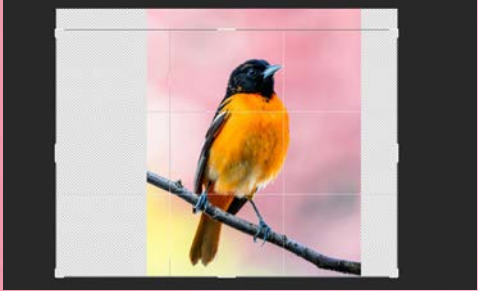
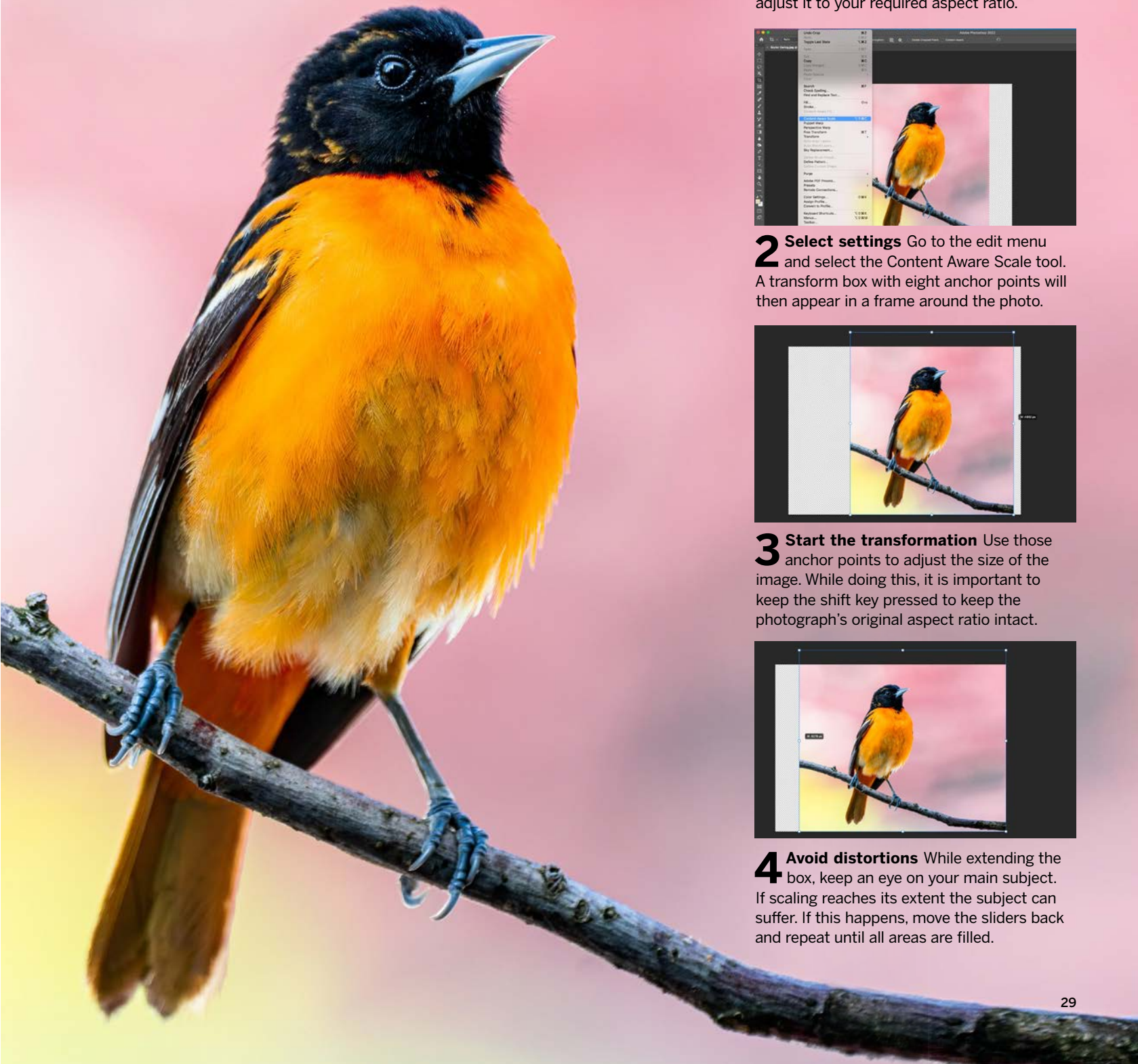
3 Landscape/Portrait format Think about whether the original orientation of the photograph supports the statement and creative characteristics. By trying out different formats, you will gain new perspectives and the potential impact of the photo can be changed and improved.

Extending backgrounds

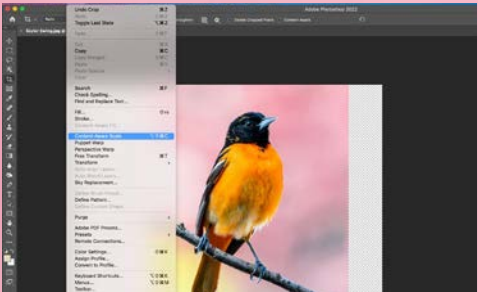
What if your original image was shot in portrait format and now you need to use it in landscape format on a website, for example? Thankfully, various editing programs offer content-related solutions. These functions are especially recommended for photos with natural or smooth backgrounds.

Photoshop offers two helpful actions. The content-based cropping function can save a lot of time during editing. It is only one click away from filling in small gaps left when the photo has been straightened. If more extensive enhancements of image sections are required, then scaling comes into play.

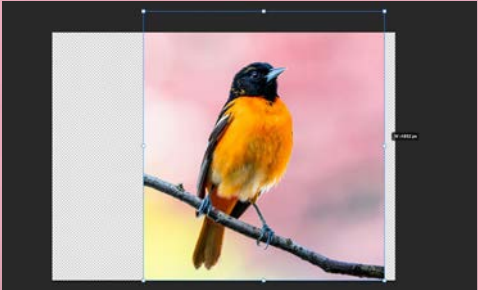
“Photoshop’s content-based crop function can save you a lot of time during editing”



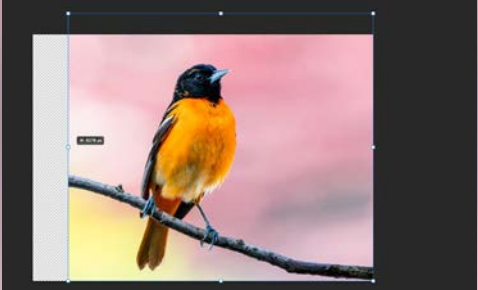
1 Find your ratio Create a copy of the background layer and keep working on the new one to allow you to come back to your original if needed. Select the crop tool and adjust it to your required aspect ratio.



2 Select settings Go to the edit menu and select the Content Aware Scale tool. A transform box with eight anchor points will then appear in a frame around the photo.



3 Start the transformation Use those anchor points to adjust the size of the image. While doing this, it is important to keep the shift key pressed to keep the photograph’s original aspect ratio intact.



4 Avoid distortions While extending the box, keep an eye on your main subject. If scaling reaches its extent the subject can suffer. If this happens, move the sliders back and repeat until all areas are filled.



STAND OUT ELEMENTS

The sharpness highlights both people in the background. Despite not standing out in terms of colour, the focus is successfully set.

DIRECTING THE GAZE

Through the three sharp elements, the viewer's eye is diverted from left to right. Through this balance, the picture does not appear overloaded and gains flair.

Set your focus

Sharpen with strategy

Learn the main sharpening tools for pro levels of detail

Sharpness is an effective creative instrument that can help direct the viewer's gaze to certain aspects of the photograph. Every editing program offers various methods for sharpening, but to be able to use these functions to their full potential, different procedures must be considered.

The important rule here is that more is not always better. Extreme sharpening can cause unwanted noise and, especially in bright areas, halos or lines. If every element within the image is presented in

absolute sharpness, the viewer's eye is overwhelmed and irritated by the unnatural detail. In addition to the sharp elements in focus, human vision also perceives out-of-focus subjects. Too often, this fact is not taken into account during post-processing and otherwise outstanding work loses depth.

Be clear about the best use of sharpness in your specific photography and consider how blur can support this. By combining both elements, you can take your images to new visual heights.

ZOOM IN

While sharpening, always keep in mind to view images at 100 percent size on the screen. Choose suitable cut-outs that show detailed elements and give guidance about the intensity of the sharpness.

EXTRA BLUR

The fog over the mountains adds a special atmosphere. Underlined with an additional blur, the details disappear to redirect the main attention from the landscape.

Sharp focus

With the strategic use of sharpness and blur, you will be able to take your photos to a new level

© Quang Nguyen Vinh

Output sharpening

Use formatting tools to ensure the quality of your photos wherever they are displayed

Your final images must be adapted for the format in which they are being published, whether it's in print, on a website or on social media. This important step is often neglected, yet the procedure can be done with just a few clicks. By formatting the image into a smaller size, sharpness often decreases and important details are lost. To solve this problem, post-processing programs such as Adobe Lightroom have quick aids that make the process fast and simple.

Prepare for web and print

Format your images for web or for print the quick and easy way, using tools in your post-processing software

When formatting your photo for use on a website or on social media, click Export and choose the file size. To achieve the best quality results, you should familiarise yourself with the size guidelines of social media platforms – these programs reduce the photo quality if the file does not meet their criteria. If you are printing your image, go to the Output Sharpening section, and specify whether you want screen, matte or glossy paper. The last step is to select the level of sharpness. In most cases, the standard mode leads to the best results. For more settings and an enhanced range of options, install a plug-in such as Nik Sharpener Pro.

Save time

Learn these shortcuts to optimise image results

1

10% opacity

2

20% opacity

3

30% opacity

4

40% opacity

5

50% opacity

6

60% opacity

7

opacity

Heal tool

Q

Quick mask

Object selection tool

W

White Balance tool

E

Merge

R

Rotate

Tools

T

Type tool

Y

History Brush tool

A

Select all

S

Stamp\ clone tool

D

Deselect

G

Grid

H

Hand tool

Z

Zoom

U

Undo

X

Cut

C

Crop

V

Paste

B

Brush

N

Command

H

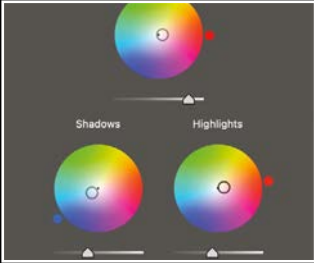
(hold for) Hand tool

Reduce your workflow

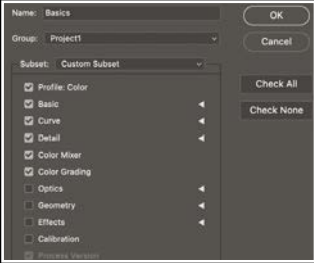
These shortcuts can help reduce the time you spend editing



CUSTOMISE WORKSPACE
Work out which functions you use most often and add them. Create separate workspaces for specific editing focal points to be able to find your settings at a glance.



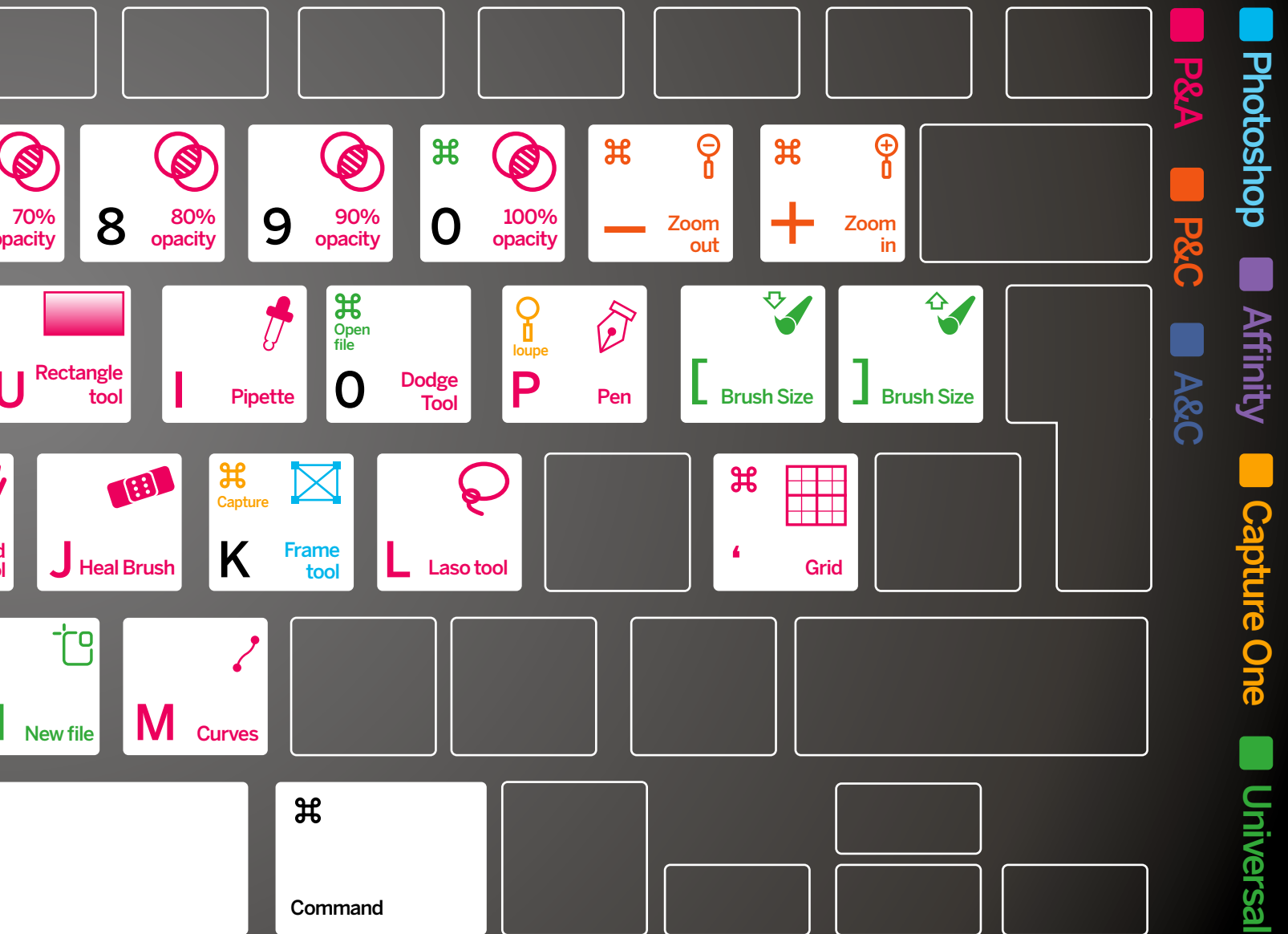
CAMERA RAW FILTER
In Photoshop, other photo formats can also be converted and adjusted with the help of this filter. Take advantage of the intuitive and rapid basic corrections.



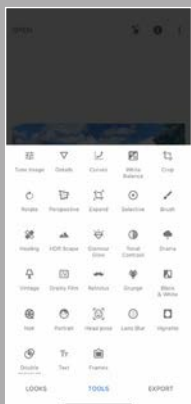
SYNCHRONISED EDITING
When editing multiple images, save the previous settings as a preset. This procedure is ideal, particularly if your pictures are part of a set or taken under the same conditions.



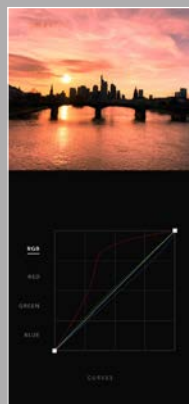
LENS CORRECTIONS
By adding specific equipment details, such as the camera make, model and lens, different software programs can adjust these settings to improve your results.



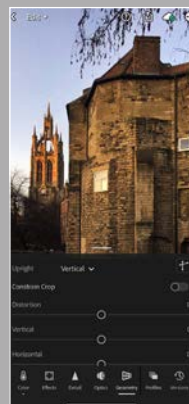
Edit on the go Some effective editing tools for social media



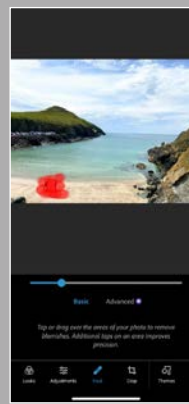
SNAPSEED
The all-rounder app is perfect for optimising basic settings such as white balance, contrast and cropping. With special tools for portraits, you can enhance and highlight elements.



AFTERLIGHT
Pro tools in Afterlight, such as curves give you more control over the RGB tones. Use the selective colour adjustments in hue or saturation to adjust images according to your visual preferences.



ADOBE LIGHTROOM
Correct geometric lines in seconds with the automatic straightening function. In addition, you can adjust the settings yourself along two parallel lines to adjust the photo to your needs.



ADOBE PHOTOSHOP EXPRESS
Remove objects precisely with the Spot Healing tool. Select unwanted elements, and you can change the size and hardness of the brush to get as much control as possible.

PHOTOGRAPHY

TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE

Even top-end camera kit isn't perfect. Use software to correct these common problems you'll experience in-the-field, for better images

IMAGE NOISE

TOOL: RAW NOISE REDUCTION

When shooting in low light and with a higher ISO setting, image noise will appear. Use Noise Reduction in RAW software to clean up your shots without smudging detail

LENS BLUR

TOOL: RAW DETAIL TOOLS, UNSHARP MASKING

Even shots taken with pro lenses need some sharpening. Apply subtle sharpening in RAW processing then localised work, using the Unsharp Mask or Sharpening Brush, in Photoshop or Affinity

OPTICAL DISTORTION

TOOL: LENS CORRECTIONS, DISTORT TOOLS

All lenses, especially wide-angles, exhibit some curving on straight lines, at the edges of the frame. Use the lens correction tab in RAW software to reduce distortion or apply manual correction on a duplicate layer

CAMERA SHAKE

TOOL: SHARPENING, SHAKE REDUCTION FILTER

It is always better to get sharp shots in-camera but, where subtle motion blur does happen, we can use features like Photoshop's Shake Reduction filter to bring back some critical detail.

COLOUR BALANCE

TOOL: WHITE BALANCE, HUE/SATURATION

Automatic white balance rarely gets the colour perfect, especially at sunrise/sunset or when shooting brightly coloured subjects. Use Temperature and Tint sliders and Hue/Saturation features to adjust colour to taste

CAMERA ANGLE

TOOL: LAYERS, GEOMETRIC CORRECTIONS

Nothing ruins a landscape photo like a slanted horizon. It's harder than it looks to keep the camera level, so use rotate tools to automatically or manually straighten-out wonky horizon lines

EXPOSURE

TOOL: BRIGHTNESS, LEVELS, CURVES

As good as auto exposure systems are, where the incorrect metering mode has been used, images can still appear under or over-exposed. Use the simple Levels and Brightness sliders or use advanced Curves

SENSOR DUST

TOOL: SPOT HEALING, PATCH TOOL, CLONE STAMP

Dust and water droplets are attracted to the imaging sensor and appear as spots in your images. Remove these with a Spot Healing Brush or Content Aware retouching tools like the Patch or Clone Stamp.

LENS FLARE

TOOL: HEALING FEATURES

Modern optics have special coatings to reduce internal reflections but, in bright light, flare can appear. Use dedicated Photoshop tools and general healing to remove flare spots and haze.

COMPOSITION

TOOL: CROP TOOL

Take advantage of high-resolution cameras and re-compose your images. Available in RAW or standard processing, most crop tools allow you to cut unwanted detail and make the subject bigger in the frame



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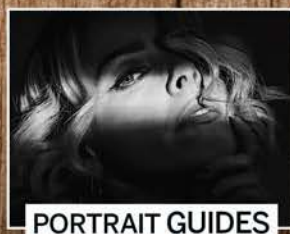
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PHOTO EDITORS

Photoshop was once essential, but now we need more than layers and masks. We test ten of the best photo-editing packages around



A lot has changed since Adobe Photoshop first came to dominate the photo-editing market. Our photo libraries have become larger and more complicated, and we need software that can organise, search and share these growing collections. Thanks to social media platforms such as Instagram, there's more interest in evocative 'looks' that can be applied quickly and simply across a batch of photos.

And most of all, we want to be able to change our minds – hence the rise of non-destructive, or 'parametric' photo editing, as used by Lightroom,

Capture One and a whole host of other photo editing packages. Often you'll come back to an image and see a better way of adjusting it, or see how to tweak the settings to get a better result.

There's also a growing mistrust amongst many photographers about subscription software. Adobe's Photography Plans are terrific value, but many people would prefer to pay a one-off licence fee without having to tie themselves down to paying monthly fees. The cost of ownership is often not so different, but there's a significant difference in how you pay and for how long.



What to look for

Everyone's photo editing needs are different. Here are some things to consider...

📁 Cataloguing tools

If your photo collection numbers in the tens of thousands, you need a tool to bring them all together in a single searchable database. Cataloguing tools mean you can create albums or collections, use keywords to find specific images and filter photos by the date they were taken and more.

🔒 Non-destructive

Some programs offer 'non-destructive' editing tools. All adjustments are 'virtual' and the original image stays unaltered. They can also edit RAW files alongside JPEGs with no separate processing stage. Many also offer 'virtual copies' so you can edit a single image without making copies on your computer.

🖼️ Image layers

If you want to blend multiple images into composites, you need a 'destructive' editor like Photoshop or Affinity Photo. Some programs offer support for layered images, but they create new files and a different editing mode. Lightroom and Capture One don't do layers but both work with programs that do.

⚙️ One-click presets

Traditional photo editors, such as Photoshop, are designed for those who know what they want to do. Lightroom takes the opposite approach, offering image styles that can be applied. If you like to see ideas for how your images could look, then programs with big libraries of presets are ideal.

💰 One-off purchase

This is a sore point for those who disagree with 'renting' software, but 'perpetual' licenses don't mean the software is yours forever – you will need to pay upgrade fees and the cost over time may be closer to a subscription. With a subscription, regular updates and major upgrades are included.



PRICE: \$150

ACDSee Photo Studio 2022 Ultimate



Effective enough, but not much finesse

ACDSee Photo Studio 2022 is the latest and most powerful version of a long-running Windows-only photo editor, though there is a separate Photo Studio for Mac 8 version (not reviewed here). It's an all-in-one photo organiser, raw processor and non-destructive editor, plus a regular image editor with layers, all rolled into one. There's even a mobile app for synchronising your camera phone pictures.

Its database organisation lacks the in-depth power and flexibility of Lightroom Classic or Capture One, however, and you can't create virtual copies to try out and save different treatments on the same image. The interface has five different modules which overlap, sometimes confusingly. The first three: Manage, Photos and View are

for image organisation and viewing – does this really need three windows? Develop is for non-destructive adjustments, while Edit is for regular 'destructive' editing, so there is some tool crossover here too.

The range of effects and the results you can get from ACDSee Photo Studio 2022 are fine, but anyone who has used Lightroom or Photoshop is likely to see it solely as an 'almost as good' alternative for slightly less money (depending on current offers). It's not a particularly strong proposition and is going to be pretty daunting for beginners.



Summary

Features ★★★★★
Design and interface ★★★★★
Performance ★★★★★
Value ★★★★★

Overall

★★★★★

Verdict

A subscription-free Lightroom or Photoshop alternative that's pretty technical and unappealing

PRICE: £10/\$10 per month

Adobe Photoshop

Still the best at what it does, but there's a lot it doesn't do



Photoshop is, of course, the world's most famous photo-editing software, and while once it was an extremely expensive professional purchase, it's now part of the Adobe Photography Plan. That means Photoshop, Lightroom and Lightroom Classic (and extras) are all yours for £120/\$120 per year.

Photoshop is solely an in-depth professional image-editing tool. It has no image cataloguing features, no library of preset effects and does not support non-destructive editing in the modern sense, though you can build adjustment layers and smart objects into your images to provide extensive 'unravelling' and 'reworking' opportunities.

Photoshop has a reputation for being difficult to learn, but actually its interface

is a model of clarity, helped by different workspaces available for photographers, designers, illustrators and 3D images – Photoshop is not just a photo editor.

You probably wouldn't use Photoshop on its own. It relies on the help of programs such as Adobe Bridge (included) and Adobe Lightroom for image browsing and organisation, and as Lightroom grows in power and sophistication, photographers may find they are using Photoshop, and programs like it, less and less.



Summary

Features ★★★★★
Design and interface ★★★★★
Performance ★★★★★
Value ★★★★★

Overall

★★★★★

Verdict

Still the best technical, in-depth photo editor, but perhaps not as essential now as it once was

PRICE: \$150

Adobe Lightroom

The web-first Lightroom requires pricey cloud storage



Adobe has made things complicated by splitting Lightroom into two versions. Both versions are included in the Adobe Photography Plan, but they look and work in different ways, so we have treated them as individual programs here.

'Lightroom' is the name Adobe now uses for its newer, web-first version. Lightroom is a stripped-down version of Lightroom Classic that's actually a lot more pleasant to use but comes with important requirements and restrictions.

First, all images must be stored in the cloud, so for an image collection of any size at all you have to pay an extra £10/\$10 per month for 1TB storage.

Second, it doesn't support external editors or plug-ins (except for Photoshop), it doesn't offer smart albums and you can't create virtual copies.

Lightroom is effective, however, if you want to use your mobile devices to capture, browse and edit images seamlessly across devices. The editing tools are now on a par with those in Lightroom Classic, and Lightroom benefits from a more streamlined interface and the power of Adobe's AI Sensei search tools.



Summary

Features ★★★★★
Design and interface ★★★★★
Performance ★★★★★
Value ★★★★★

Overall

★★★★★

Verdict

Lightroom requires pricey cloud storage, but it does make all your images editable and viewable everywhere

PRICE: £10/\$10 per month

Adobe Lightroom Classic

Ideal for getting great results, but it's starting to look dated



Lightroom is an all-in-one image cataloguing, raw processing, editing and effects preset tool that can tackle just about any kind of photo enhancement, short of multi-image composites, type and illustration effects. For that, there's always Photoshop, which is also included in the regular Adobe Photography Plan.

Lightroom Classic is the 'old' desktop-first Lightroom and the version likely to be used by most photographers. Images are stored on your own computer (though collections and smart previews can be synced online) and you can use plug-ins and external editors freely.

The most recent update has added powerful masking tools, including some effective AI-powered sky and subject

masking. As Lightroom Classic's capabilities grow, you may find you need a regular photo editor, like Photoshop, less and less.

You can get excellent results quickly in Lightroom Classic, though its multi-module interface feels a little outdated, with Map, Slideshow and Web modules that feel less relevant today. Its noise reduction also seems some way behind Capture One and DxO PhotoLab, and even the noise reduction applied to in-camera JPEGs.



Summary

Features ★★★★★
Design and interface ★★★★★
Performance ★★★★★
Value ★★★★★

Overall

★★★★★

Verdict

Lightroom Classic is hard to fault for features, but its interface is fussy and noise control indifferent

PRICE: £48/\$55

Affinity Photo 2

The best subscription-free alternative to Photoshop

Affinity Photo is the closest thing to a Photoshop alternative in this group. Like Photoshop, it's designed solely as a powerful, in-depth, technical image enhancement tool. It's available subscription-free and the cheapest program of all in this roundup.

Where Photoshop is designed to dovetail with Adobe Illustrator and InDesign, Affinity Photo works with and alongside Affinity Designer and Affinity Publisher. The combined price for all three is little more than the cost of one year's Photography Plan.

Affinity Photo works in 'personas'. There's a Develop persona for raw processing, a Photo persona where the editing work is done, a Tonemapping persona with extremely good HDR tools, and an Export persona for generating processed images to share.



Affinity Photo does not offer any image cataloguing tools or

any creative one-click presets. But it does have focus stacking, HDR merge, panorama stitching, frequency separation retouching tools, live image filters and more. Its interface is pretty busy and technical, at least at first, but its tools are a match for Photoshop's and often better.

It can take a little work in the Develop mode to get the best out of raw files, and Affinity Photo's handling of layers and masks is somewhat disorientating compared to Photoshop's, but it is a worthy rival.



Summary

Features ★★★★★
Design and interface ★★★★★
Performance ★★★★★
Value ★★★★★

Overall

★★★★★

Verdict

Affinity Photo is powerful and effective but not for beginners. It's also cheaper than any other program of this calibre

PRICE: £299/\$299

Capture One 22

A superb, but expensive, Lightroom alternative

Capture One 22 is the latest version, adding panorama stitching and HDR merge tools to the already formidable Capture One 21. Capture One comes in an 'all cameras' edition, plus a Nikon-only version at around half the price (and Fujifilm and Sony editions too). All are available on subscription or for a one-off fee.

Capture One is an alternative to Lightroom, offering the same combination of image cataloguing, non-destructive editing, local adjustments and preset effects. It does not offer cloud synchronisation (that's planned for next year) but is especially strong on tethered shooting and studio workflow 'sessions'.

Capture One works within a single browsing and editing window using a customisable system of 'tool tabs' and



drag-off floating palettes (they can also be used docked to the sidebar).

Lightroom now has AI-powered sky and subject masking, but Capture One has an effective Magic Brush selection tool, and powerful layer and mask-based local adjustments.

Apart from Capture One's sophisticated masking and colour control, it has visibly superior raw processing than Lightroom, with finer detail and less noise. Capture One and DxO PhotoLab are easily the two best raw processors here.



Summary

Features ★★★★★
Design and interface ★★★★★
Performance ★★★★★
Value ★★★★★

Overall

★★★★★

Verdict

Capture One is more expensive than Lightroom, but has a superior interface, better tools and results

PRICE: £199/\$219 (Elite edition)

DxO PhotoLab 5

Superb raw processing and local adjustments

DxO PhotoLab is a combined image browser and editing tool that can deliver lens corrections and raw processing with sophisticated local adjustments. It integrates with DxO ViewPoint 3 (perspective corrections) and DxO FilmPack 6 (analogue film and processing simulations), though these cost extra.

It's a non-destructive 'parametric' editor, so if you want layered image composites and more complex effects that require pixel adjustments, you will need to send images to a program such as Photoshop.

PhotoLab comes in two editions: Essential and Elite. The Elite edition includes DxO's remarkable DeepPRIME noise reduction and good ClearView local contrast tool and is the one to get.



There is a folder browser, rather than a cataloguing feature, though new EXIF support and keywording tools are making it more effective.

Editing is done in a Customise window, where you can apply DxO's extensive tonal, colour and contrast adjustment tools and precise U-point adjustments.

An interface redesign has made PhotoLab 5 easier to use, but it's still a technical program suited to experts rather than beginners. The quality of the results makes up for everything, however, including the cost and the complexity.



Summary

Features ★★★★★
Design and interface ★★★★★
Performance ★★★★★
Value ★★★★★

Overall

★★★★★

Verdict

PhotoLab is complicated and pricey, but if quality and control are what you are after, this is the program for you

PRICE: £10/\$10 per month

Exposure X7

Beautiful presets and a calm, elegant workspace



Exposure X7 is another all-in-one program that can browse, catalogue and edit your images non-destructively – but this one is different. Exposure X7 is good at regular image adjustments but specialises in analogue film effects and darkroom processes. These are applied via a one-click presets library that lets you 'audition' up to six image presets and choose those you like most. You can also create virtual copies to keep different treatments.

Exposure X7's presets apply a series of adjustments that you can browse and modify manually. These include image borders, light leak effects and textures that you don't get in regular all-in-one programs like Capture One and Lightroom. However, Exposure X7 also works as a plug-in for Lightroom and Photoshop, and as

an external editor for Capture One, so you can use these programs for your organising and raw processing, and Exposure X7 solely for its effects.

If Exposure X7 has a weakness, it's raw processing. Raw images often look noisy and a little soft at the same time, and the highlight recovery, one of the main reasons for shooting raw, isn't that good.

However, Exposure X7's analogue-look presets are excellent and easy to modify and combine via its layers and masks.



Summary

Features ★★★★★
Design and interface ★★★★★
Performance ★★★★★
Value ★★★★★

Overall

★★★★★

Verdict

Exposure X7's 'looks' are its biggest asset, but it also works well as an all-in-one cataloguing and editing tool

PRICE: £94/\$100

ON1 Photo RAW 2022

Huge scope at a modest price and it does almost everything



ON1 Photo RAW 2022 is one more 'do it all' photo editor that covers everything from photo editing to non-destructive raw processing and preset effects. This time, it goes right through to multi-layer composites, still within its non-destructive workflow. It covers a lot of ground.

The 2022 version has a new Sky Swap AI feature, which can be as effective as Luminar's ground-breaking Sky Replacement. It incorporates ON1 NoNoise, previously a standalone product, it can use Photoshop-compatible plug-ins directly and it handles focus stacking, panorama stitching and HDR merges too.

It's hard to find any gaps in ON1 Photo's features. This is probably the most complete single program here.

It even has a library of effects presets to rival those in Exposure X7. If it has a weakness, it's the interface, which can be complicated to navigate and does have some crossover between its Browse and Catalog tools and Develop and Effects modes.

The results from ON1 Photo RAW 2022 are good. Its presets are varied and exciting, the raw processing is at least as good as Adobe's, and its effects filters offer huge control – they can even be masked individually. It just lacks a little fluidity compared to other programs.



Summary

Features ★★★★★
Design and interface ★★★★★
Performance ★★★★★
Value ★★★★★

Overall

★★★★★

Verdict

This is a powerful, all-encompassing program with huge scope. It can be confusing but it is worth the effort

PRICE: £69/\$79

Skylum Luminar AI

A rather limited AI-based follow up to the excellent Luminar 4



Luminar AI isn't the latest incarnation of Skylum's ever-changing photo editor. The company had been pushing and pre-selling its next Luminar Neo product for months, though it wasn't released until February of 2022. Luminar AI will continue, and right now it's the only version you can buy and actually use.

With Luminar AI, Skylum really pushes the AI angle, with excellent Sky Replacement and equally excellent AI Portrait enhancement which can find and enhance facial features quickly and naturally, without turning people into caricatures. The AI Composition tool is less impressive, AI Structure doesn't seem to add much, and the promise of automatically selected Looks doesn't really come off, largely because Luminar AI's

supplied Looks (presets) are actually on the dull side.

Other disappointing aspects, after the high of Luminar 4, are that layers are no longer supported and the catalogue tools still don't include proper search tools or virtual copies – an obvious feature, you would have thought, in a program designed for experimentation with different looks.

Parts of Luminar AI are excellent (sky replacement and portraits), while others are less so, where the 'magic' of AI is somewhat overplayed.



Summary

Features ★★★★★
Design and interface ★★★★★
Performance ★★★★★
Value ★★★★★

Overall

★★★★★

Verdict

Luminar AI is a dumbed down version of Luminar 4, but still a great tool for augmented and 'enhanced' reality

ACDSee Photo Studio 2022 Ultimate**Specs:**
PC: Intel or AMD processor with 64-bit

support, Intel i5 or better processor recommended for max performance, Microsoft® Windows® 7 (SP1), Windows® 8, Windows® 8.1, & Windows® 10 (64-bit editions only)

Mac: n/a**RAM:** 4GB minimum

(6GB recommended)

Hard disk space: 2GB**Screen resolution:** 1280 x 800 (1920 x 1080 recommended)**Adobe Photoshop****Specs:**
PC: Intel or AMD processor with 64-bit

support; 2GHz or faster processor with SSE 4.2 or later, Windows 10 64-bit

Mac: Intel processor with 64-bit support; 2GHz or faster processor with SSE 4.2 or later, macOS Catalina**RAM:** 8GB (16GB+ recommended)**Hard disk space:** 4GB

(16GB recommended)

Screen resolution:

1280 x 800 (1920 x 1080 recommended)

Adobe Lightroom Classic**Specs:**
PC: Intel, AMD, or ARM processor with 64-bit

support; 2GHz or faster processor, Windows 10 (64-bit) Version 1909 or later

Mac: Multicore Intel processor with 64-bit support or M1 Apple Silicon processor, macOS Catalina (version 10.15) or later**RAM:** 8GB (16GB+ recommended)**Hard disk space:** 2GB**Screen resolution:** 1024 x 768 (1920 x 1080 recommended)**Adobe Lightroom Classic****Specs:**
PC: Intel or AMD processor with 64-bit

support; 2 GHz or faster processor, Windows 10 (64-bit) 1909 or later processor with 64-bit support or Apple Silicon processor, macOS Catalina (version 10.15) or later

RAM: 8GB minimum (16GB+ recommended)**Hard disk space:** 2GB

(Catalog size variable)

Screen resolution:

1024 x 768 (1920 x 1080 recommended)

DxO PhotoLab 5**Specs:**
PC: Any CPU supporting SSE 4.1 (Intel Core i7 4th

generation, or AMD Ryzen recommended), Microsoft Windows 10 version 1809 +

Mac: Any CPU (Intel Core i7 4th generation or higher, or Apple Silicon. Recommended), macOS 10.15.7 (Catalina), 11.0 (Big Sur) or 12.0 (Monterey)**RAM:** 8GB (16GB recommended)**Hard disk space:** 6GB**Screen resolution:**

Not quoted

Capture One 22**Specs:**
PC: Intel or AMD CPU with 2 cores, Windows 8.1

64-bit, Windows 10 64-bit, Windows 11 64-bit

Mac: Intel Core i3 (1st generation), macOS 10.15 or later**RAM:** 8GB minimum (Higher recommended)**Hard disk space:** 10GB**Screen resolution:**

1280 x 800

Affinity Photo 2**Specs:**
PC: Windows-based PC (64 bit), Windows® 10 /11**Mac:** Mac with Apple M1/ M1 Pro/ M1 Max chip or Intel processor, macOS 10.9 Mavericks or later**RAM:** 4GB min (Higher recommended)**Hard disk space:** 1GB (PC), 2.8GB (Mac)**Screen resolution:**

1280 x 768

Exposure X7**Specs:**
PC: Intel Core 2 processor or newer, 64-bit

Windows edition

Mac: Apple M1 or Intel Core 2 processor or newer, macOS 10.13 High Sierra**RAM:** 8GB (16GB recommended)**Hard disk space:** Not quoted**Screen resolution:**

1280 x 768

ON1 Photo RAW 2022**Specs:**
PC: Intel Core i5, Xeon, or better processor(s),

Windows 10/11

Mac: Intel Core i5, Xeon, or better processor(s) or Apple Silicon, 10.15, 11**RAM:** 8GB (16GB+ recommended)**Hard disk space:** 1.5GB**Screen resolution:** 1280 x 800 (1920 x 1080 recommended)**Skylum Luminar AI****Specs:**
PC: Intel Core i5 or better, AMD Ryzen 5 or better

Windows 10 (64-bit only)

Mac: Intel Core i5 or better, Apple M1 chip, macOS 10.13.6 or higher**RAM:** 8GB minimum (16GB+ recommended)**Hard disk space:** 10GB min (Higher recommended)**Screen resolution:**

1280 x 768

The winner is... Adobe Photography Plan

Adobe wins for scope, features and value, but you'll need Photoshop and Lightroom

Adobe is in a unique position in this roundup. It has two (three, if you count both versions of Lightroom) very different programs in this group test that each deserve to be here on their own merits – yet you get both for a single subscription fee via the Adobe Photography plan. However cheap Adobe's rivals might be, this still has to be just about the best value of all.

But Adobe's raw processing is not the best. It's likely to be fine for most users, but Capture One and DxO PhotoLab are clearly better, and DxO's DeepPRIME high-iso image

processing is just extraordinary. Neither is cheap, but then neither are the best cameras, the best lenses and so on.

The story doesn't end here, though. ON1 Photo RAW 2022 and Exposure X7 are intriguing all-in-one programs that can catalog your images, edit them non-destructively and provide you with endless inspiration via their excellent libraries of preset effects. Luminar AI aims to have the same kind of scope, but while its AI is remarkable in parts, Luminar's presets are less inspiring and its tools more limited.

On the subject of inspiration, Photoshop Elements, PaintShop Pro Ultimate 2022 and ACDSee 2022 are disappointing. All have a dated design and approach to editing, and while the first two are aimed at novices and the third at value-hungry power users, none of them better their more modern rivals.

That just leaves Affinity Photo. If you want a powerful photo editor without any cataloguing, presets or non-destructive editing – or a subscription – this wins. It's cheap for what it does, and Affinity hasn't charged for an update since it was launched.

Work with RAW

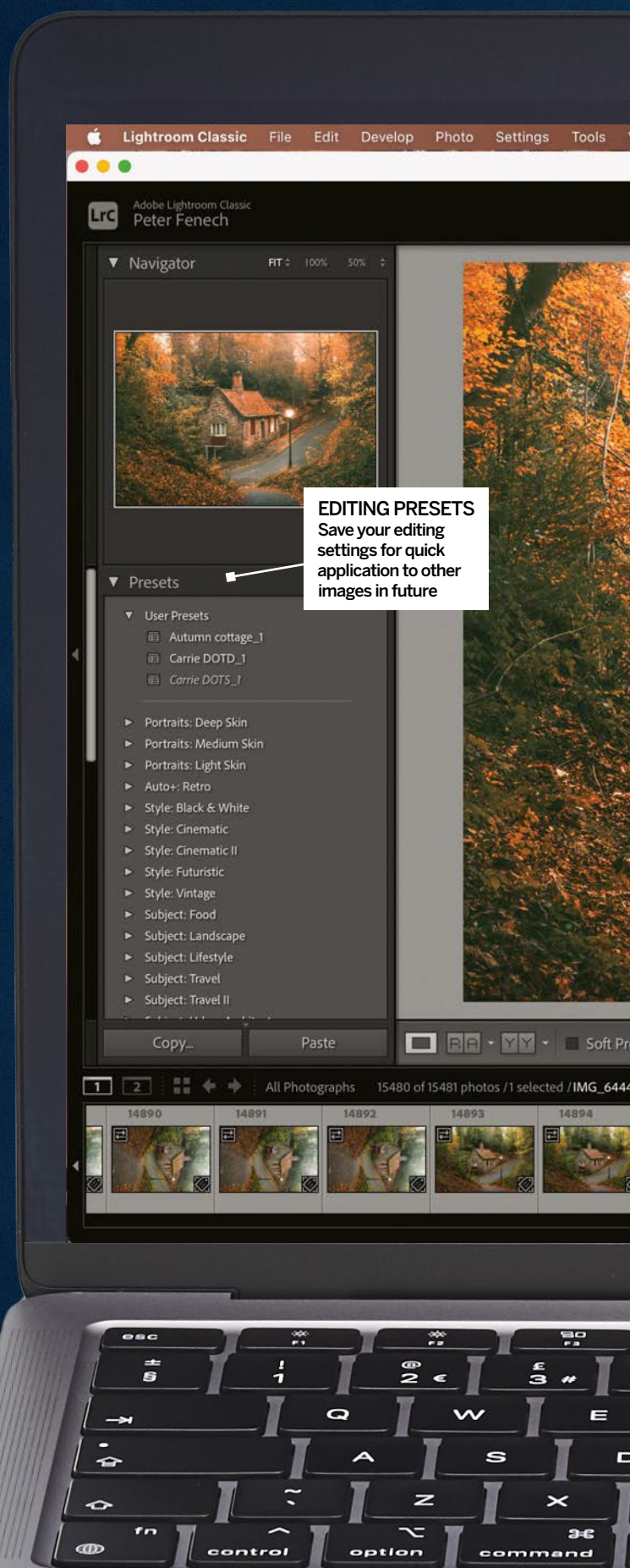
Learn to get more from your images by shooting and editing RAW files

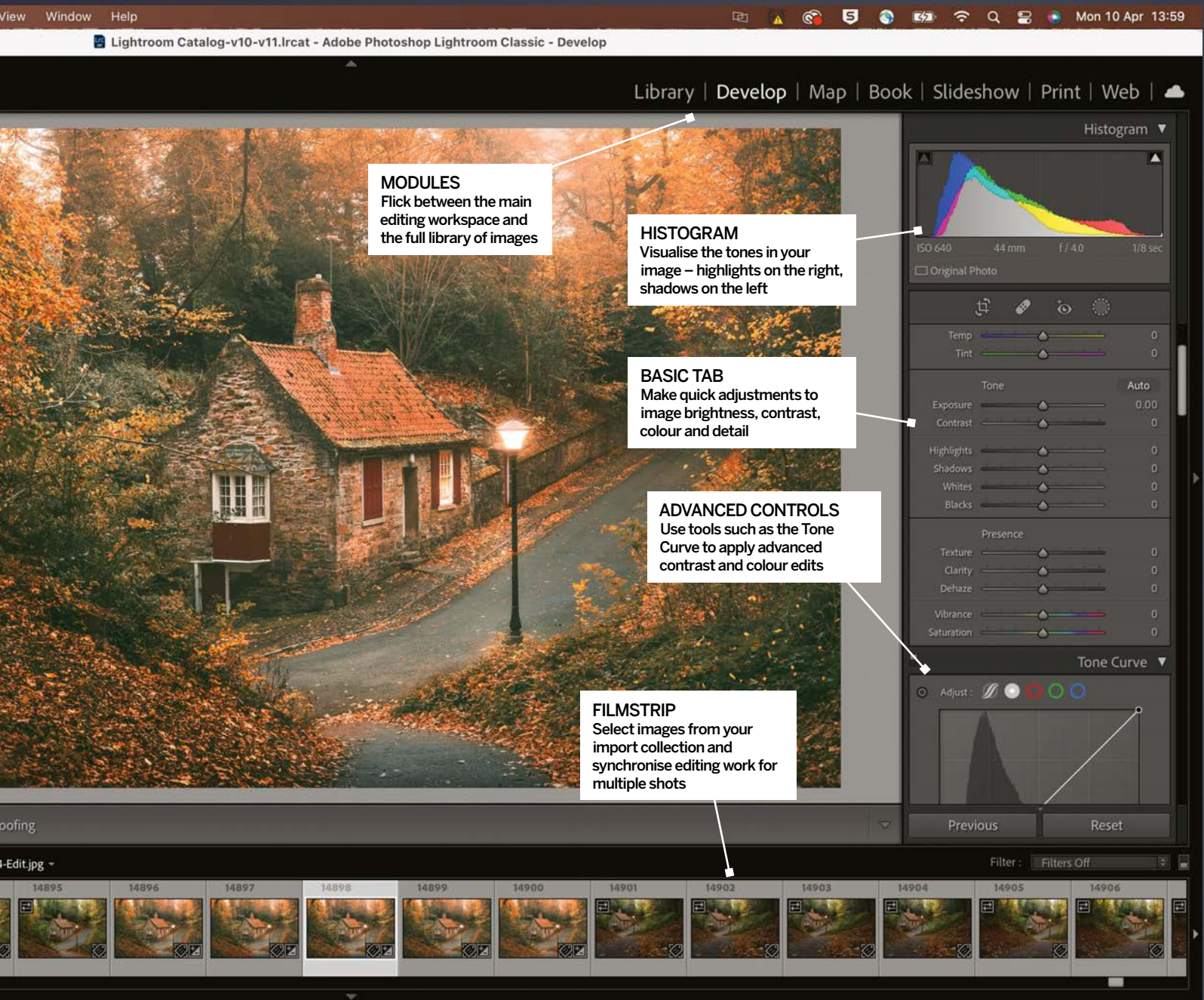
Shooting images in RAW format is arguably the first step towards professional quality photography. RAW files are like the negatives from the days of film – they contain all of the picture information needed to make your final shots look their very best. Unlike Jpeg files, RAWs are uncompressed, unprocessed and contain more digital data to work with. You can push these images a lot further in editing, making extreme changes to brightness and colour, without fear of losing quality.

Importantly however, because no editing has been applied to your RAW images, they can look a little flat straight out-of-camera. It's also likely you won't be able to open your photos in regular image sharing apps such as Instagram or Facebook, so careful processing is needed. Over the following pages we'll explore how to use specialist RAW editors, such as Adobe Lightroom, to get the very best colour and detail from your work, as captured by your high-tech, modern digital camera.

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MacBook Air

The ultimate guide to *Lightroom*

Unleash the full potential of your photos with
RAW power in our Lightroom
Classic CC crash course

When you've taken an image that you're really happy with, it can be tempting to upload it to the internet straight away, or even print it out and consider it a job done. But pressing the camera shutter and taking the photo is only half of the story with modern digital cameras. Your photos have so much more potential when using editing software back at your computer, and there isn't an image ever taken that couldn't benefit from an enhancement – whether it's a subtle crop, a slight boost to the colours or applying a black and white treatment.

RAW files are digital images that contain significantly more information from the point of capture than JPEGs, which are compressed. The latter are also processed in-camera, with the camera deciding how vibrant the colours are and how excessive the sharpening or noise

reduction is. Because of this it's much harder to get the images looking exactly how you want them if the camera has different tastes and preferences to you.

If you're not shooting in the RAW format already then it's certainly worth trying it now, as you'll be able to tweak things such as exposure, colours, white balance and sharpness after the point of capture.

To edit a RAW file you'll need a RAW editor such as Adobe's Lightroom Classic CC, and in this crash course we've laid out everything you need to know about the software – from how to import your photos, how to apply basic and more advanced edits, and also discussing when it's time to take your photos from Lightroom into Photoshop. We'll be covering Lightroom Classic CC, rather than Lightroom, which is geared more towards use on a mobile or tablet. Here's everything you need to know.



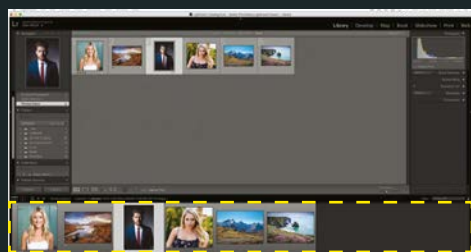
Discover how to sort and file your RAW images

It's unlikely that you'll need to dive into any modules other than the first two – the Library

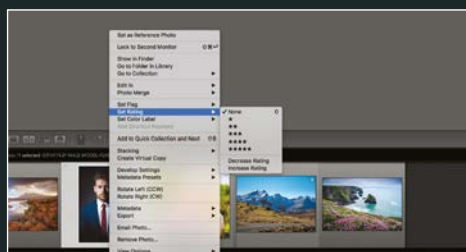
Lightroom is predominantly billed as a RAW editor, but you can also bring in JPEGs to edit, albeit without the extra RAW data, and open movie files like MOV or MP4 files to play them back – this can be useful for extracting still frames from 4K videos.



Get to know the most useful parts of the Library module

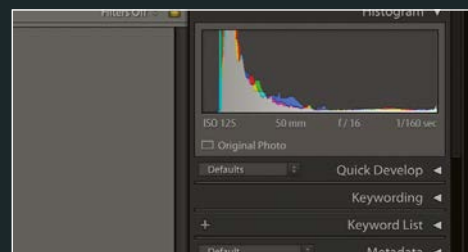


1 Use the filmstrip The images from your latest import are shown here. Use the arrow keys to cycle through images and the 1-5 number keys to apply star ratings. Use the Filter menu to show images with a specific star rating for fast shortlisting.

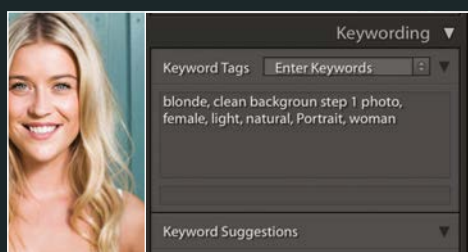


2 Right-click for more options

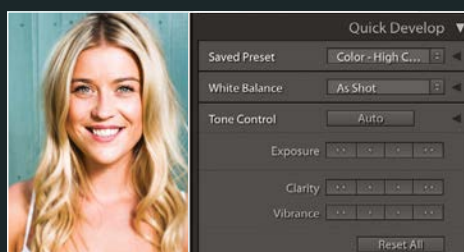
You can access extra options by right-clicking on the image thumbnail in the filmstrip. These options include star ratings, adding colour labels or adding your shot to a collection for quick access later on.



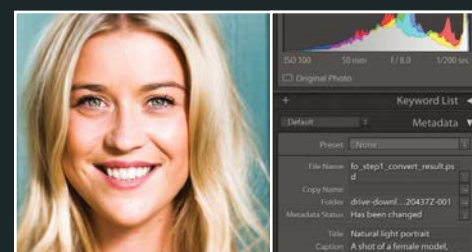
3 Understand the histogram This shows the distribution of tones in the shot. If the graph is bunched up to the left it means the image is underexposed, and if it's to the right there's a lot of highlights and midtones, so it's likely overexposed.



4 Add keywords Embed keywords into the metadata of your photos. This is beneficial if you have huge libraries. Add generic words like 'landscape' as well as specific ones like 'Peak District' to make it easier to find your shots.



5 Quick develop This panel is great if you want to quickly edit your white balance and exposure. The Automatic Tone Control can be very handy too if you just want to quickly give your RAW a boost without diving into the Develop module.



6 Looking at metadata Click on the Metadata panel to expand it, revealing key information such as the camera used and copyright info. Exposure parameters such as the ISO, aperture value and shutter speed can be found below the histogram.

Import the RAW images

Learn how to import photos into Lightroom

Lightroom requires you to import your RAW images before you can start processing them. This is to help you organise your shots easily, build bespoke collections of a group of images and also simplify trivial tasks like renaming a batch of images. As most people want to dive straight into the editing, the Import dialogue is often glanced over, but I'm going to show

Inside the Import dialogue What you need to know to bring your RAWs into Lightroom



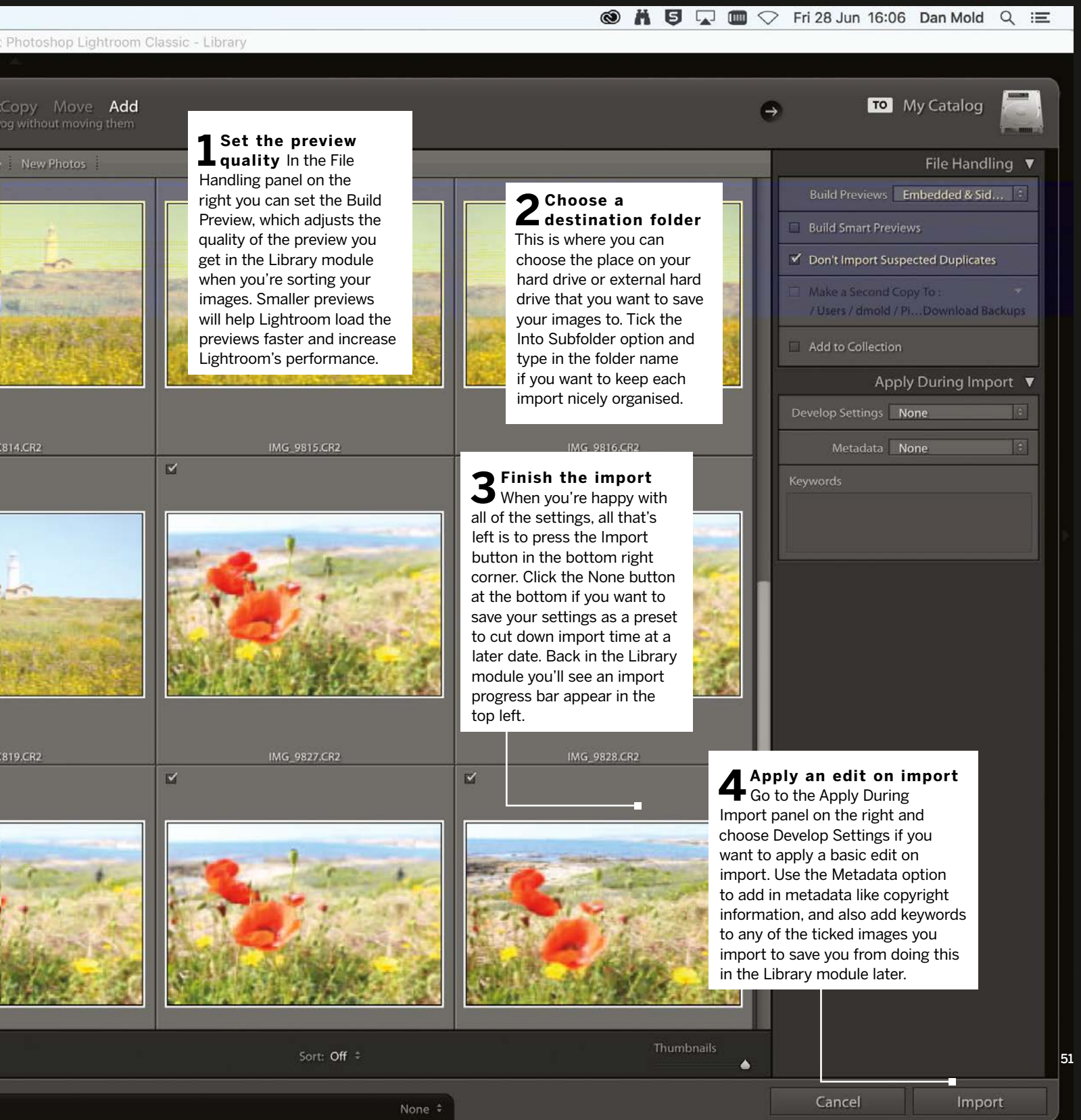
you why you should spend a few moments perfecting the settings, as it can save a lot of time in the long run – especially if you save the key settings as a new preset.

To begin importing your shots, open up Lightroom Classic CC and head over to the Library module, then click on the Import button towards the bottom left of the interface,

or go to File>Import Photos and Videos. In the Import dialogue that appears you can change the view mode to Grid with G or Loupe with E, sort files by capture time, file name or file type, and also adjust the size of the thumbnails in the folder you've selected using the Thumbnails slider or with Ctrl/Cmd+Plus or Minus. Any image in the main import screen

with a tick next to it will be imported, while any images that don't won't be. You can use the Check All and Uncheck All buttons to select or deselect your shots quickly.

There's loads more functionality that we're going to take a closer look at now. The dialogue can look a bit daunting so we'll break it down and explain what it all means.





Understand the Develop module

Learn how to perform a basic RAW conversion in the Develop module

Once you've imported your shots and done everything you want to do with your photos in the Library module, such as adding keywords and creating any collections you want to make, it's time to go into the Develop module to start

editing images to bring them to life. Click on the Develop module heading in the top right or press D on your keyboard to get there.

This is where you can take full advantage of the extra data in your RAW files and adjust

exposure by over ten stops, though realistically it's best not to push this past two or three stops under or over the exposure to maintain a usable image quality. It's also really easy to change the white balance after the point of

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Get more with RAW Perform a basic RAW conversion in Lightroom Classic CC



1 Tweak white balance While it's difficult to correct the white balance for JPEG images, it's easy to change this in Lightroom because you have the extra RAW data. Use the Temperature and Tint sliders in the Basic panel or use one of the presets from the drop-down list to change it.



2 Balance the exposure RAW files contain much more data from the point of capture than JPEGs, so you can successfully move the exposure by roughly three stops before you start to see image degradation. This is an impossible feat for JPEGs, as the tones are compressed.



3 Expand the dynamic range RAW files captured by modern digital cameras contain huge amounts of detail, but without working them up you'll likely have images that are biased towards highlights or shadows. Use Highlights, Shadows, Whites and Blacks sliders to get more out of the dynamic range.



capture, which is a very tricky task to do with JPEG files.

It is worth noting here that the core tools, features and functions that you will find in the Lightroom Classic CC's Develop module can also be found in Photoshop's Adobe Camera Raw (ACR), so if you want to edit a RAW image quickly you can also bring it into Photoshop and have similar functionality. However, Lightroom comes into its own because it has a brilliant system to organise and sort your pictures too.

So without further ado, here's how you can use the Develop module in Lightroom to do a basic RAW conversion.

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Improve image quality

Sharpen your shots and reduce noise the smart way



1 Correct lens distortions

One of the easiest ways to improve

the image quality of your photos is to go to the Lens Corrections panel and tick Enable Profile Corrections. Lightroom will then automatically select your lens profile from its database and correct defects like vignetting and barrel distortion.



2 Remove chromatic aberration

Staying in the Lens Corrections

panel, you can click on the drop-down list and choose your lens manually if it isn't chosen automatically. If you see an unsightly purple or green fringe around edges of high contrast you can then click Remove Chromatic Aberration.



3 Sharpen shots

Go to the Detail tab in the Develop module

and use the Sharpening Amount slider to increase the sharpness. A value of 50 usually works well, but you can push this higher if your picture is soft. The Radius slider determines how wide the edge is.



4 Sharpen mask

When adjusting the Sharpening Amount slider

a top tip is to hold down the Alt key as you do so. This will provide you with a black and white sharpening mask overlay. Any areas that are white will be sharpened, while any black areas won't be sharpened.



5 Reduce noise

In the Detail panel you can fine-tune the noise

reduction. Here you can reduce luminance noise, which is where the noise appears as brighter or darker specks around the frame, or chrominance noise via the Color slider, to reduce noise that has a clear colour tint, such as red, blue or green specks.



6 Improve colours

Take total control of the colours in your image

by heading to the HSL panel. HSL stands for hue, which lets you change the colours, saturation, which lets you boost or subdue specific colours, and luminance, which enables you to tweak the brightness of the colour channels.

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4 Clipping mask warnings When tweaking the Exposure, Highlights, Shadows, Whites and Blacks sliders it's worth holding down the Alt key as you drag each slider, as this will give you a clipping warning. You'll see warnings when dark or bright tones are about to clip and lose detail.



5 Increase contrast The Contrast slider found in the Basic panel is pretty basic, so for more control you can go to Tone Curve and adjust the Highlights, Lights, Darks and Shadows sliders. This way you can fine-tune the contrast of these specific areas more easily.



6 Boost details Staying within the Basic panel, you can use the Clarity slider to increase the microcontrast and give your shots a bit of punch, or use the Dehaze slider to cut through fog or haze and make the details in your image stand out more.

Make more advanced edits

Get to grips with Lightroom's powerful arsenal of tools

With a basic RAW conversion in hand it's time to move on and take more control of the image to get it looking exactly how you want it to. To do this we'll be using the tools on offer in Lightroom's Develop module. The main six tools – Crop, Spot Removal, Red Eye, Graduated Filter, Radial Filter and Adjustment Brush – can all be found under the histogram, though others like the White Balance and Targeted Adjustment tools can be found within certain panels on the right-hand side.

You certainly have fewer tools than Photoshop CC, but that's because the tools here are designed to help you get the most

from the RAW data, and more involved digital image manipulation techniques are best saved for Photoshop – but we'll get to that later.

Any adjustments you make with the tools here can be reversed: when you're working on a RAW image every edit is non-destructive, so you can revert back to the original at any point. Clicking back on tools such as the Graduated Filter, Radial Filter or Adjustment Brush will

display the editing pins for every edit you've done, and you can simply right-click on these and choose Delete to remove them. Or, if you've gone too far, you can press Reset in the bottom right to take the picture back to its unedited RAW state.

Here we'll run through how you can use the tools to make advanced adjustments to landscape and portrait photos.

“The tools here are designed to help you get the most from the RAW data”

Lr Adobe Lightroom Classic CC Dan Mold Library | Develop | Map | Book | Slideshow | Print | Web

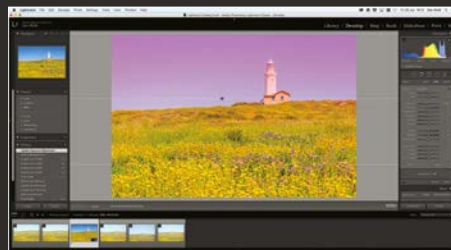
Local adjustments for landscapes

Edit with greater precision using Lightroom's tools



1 Process the sky Grab the Graduated Filter tool and drag from the top of the landscape to the horizon to make your adjustment. Use the sliders on the right to adjust

only the area you've selected – it can be useful here to tweak the exposure or highlights to darken the sky in a landscape.



2 Fine-tune the editing area Drag the lines that appear to change how hard or soft the gradient is in your Graduated Filter adjustment, and move them around

to reposition them. Hit O to see the affected area appear as a red overlay, and press O again to turn it off.



3 Edit an elliptical area The Radial Filter lets you edit an elliptical area and is great for things like adding a vignette. Grab the tool and drag your cursor

over the picture to create an adjustment, then use the sliders on the right. Edit the inside or outside area by toggling the Invert option.

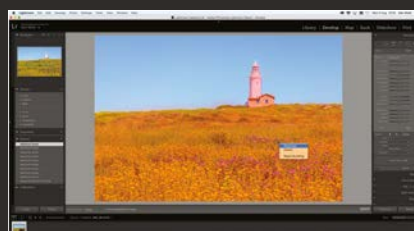


4 Edit with precision Sometimes you'll need to paint over an intricate area that you want to select, and for these times it's best to use the Adjustment Brush tool. Click it to activate it, and use the different options to change the size of the brush and also tweak the feathering.



5 Remove and Erase If you paint over an area that you didn't mean to, you can hit O on the keyboard to see the parts you painted over as a red overlay. Then, all you

need to do is to click Erase in the panel on the right, adjust your brush size and then paint over the offending area to remove it from the adjustment.



6 Extra options Right-click on your adjustment pin to bring up additional options. From here you can duplicate the effect, which will make it more prominent, or drag it to reposition the duplicated adjustment in a different part of the frame. From here you can also find the option to delete the adjustment entirely.

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Dan Mold

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Edit portraits professionally

Learn the tricks of these tools for portrait enhancement



1 Banish Red Eye Although it's a rare occurrence in modern digital cameras, if your portrait has red eye you'll want to fix it right away. Grab the Red Eye Correction tool and click over each offending eye, then use the Pupil Size and Darken sliders to fix it.



2 Or use Pet Eye Pet portraits are just as fun to work on and can be susceptible to glowing yellow eyes when using flash. If this occurs in your images you can use the Red Eye Correction tool again, but this time use the Pet Eye mode.



3 Remove distractions For simple cloning work grab the Spot Removal tool and tweak the Size, Feather and Opacity sliders to your liking, then paint over the offending article. If you want to do heavy skin retouching or more involved cloning it's best to save this for Photoshop.



4 Fine-tune your patch Lightroom has now automatically picked a source point from the image to replace your distraction with, but you can drag it around to change it. You can also click between the Clone and Heal options to change how the new area is blended in.



5 Correct white balance In the Basic panel you'll find the White Balance tool next to the Temperature and Tint sliders for controlling the white balance. You can use this tool to quickly click on a midtone in your shot like a grey card, to set the white balance fast.



6 Crop tool There are few images that can't be improved compositionally with a slight crop. Grab the Crop Overlay tool from the Toolbox and drag the box to change your crop. Hit X on the keyboard if you need to change between portrait and landscape orientation.

Lr Adobe Lightroom Classic CC
Dan Mold

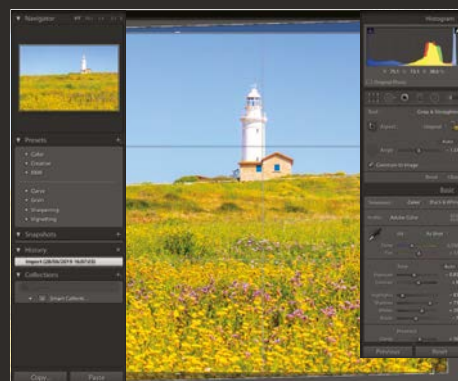
Library | Develop | Map | Book | Slideshow | Print | Web

Three hidden tools

Discover a selection of tools you won't find in the main toolbox



1 Targeted Adjustment Click on the Tone Curve panel to find the Targeted Adjustment tool. Now click on part of your shot, and drag up to make those tones brighter or down to make them darker. Your change will be updated on the tone curve histogram too.



2 Straighten This tool sits inside the Crop Overlay panel and looks like a ruler icon. Click it to activate it, then draw over the horizon. Lightroom will then adjust the overall crop of your picture to make the whole shot level. Just hit Return or click the Done button to apply it.



3 Guided Upright Go to the Transform panel to bring up options that let you correct lens and perspective distortion. You can also access the Guided Upright tool here. You can use this to drag lines over any areas you want to be perfectly perpendicular in your shot.

Bring your shots into Photoshop

Know when it's time to move to the next phase

One question every photographer will ask themselves during the editing process is "When should I take my image from Lightroom into Photoshop?" At this point you should make sure that you understand and utilise the strengths of each program. Lightroom Classic CC is a fantastic RAW converter and image library, while Photoshop CC is a powerful image manipulation tool that's brilliant for creating composites and doing involved edits that are impossible in Lightroom.

While you have access to all of that extra RAW data in Lightroom it makes sense to squeeze as much out of it as you can, so definitely make sure your exposure and colours are exactly how you want them before proceeding, as you'll have more information from the point of capture to play with in

Lightroom for greater control. When you Export images from Lightroom Classic CC this is usually as a compressed JPEG file (though other options are available), so bear in mind that you'll no longer have access to the Raw exposure information when you do this.

Photoshop is brilliant because it gives you a plethora of tools that you don't get in Lightroom, such as the Clone Stamp tool, handy for removing distractions, the Pen tool for making paths or selections, and the Brush tool that allows you to digitally paint on your photos. You also have layers, so it's possible to stack different parts of pictures together or put text on them, creating composite images.

Here's what to do when you've reached the limitations of Lightroom and want to bring them into Photoshop to finish your edit.

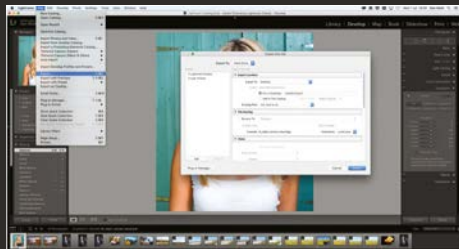


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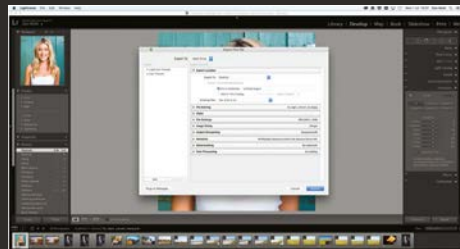
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Export your images

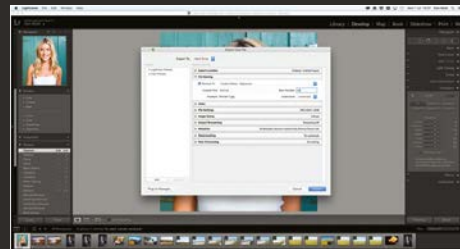
Turn your converted RAW into a JPEG that you can edit in Photoshop



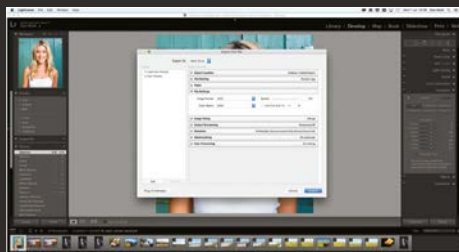
1 Start the export Select the edited RAWs in the filmstrip and go to the Library module, then click Export or go to File>Export to get the Export dialogue. Or to skip this go to Photo>Edit In>Adobe Photoshop CC.



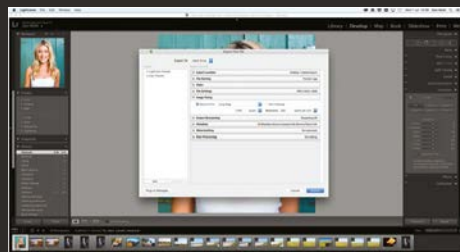
2 Choose location Under Export Location you can choose where to save the image by clicking Export To and selecting a destination. You can put them in a subfolder and overwrite images with the same name.



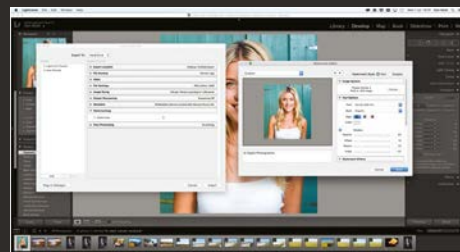
3 Rename files To create new file names for a batch of images, tick the Rename To box in the File Naming tab, choose an option or create new custom names, or number a sequence of shots.



4 Set the output quality Go to File Settings and change the image format to JPEG to save space. Choose a suitable quality, with 100 being the highest. You can limit the file size here, which is useful if you need smaller files to upload to a website.



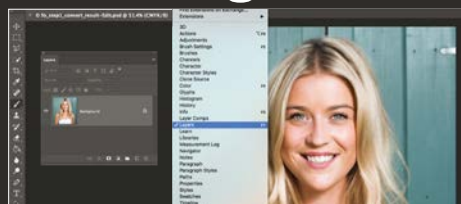
5 Resize your shots Use the Image Sizing panel if you'd like your JPEGs to be a specific size, which is useful for minimising the file size when uploading to the web. As we don't want to do that with our images we've left this option unchecked.



6 Add a watermark You can add a watermark using the Watermarking panel. Click Watermark, go to Edit Watermark and type in the copyright message or upload your own logo, and choose where you want to position it. Then just press Import.



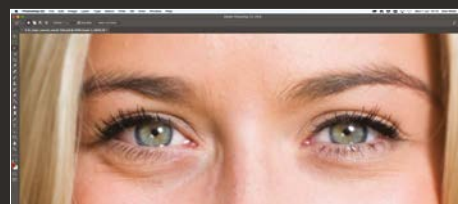
Performing edits in Photoshop Easy edits that are impossible in Lightroom



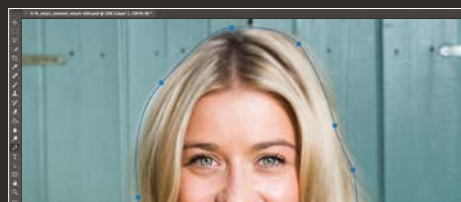
1 Activate the Layers panel In Photoshop CC head over to the Layers panel by going to Window>Layers. Layers enable you to build up a series of images in a single document, and the Layers panel will show you all of the different layers in your current document. You can turn each layer on or off by clicking the eye icon.



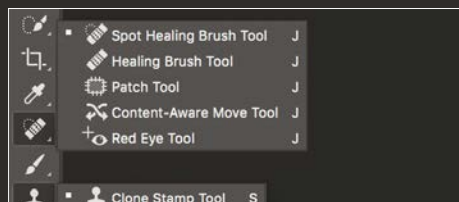
2 Create duplicate layers Hit Ctrl/Cmd+J, or go to Layer>Duplicate Layer to make a copy of your active layer. This is essential when making involved edits, as it means you have a copy of the original should your edit go wrong. Comparing your edit to the original is useful for checking your progress as you go.



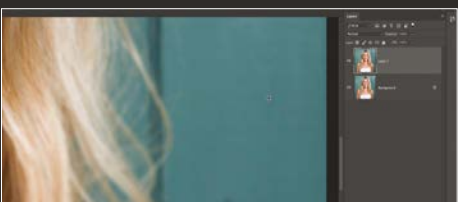
3 Make selections Tools like the Rectangular Marquee and Polygonal Lasso are brilliant for making selections of parts of your images. The marching ants will show you selected areas. You can then choose to copy or cut them out and paste them onto other images, to build them up and create composites.



4 Use the Pen tool Photoshop's coveted Pen tool can't be found in Lightroom. It makes it easy to draw a 'path' around even the most intricate details of your image. Paths have numerous uses, but for photographers it's best for creating highly accurate and detailed selections.



5 Advanced cloning Lightroom's Spot Removal tool is rudimentary compared to the host of clone and retouching tools in Photoshop. There's the Clone Stamp tool, Spot Healing Brush tool and Patch tool, to name just a few, and as you're not working on a large RAW, they're quicker to use.



6 Remove distractions easily To use the Clone Stamp tool grab it from the Toolbox to make it active. Now hold down the Alt key and click on a part of your image to source the 'good' pixels, then brush over the offending distraction to paint that sourced area over it and remove it from shot.

Pro case study



Photographer and image retoucher Dan Mold is an Adobe Certified Associate

What is the best time-saving cheat you can give us to shorten edits in Lightroom?

Syncing images together has to be the best way to save time when editing your images in Lightroom. Whether you're copying exposure settings or duplicating keywords, it all helps to shave off the hours when you're editing similar pictures. Click on an image in the filmstrip to make it active, then Cmd/Ctrl+click on other images you want to sync to. Click Sync Metadata in the Library module, or sync in the Develop module to sync the develop settings.

Syncing settings will give you the exact settings from the image you're syncing it to and won't take into account variations in exposure. So for this, a good trick is to

select an image with the correct exposure to make it active, then select the other images in the filmstrip you want to sync up to and go to Photo>Develop Settings>Match Tone Exposures. The exposure will then be matched according to the tonal value of your image and not according to the value of the Exposure slider.

What are the first steps when setting up an image database?

Lightroom Classic CC has a brilliant feature called Virtual Copies. You can create these by right-clicking on an image in the filmstrip and choosing Create Virtual Copy. This gives you an additional thumbnail to work on, so you can create multiple edits of the same picture; mono, split-toned, etc. As it's not duplicating the RAW file it doesn't take up any extra space on your hard drive either.

Can you work on images if you don't have the hard drive they're stored on with you?

If Lightroom is accessing images on an external hard drive you'll no longer be able to

work on them when the drive is disconnected. But you can select the picture you want to edit in the filmstrip, click the icon under the histogram where it says Original Photo, then click Build Smart Preview in the panel that appears. This creates a smaller file that you can still work on while the hard drive is disconnected, and Lightroom will sync the settings back up to the hi-res RAW when the hard drive is connected once again. This is a really useful tip if you travel a lot and your images are stored on numerous hard drives.

What do you think is the best hidden feature in Lightroom Classic CC?

Unlike in Photoshop CC, where all of the tools can be found in the toolbar, many of the tools in Lightroom are found within panels – only the main six tools actually sit in the toolbar underneath the histogram. You'll find the White Balance tool in the Basic panel and the Targeted Adjustment tool in the Tone Curve panel. Both are very handy to have in your arsenal and can speed up edits.

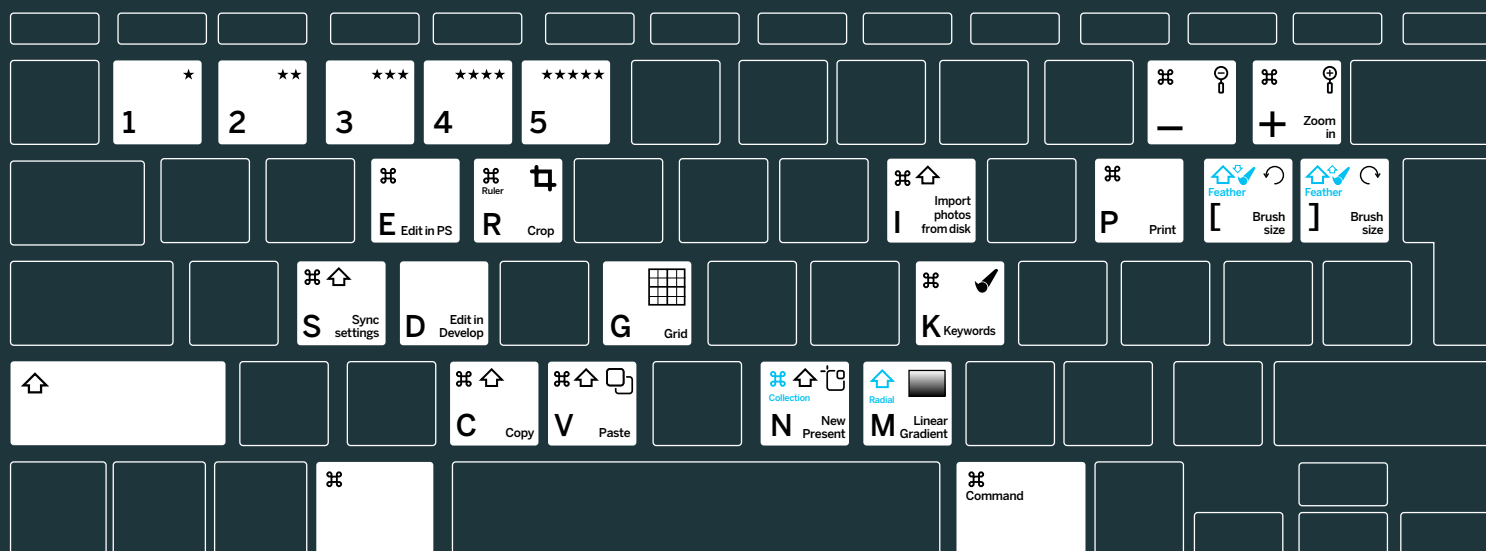
My advice would be to really explore the panels to find these hidden gems. Another brilliant feature that's a bit tucked away is the ability to create HDR panoramas from a series of pictures. To do this you can select all of the images in the filmstrip, right-click on the selection and then choose Photo Merge>HDR Panorama.

“Syncing images together has to be the best way to save time when editing your images in Lightroom”



LIGHTROOM CHEATSHEET

Get more from Lightroom Classic with essential shortcuts



Lightroom Classic keyboard shortcuts

Import photos from disk: Ctrl/Cmd + Shift + I	Linear Gradient: M
Rotate right: Ctrl/Cmd +]	Radial Gradient: Shift + M
Rotate left: Ctrl/Cmd + [	Sync settings: Ctrl/Cmd + Shift + S
Zoom in/zoom out: Ctrl/Cmd + = / Ctrl/Cmd + -	Increase/decrease brush size:] / [
Set Star Rating: 1 – 5	Increase/decrease brush feather: Shift +] / Shift + [
Add keywords: Ctrl/Cmd + K	Create preset: Ctrl/Cmd + Shift + N
Edit in Develop: D	Print image: Ctrl/Cmd + P
View Grid: G	New Collection: Ctrl/Cmd + N
Crop Tool: R	Copy/Paste Develop Settings: Ctrl/Cmd + Shift + C / Ctrl/Cmd + Shift + V
Brush Tool: K	Edit in Photoshop: Ctrl/Cmd + E

Lightroom jargon buster

MODULE

Lightroom terminology for the seven main tabs of the workspace. Each of the Library, Develop, Map, Book, Slideshow, Print and Web modules allow for either archiving, editing or output of images.

CATALOG

Your main image database. All images you import into LR are placed in the Catalog. You can compile multiple Catalogs e.g 'Personal' and 'Work'. Remember to backup your Catalogs.

VIRTUAL COPY

Create an identical copy of any image on which you can apply different Develop settings. This enables you to quickly and easily create multiple versions of the same image.

COLLECTION

Further organise your images by adding related photos to a Collection. This is handy for subdividing your Catalog into shoots or collating the best images from a particular shoot.

SOFT PROOF

Check Soft Proofing to see your images with the current colour profile, simulating how it will look once printed. Ensure your monitor is correctly calibrated for maximum accuracy.

Correct distortion in Lightroom

Who needs a tilt-shift lens when fixing distortion is this easy? Correct geometry in five quick steps

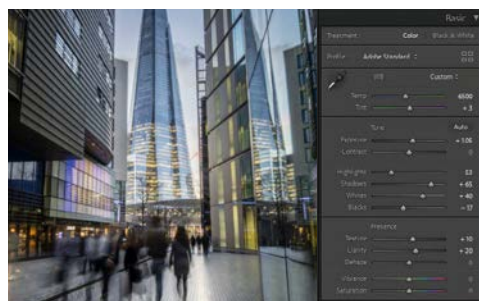


There's no getting away from the fact that tilt-shift (or perspective control) lenses are great for avoiding perspective distortion at the point of shooting, but they are specialist and tend

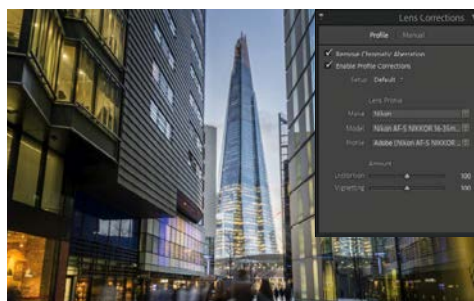
to be expensive. While getting shots right in-camera is often the best way to work, the tools available in Lightroom for correcting perspective are both easy to use and highly effective, so add them to your workflow.

What you'll be using

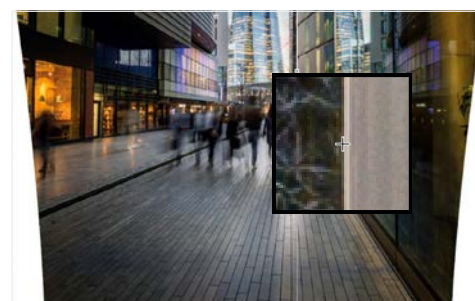
- Basic adjustments
- Manual Transform
- Guided Transform
- Lens Corrections
- Crop Tool



1 Apply basic adjustments Process your image, as usual, using the tools available in the Basic tab. For this shot, which was an HDR image created in Lightroom, it was necessary to work with the Shadows and Highlights, Whites and Blacks and also White Balance to warm up the cool blue-hour colour balance.



2 Apply Lens Corrections Scroll down the Basic tab to Lens Corrections and check Remove Chromatic Aberration, if this is visible along subject edges, and also Enable Profile Corrections. If Lightroom doesn't pull through the lens profile, set the Make to the correct manufacturer and search for your model.



3 Transform the image Click on the Guided button in Transform and then left-click on a distorted line. Using the magnifier to line up the point correctly, hold the mouse button down and drag to the other end of the line. Do this to a second line, or more if required, and the perspective distortion will be corrected.



4 Go manual if you prefer Another option is to use the sliders below the Transform buttons to manually apply the desired correction. They are self-explanatory and, in some situations, you may find that even when using the Guided option you can use these too. Constrain Crop removes any empty space.



5 Crop the image Constrain Crop removes empty space around the corrected image, but you may need to perform a more significant crop. Click on the Crop Tool icon, make sure Aspect is set to Original and that the icon shows a closed lock, then drag the guide edges to set the crop and hit Enter.

KEY TIP TRY AUTO FIRST

When correcting perspective distortion with Transform in Lightroom, it's always worth trying the Auto option first. Its effectiveness is 50/50, but when it works it will fix an image in an instant, saving you lots of time at the laptop.

Inset Converging verticals

The original image was HDR so detail is easy to recover, but the most obvious problem is the perspective distortion

Main Perfect lines

Using two guides, the converging verticals have been completely removed without any negative effect

AFTER



BEFORE

Dig deeper with Tone Curve in Lightroom

Apply targeted detail recovery using the Parametric Tone Curve and Point Curve



The Shadows and Highlights sliders are fantastic controls for recovering detail in Lightroom, but they can sometimes be a blunt instrument when dealing with high-contrast images. But

when combined with the Point Curve and Parametric Tone Curve, your ability to target detail recovery to specific tonal ranges is greatly increased. It's safe to say that there's more to the Tone Curve than meets the eye.

What you'll be using

- Shadows & Highlights
- Basic adjustments
- Both Tone Curves
- Lens Corrections
- Whites & Blacks



1 Apply Lens Corrections Scroll down to the Lens Corrections tab and check Remove Chromatic Aberration and Enable Profile Corrections. If you check Enable Profile Corrections and the profile doesn't load, click on the Make dropdown menu and select the manufacturer, which forces the profile to load.



2 Make basic Adjustments In this image, White Balance, Exposure, Clarity and the Tone Curve were adjusted. The Point Curve was set to the Strong Contrast preset, and the Parametric Tone Curve icon was clicked to open this second Curve. The icon is a white S shape over a grey circle above the Curve.



3 Recover Shadows and Highlights The Shadows and Highlights sliders are useful but push them too far and it will look like an over-processed HDR shot. Adjust these sliders using amounts that recover detail without washing out the image. Here, Highlights were set to -60 and Shadows to +50.



4 Use the Parametric Curve Scroll down to the Tone Curve where the Parametric Curve is open. The four sliders provide more refined control over tonal range detail than the Shadows and Highlights sliders in the basic tab. Here, Highlights is set to -80, Lights to -20, Darks to +30 and Shadows to +40.



5 Adjust Blacks and Whites The image was looking washed out so a boost of contrast was required; the best way to achieve this is to increase the white point and decrease the black point using the Whites and Blacks sliders. Here, Whites were set to +40 and Blacks to -30 to improve the image.

KEY TIP TWO IN ONE

Lightroom's Tone Curve consists of two curves. As well as controlling colour, brightness and contrast with the Point Curve, the Parametric Tone Curve sliders cover four tonal ranges and expand on the use of the Shadows and Highlights sliders.

Inset Controlled underexposure

This high-contrast scene was tricky to capture while maintaining detail, partly due to the sun star being captured through the tree branches

Main Recovered detail

Using Shadows, Highlights, Whites, Blacks and the Parametric Tone Curve has allowed much of the detail in this extremely high contrast scene to be recovered

AFTER



BEFORE

Balancing warmer and cooler tones

Add depth to your images with colour contrast

 In this tutorial, I am going to teach you how to use the colour grading feature to add some mood into the photo and add colour contrast, which I love doing in my photos. I will introduce some

cooler tones into the orange sky to bring depth to the shot. I often find with sunset photos, having one colour in the sky without any contrast doesn't draw the viewer's eye to the image and it can look quite flat.

What you'll be using

- Temperature
- Colour Grading
- Calibration tab
- Highlights
- Shadows
- Tint



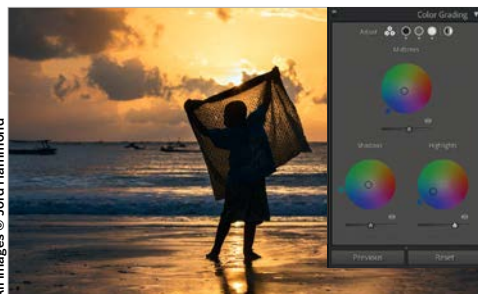
1 Lower the white balance I lowered the white balance from 5,200K to 4,400K which gives the photo a cooler feel. The photo has a bright orange sky and whilst I am able to keep many of those oranges, lowering the temperature means it isn't so intense.



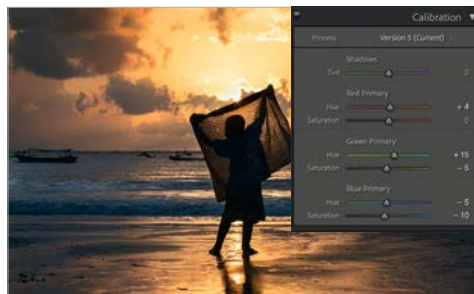
2 Cool the midtones Now I introduce cooler midtones. This is where we will start getting the colour contrast we need for the effect as these higher Kelvin colours will contrast with the sunlight. I also increased the luminance slightly to brighten the midtones.



3 Cool the shadows Next, I have cooled the shadows down. For the shadows, I have gone for a slightly warmer blue than that of the midtones to add more colour contrast. In nature there are many colour combinations so mixing tones like this adds realism.



4 Cool the highlights I have cooled the highlights, opting for a blue that differs from my choices for the shadows, so as to create a smooth transition of cooler tones throughout the scene. Just one blue would, for myself, be too unrealistic.



5 Warming the warmer tones I have now moved over to calibration where I have created a warmer image. This helps me to achieve my signature look. The Calibration tab can be a powerful colour control tool for advanced editing and refined adjustments.

KEY TIP

MASTERING COLOUR GRADING

People often ask how I edit my photos to have such depth, and this is the trick. Bringing cool tones into a warm image helps to create depth and makes the image much more pleasing to the eye.

Inset
Selong Belenak, Lombok

I came here to shoot the buffalos on the beach at sunset, but ended up photographing the local kids watching the sunset

Main
Improved sky colour depth and drama

I've brought a lot more depth to the sky which in turn highlights the subject more. I'm really pleased with how this turned out and feel it is now print-ready

AFTER



BEFORE



Dodge and burn in Lightroom

Learn how to complexify the exposure with lighter and darker tones to create breathtaking shots that come alive



Dodging and burning is one of my favourite ways to retouch photos and get noticed as a photographer. When done with care, it can turn a good photo into a selective artwork. If you want to improve your retouching skills and make your photos more impactful, practise this skill first.

Inset Montmartre Paris

This is one of my favourite places to take photos. I was lucky to have no one on the stairs and a nice sunset

Main Montmartre lights

Dodging and burning can be intense or subtle, but I love how it makes any photo feel more alive. It makes a big difference

If you're not familiar, dodging and burning is a photography technique that makes some parts of the photo darker (burn) and some parts lighter (dodge), to guide the eyes of your viewer into the photo. Let's take a look at how to dodge and burn in Lightroom, using several methods for effective results.

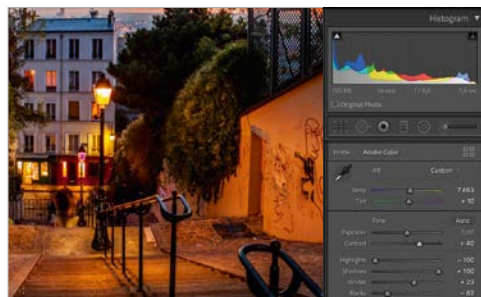
What you'll be using

- Radial filter
- Crop
- Brushes
- White balance
- Graduated filter
- Exposure

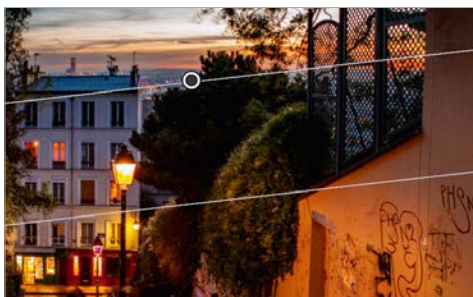
KEY TIP

GET GOOD CONTRAST

Contrast is very important for this technique, so when you lower your Black Points press the Alt/Opt key and you will see where there are 100% Black Points. Do the same for the White Points. Avoid having 100% White Points, because these don't tend to look good in the printing process.



1 Basic retouch First, get into the basic retouch of the photo. Use the sliders to perform your usual exposure editing workflow. Set the white balance, and crop the image – to 4x5 if you intend to post it on social media.



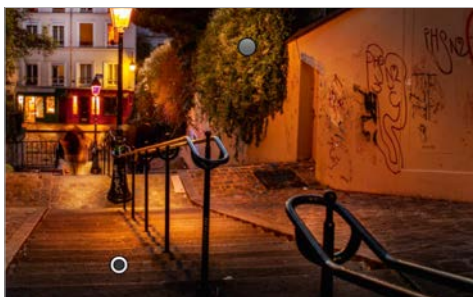
2 Graduated filters Narrow the focus in the photo to put more attention on the centre of the image. Set a Graduated filter at the top and lower the exposure, and also add some colour – in this example, some blue on the sky.



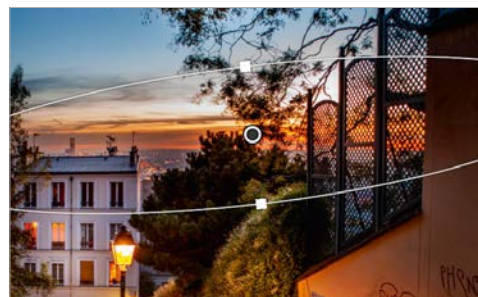
3 Brush Paint the photo with light using a brush and increased exposure. Make it very obvious at first. You can also add some tint to the brush. That way you can see clearly what you want to focus attention on.



4 Brush #2 Next, bring the exposure back down to make it much more natural and subtle. Once this is done, it's a good idea to take a break, and come back to the images with a fresh eye to see if it is still too much.

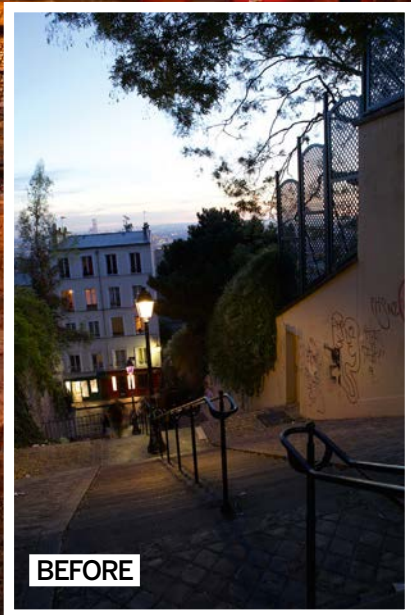


5 Vignetting Vignetting is a great way to add drama and focus attention on the centre of the photo, burning the edges. Use a brush, lower the exposure, and paint over the lower frame of the photo to create this effect.



6 Radial filter Another way to dodge and burn is to use Radial filters. Create a Radial filter, invert the mask, and then boost the exposure. You can even add some tint – here we'll put it over the sunset.

AFTER



Take control of colours using HSL

Enhance colours using the Hue, Saturation and Luminosity controls in Lightroom

 Subtle colour casts and elements within landscapes can look untidy due to their colour not fitting into the wider scene. Using the Hue, Saturation and Luminosity controls in Lightroom, we can shift

individual colour channels into new colours, increase or decrease saturation and adjust the brightness of colours. The result is punchier images where the important elements within the scene become more prominent.

KEY TIP

EXPERIMENT WITH SETTINGS

All adjustments in Lightroom are non-destructive, so you can always undo the specific adjustments or simply reset the entire image. This makes experimenting with controls such as HSL worthwhile, because you can cannot go wrong.

What you'll be using

- Basic adjustments
- Saturation control
- Colour channels
- Luminosity control
- Hue control
- Tone Curve



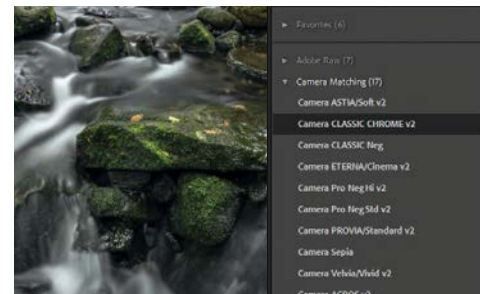
3 Shift the Yellow and Green Hues Click on Hue and you can now shift the hue of any of the colour channels depending on what needs to be adjusted. To get started, the Orange Hue was adjusted to +40 and the Yellow Hue to +60 to shift these channels along so that they appear greener in the image.



1 Make basic adjustments Process your image as you would normally using the controls in the Basic tab to get the image looking right. For this image, the White Balance, Tone and Presence were adjusted, while contrast was increased using the Medium Contrast preset in the Tone Curve tab.



4 Change the Aqua and Blue Hues Despite the desaturation of Aqua and Blue in the second step, Aqua was set to +20 to neutralise the colour of the water and make it brighter. Green was changed to +15 to make greens appear richer without looking unnatural. The latter was a subtle change.



2 Adjust Saturation Scroll down to the HSL tab and click on Saturation. Here, you can increase or decrease the saturation of individual colour channels. For this image, Yellow and Green were increased to +11 to enhance the moss, while Aqua and Blue were set to -51 to reduce the blue tint in the water.



5 Tweak Luminance Click on Luminance where you can control the brightness of individual colour channels by making them lighter or darker. For this image, Aqua and Blue were both set to +20 to make them brighter. This had the effect of brightening the water without blowing the highlights.

Inset Subtle colour issues

The original image looks good but the greens are subdued and the yellows in the scene and blue tint in the water don't look quite right

Main A refined result

Using Hue, Saturation and Luminosity controls results in an image with no colour casts and much greater contrast between the moss, water and rocks

AFTER



BEFORE

Use Lightroom Calibration creatively

Shift the way RGB pixels in your images appear to apply creative colour effects in Lightroom

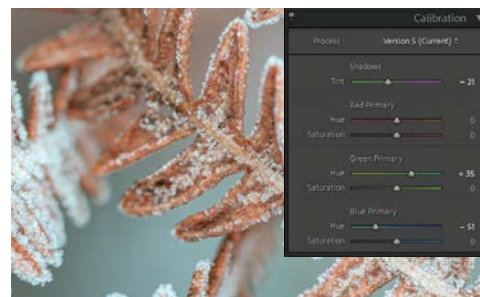
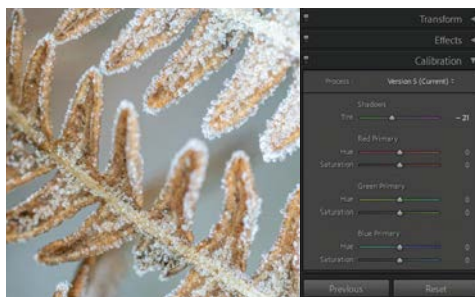
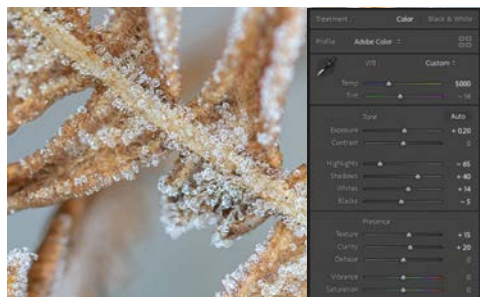


Calibration in Lightroom provides a set of controls that are often overlooked or completely ignored, but their wide scope for both colour correction and creative effects can be huge.

The seven sliders control specific colours in the image, while at the same time affecting all colours globally. Sounds confusing? Don't worry, Calibration is an incredibly easy-to-use tool and equally powerful too.

What you'll be using

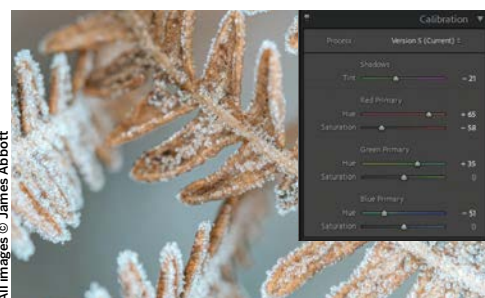
- Basic adjustments
- HSL/Color controls
- Calibration Shadows
- Red Primary
- Green Primary
- Blue Primary



1 Process the image Process your RAW file, as usual, making sure that White Balance, Exposure, Contrast and any other settings are optimised to make the image look its best. The colour effects we'll apply will always look best when all other settings are correct because it allows you to focus on the desired effect.

2 Adjust Shadows Scroll down to Calibration on the right and expand the tab. The Shadows slider allows you to add green or magenta to shadow areas for colour correction or creative effect. For this shot, Shadows were set to -21 to add a hint of green, but it also affects the whole image.

3 Tweak Blue and Green Primary The idea behind this image was to cool down the background to create a complementary colour contrast with the bracken. The Blue Primary Hue was set to -51 and Green to +35. This made the bracken red, so change the Hue and Saturation of the Red Primary.



4 Colour correct with Red To reduce the red in the image and regain the natural colour of the Bracken, the Red Primary Hue was set to +65 and saturation to -58. Since these sliders affect the whole of the image, the new, colder-looking background colour has been maintained and accentuated.

5 Increase saturation Scroll to the HSL/Color tab and click on Saturation. Here, we can subtly increase the saturation of specific colour channels rather than globally using Calibration. For this image, Orange was set to +5 and Aqua was set to +35 for a more refined level of saturation control.

KEY TIP

CALIBRATE YOUR MONITOR

Always calibrate your monitor to ensure that colours, contrast and brightness all display correctly. Working with colour controls, it's essential, as any colour shifts on your screen will result in the wrong colours being applied during editing.

Inset Little colour contrast

The original image is a great starting point, however, the colours are muted and the background would benefit from an effect that echoes the cold look of the shot

Main A colder finish

By shifting the colours and saturation using Calibration, the natural colours of the image have been maintained, while the background has been given a 'cold' blue tint

AFTER



BEFORE

Use colour range masks for dramatic skies

Darken the sky to draw viewer focus into an image

 In this tutorial, I demonstrate how to darken the top of the sky using a colour range mask. I do this with most of my photos because I like using the sky as a natural vignette. It's a way to add contrast to the photo, and it helps to draw the eye away from the edges of the frame.

After
Dramatic sky
I love the end result. I have darkened the sky which adds depth to the photo, as well as helping to draw focus to the most important elements of this image, the volcano and house

Before
Karangasem, Bali
I was happy with this photo taken on my Mavic 2 Pro. However, you can see the sky is a little flat compared to the rest of the landscape scene

What you'll be using

- Graduated Filter
- Brush Tool
- HSL
- Vignette
- Dehaze

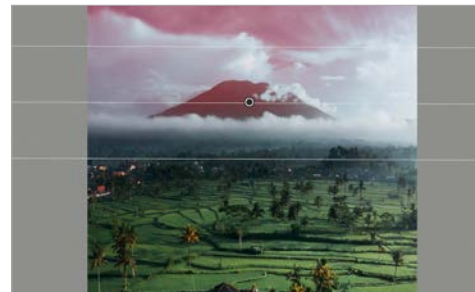
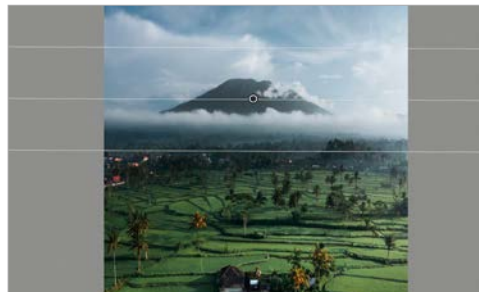
KEY TIP

USE MULTIPLE TOOLS TO DARKEN THE SKY TONE

We will focus on the colour range mask in graduated filters, as well as luminance and vignette to achieve a darker sky.



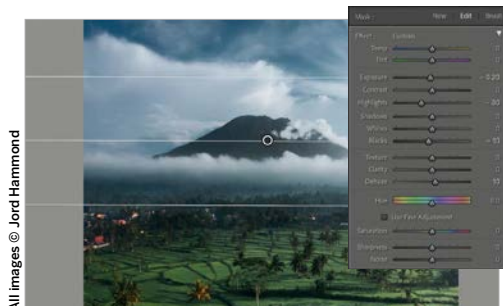
BEFORE



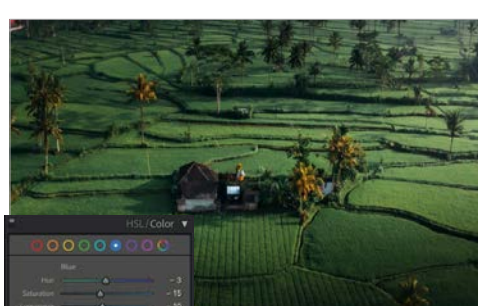
1 Select and apply filter To darken the sky in my images, I apply a graduated filter. By darkening the sky gradually, you'll lead the viewer's eye away from the edges of this frame towards the key focal areas. The first stage is to import the image into Lightroom.

2 Select colour range mask I use the 'colour range' mask within the graduated filter to target the adjustment to the blues in the sky. I don't want to darken the clouds. Click the colour picker on the sky to select the blues. You can hit 'O' to see the affected area.

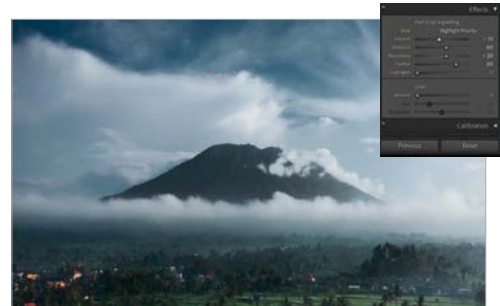
3 Adjust the colour range mask You may find that the automatic selection is either too broad or minimal, so try shifting the 'amount' slider until you have a selection you're happy with. Failing that, try brushing away parts of the selection using the Brush tool.



4 Darken the sky Next, reduce the filters' exposure and increase the dehaze to darken the sky. You could also reduce the highlights and blacks which will add further contrast between the blue sky and white clouds, which will really make it pop.



5 Reduce the luminance Once you're happy with the graduated filter, go to the HSL menu. Hit luminance, and reduce the blue luminance. This will further darken the sky. However, reduce this minimally as it will affect the luminance of every blue part of your image.



6 Add a vignette Lastly, open the effects menu. Using the highlight priority style, create a light vignette to draw focus to the subject of the photo. Finish off by playing with the midpoint and roundness, and feather until you're happy with the results.

AFTER



Get to grips with PS

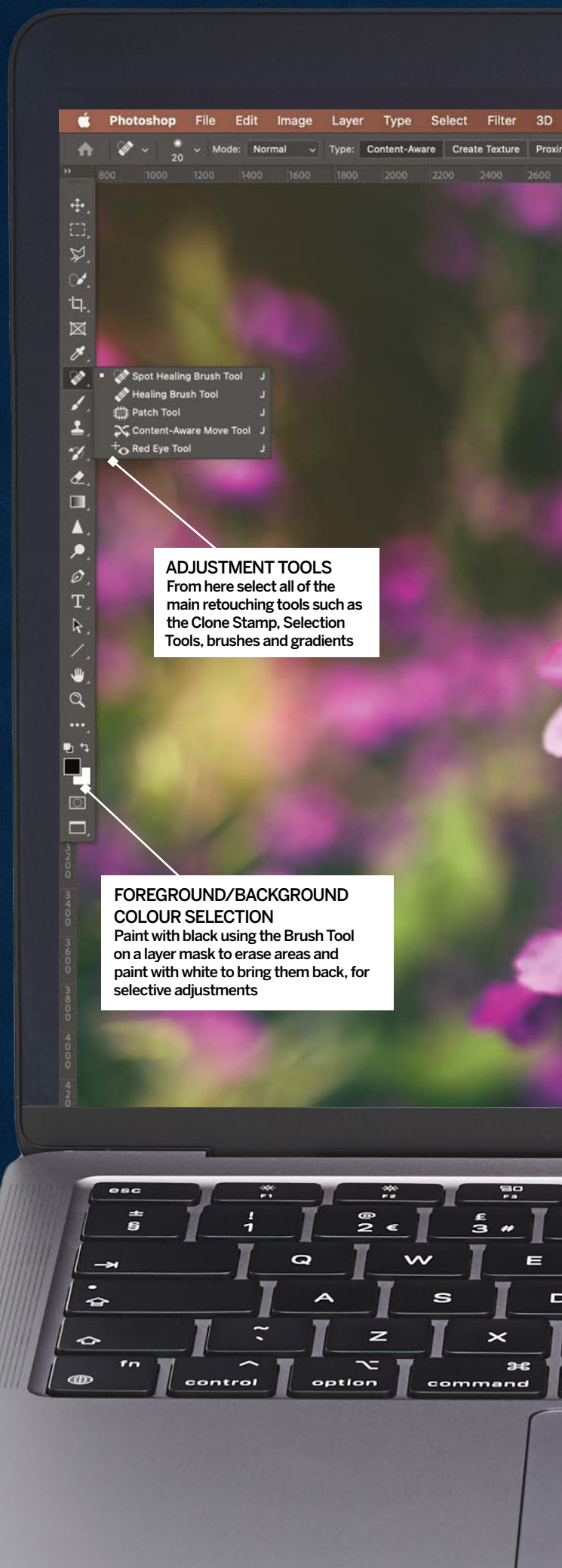
Go beyond the basics of image editing and apply advanced retouching steps

As we have learned, RAW format offers tremendous scope for editing the highlights, shadows and detail in our images – it truly is the file type for the pros! However, while many of the regular adjustments you might need to make to your images can be applied in software such as Lightroom, or Adobe Camera Raw, there are some advanced retouching steps that must be done in Photoshop.

The Photoshop brand has become synonymous with removing blemishes from photos for good

reason. The tool set available is extensive and allows you to make changes both big and small, which you'd struggle to do using Lightroom's more limited sampling capabilities.

Let's dive into the Photoshop workspace to explore the sliders, tools and functions which will allow you to create unbelievably detailed shots, free from lighting inconsistencies, dust, distortions and more. By the end, you'll be a retouching pro!

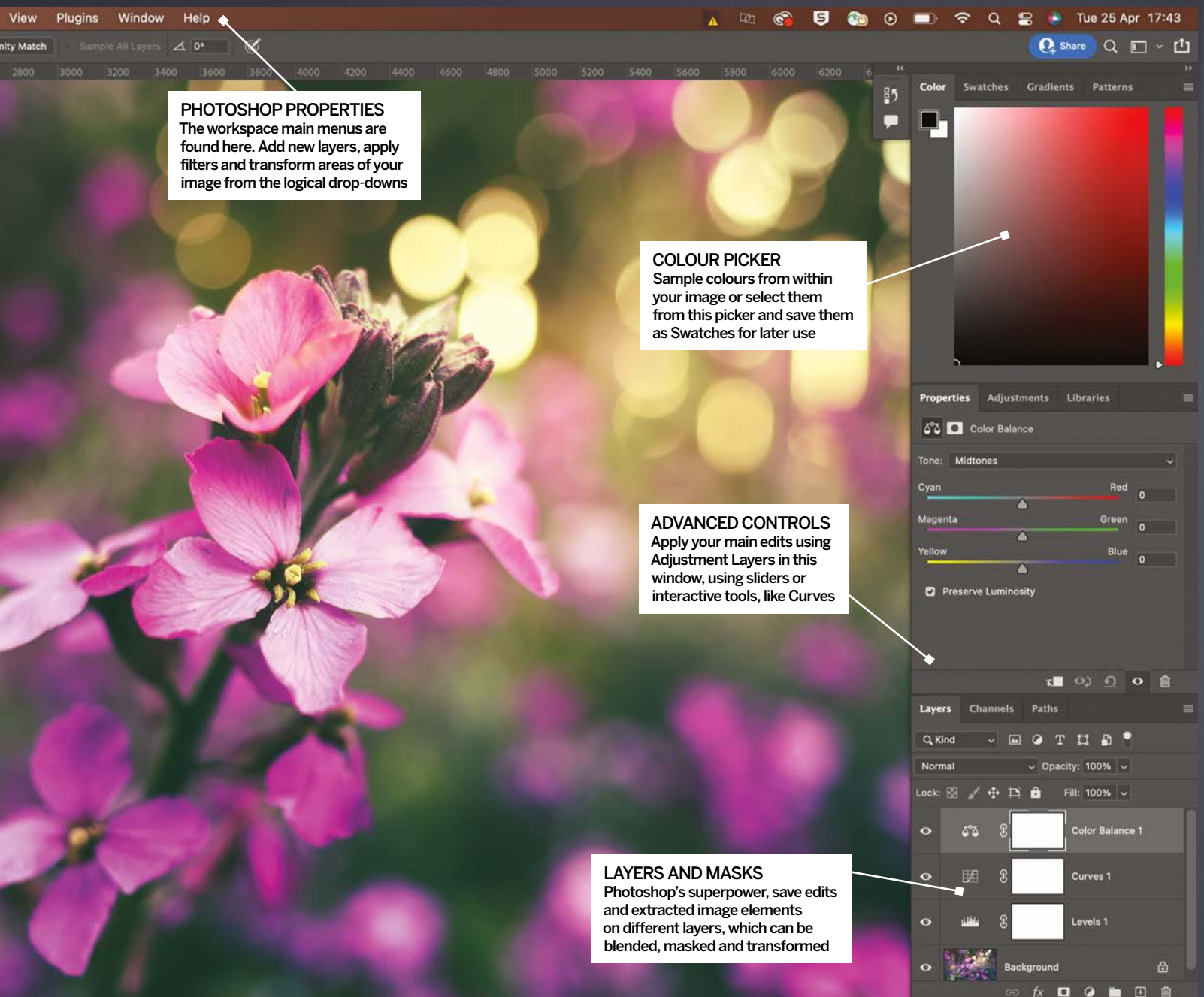


ADJUSTMENT TOOLS
From here select all of the main retouching tools such as the Clone Stamp, Selection Tools, brushes and gradients

FOREGROUND/BACKGROUND COLOUR SELECTION
Paint with black using the Brush Tool on a layer mask to erase areas and paint with white to bring them back, for selective adjustments

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	Discover how to create scenic photos with amazing depth, detail and colour		Give your shots the personal touch by crafting a look
104	CREATIVE COMPOSITES	143	TOP TIPS FOR EDITING LIKE A PRO RETOUCHER
	Explore these advanced techniques for blending multiple images together		The insider secrets for an easy editing workflow



MacBook Air

Main
Light rays in Bali

One of my favourite scenes to shoot is light rays in Northern Bali. By sharpening the image in Photoshop, I brought more definition to the subject

Sharpen up your images

Get pin-sharp shots with layers and blending modes

In this tutorial, I am going to teach you how to sharpen your images like a pro using Photoshop. This technique works particularly well with human interest and landscape images, and focuses on increasing

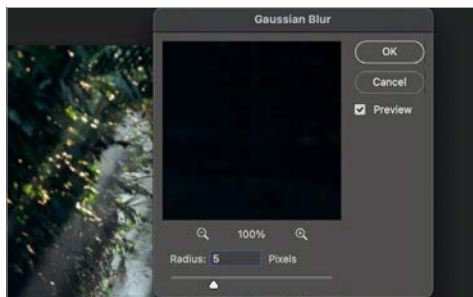
the contrast in the brighter and darker tones found in the image's colours, as opposed to the details themselves. The technique is also effective for images involving skies, as it doesn't increase the noise that can be found in them.

What you'll be using

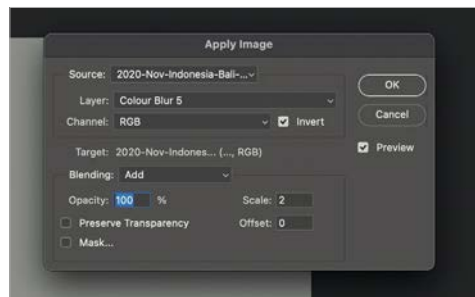
- Gaussian Blur Filter
- Duplicate Image Shortcut
- Apply Image
- Linear Light (blending mode)
- Opacity Slider



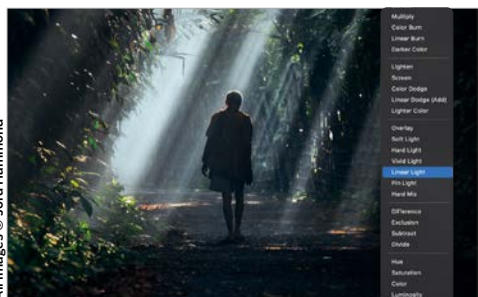
1 Duplicate the layers To sharpen this image, we need to first duplicate the original layer twice. The first layer should be renamed to 'Colour Blur 5'; and the second renamed to 'Detail'.



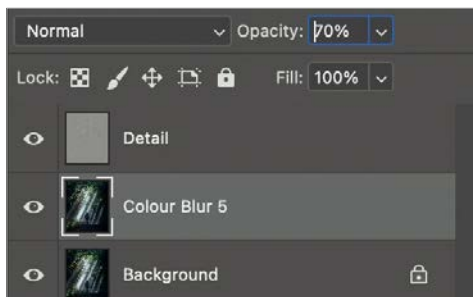
2 Add Gaussian Blur Now apply a Gaussian Blur with a radius of 5 pixels to the Colour Blur 5 layer. To do this, hit Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur. This will be the base of the dreamy effect we are creating.



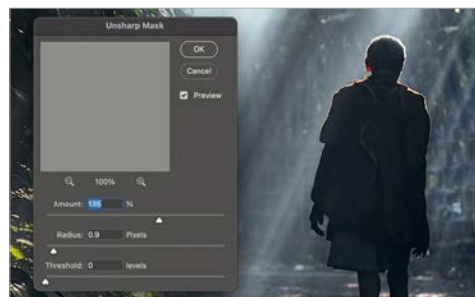
3 Create details only layer On the second layer click Image > Apply Image. Select your blurred layer. Check invert and change the blending mode to Add, Opacity 100%, Scale 2, Offset 0. Then hit OK.



4 Change the blending mode Now, change the blending mode of the detail layer from 'Normal' to 'Linear Light'. You'll notice the image now looks the same as our original layer. Time to introduce the sharpness.



5 Reduce opacity Now we will reduce the opacity of the Colour Blur 5 layer. I reduced the opacity to 70%, which sharpens the image just enough. You can erase parts of this effect via a layer mask if necessary.



6 The final touches Finally, on the Detail layer, go to Filter > Sharpen > Unsharp Mask and take the amount to 135 for some extra crispiness. The processed shot is super sharp and ready for print.

AFTER



Main
Tidy image composition

I've now tidied up the image enough so that it still looks realistic but is easier to view and understand, as well as being more symmetrical

Inset
Temple in Bali, Indonesia

I found this location for my drone one early morning. A lot of elements were distracting, but I had the final edited image in my head

Remove distracting elements

Create distraction-free compositions with advanced retouching

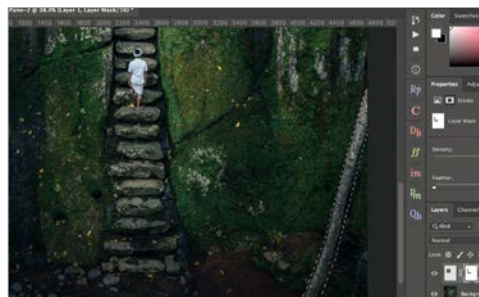


Whilst I don't tend to clean up my photos to the point of them looking unrealistic, I do like to take out distracting elements to allow for a more aesthetically pleasing photo, thus guiding the viewer through the composition with

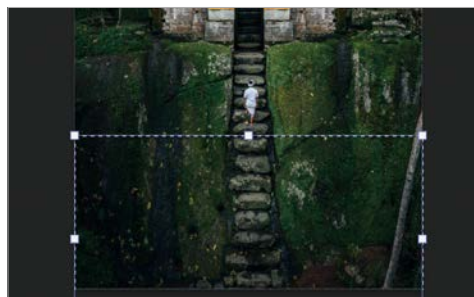
ease. Photoshop and other similar software applications have many advanced tools for selectively removing or redistributing detail within an image and, when used carefully, these can transform a messy scene into a clean, visually appealing masterpiece.

What you'll be using

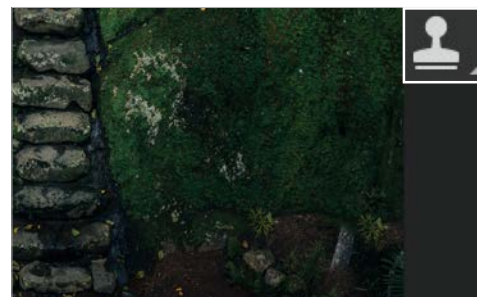
- Marquee tool
- Clone stamp tool
- Spot healing brush tool
- Layer masks



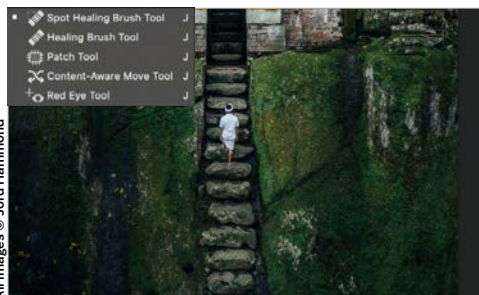
1 Clean up gateway Use the Marquee tool (M) to make a rough selection of the right-hand side of the gate. Then right-click to copy it and flip horizontally. Then move it across to the other side.



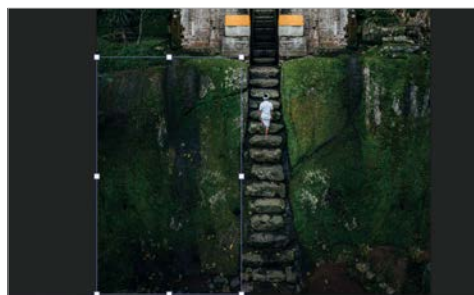
2 Extend the staircase This helps to dramatise the scene and remove the distracting path at the bottom. Use the Marquee tool to select around the stairs and stretch downwards while holding shift.



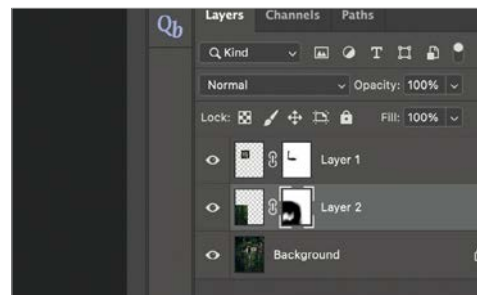
3 Clone stamp that log Select the Clone Stamp tool and reduce the hardness of your brush for softer edges. Then, select an area of the green wall which would cover the log as well, and stamp away.



4 Remove the leaves I feel that some of the leaves are a little distracting, so I'll remove some using the Spot Healing Brush Tool (my preferred tool for removing smaller items from any image in a heartbeat).

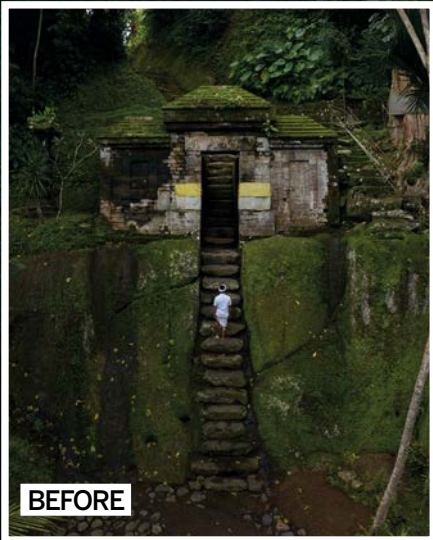


5 Clean up left-hand-side wall I wanted a more solid section of green on the left-hand side of the image as a replacement for the darker walls. Just as we did in Steps 1 and 2, I used the Marquee tool to clean up the wall.

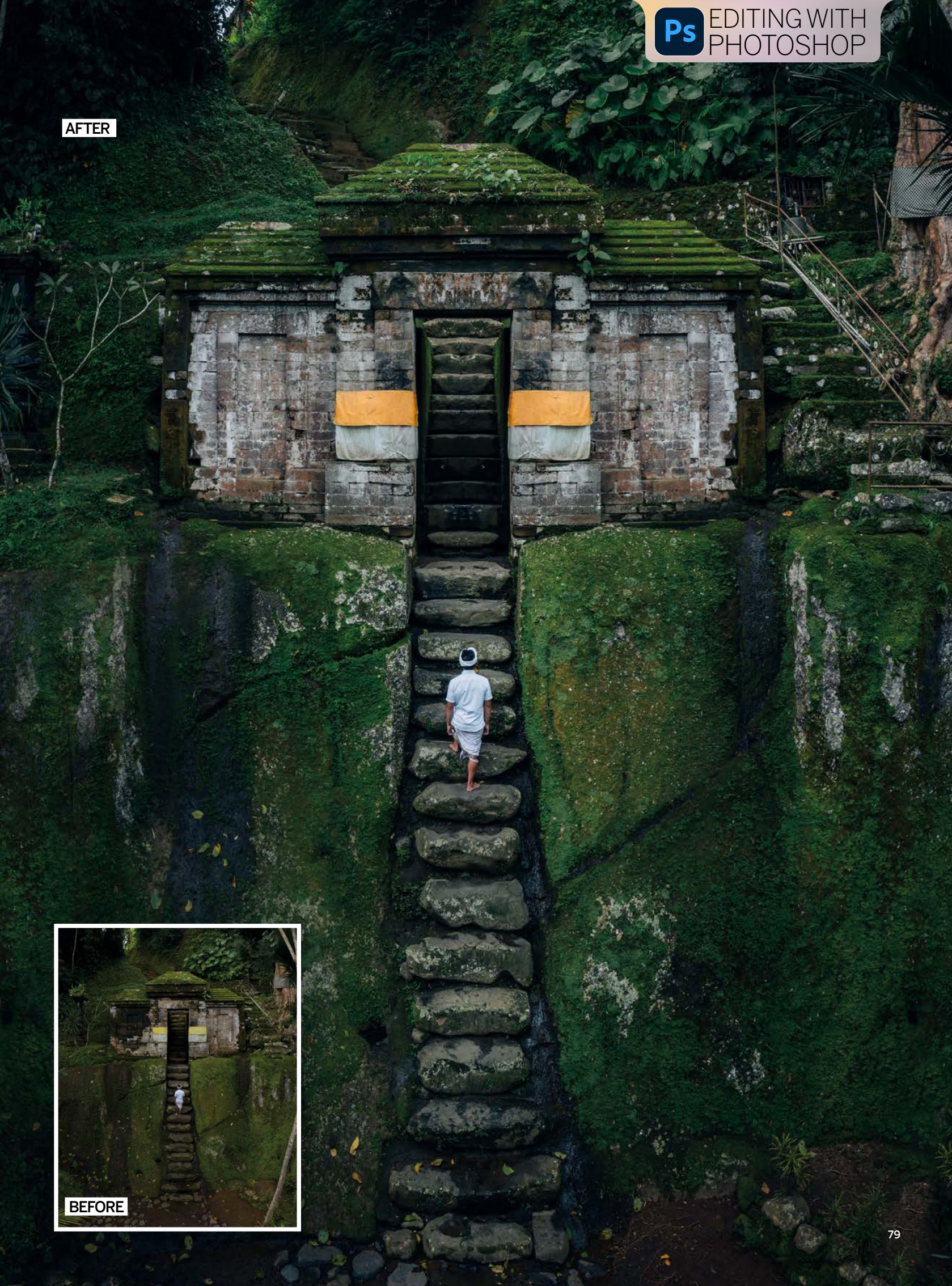


6 Refine the patch Using a layer mask, refine the edges of the duplicated detail, to make it blend with the surrounding texture. Use a large, soft brush and paint black on a white mask to erase the hard edges.

AFTER



BEFORE



Two ways to replace the sky

Follow these techniques to quickly and easily change the sky in a shot



Replacing the sky is a basic use of Photoshop, and it always comes in handy if you are working in Lightroom to just jump into Photoshop and change the sky. But as you may know, there is a new feature in Photoshop that can be used to do this. Here I will show you how you can

quickly change a sky, plus another way that I think is more efficient and gets better results. If you learn these two techniques, you will be able to change skies much more quickly and get pleasing results in a variety of different scenes. As with most editing processes, it is a matter of personal preference which you use.

Inset

Boring sky

This mountain view is a nice composition, but the sky is sadly lacking and is rather bland. In Photoshop we can amend this, and the reflection

Main

Sunset mountain

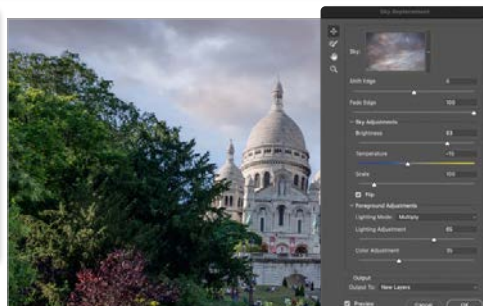
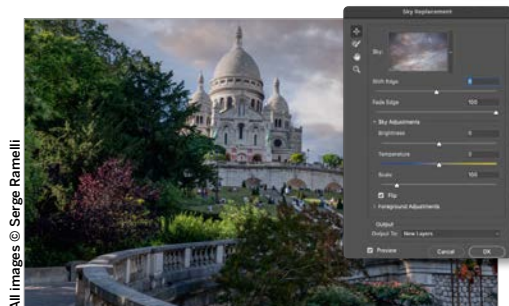
I love the sunset effect here – it makes the photo even more spectacular

AFTER

BEFORE

What you'll be using

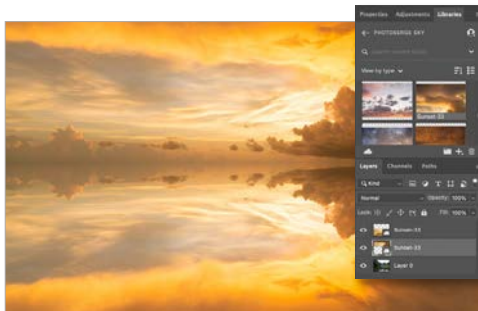
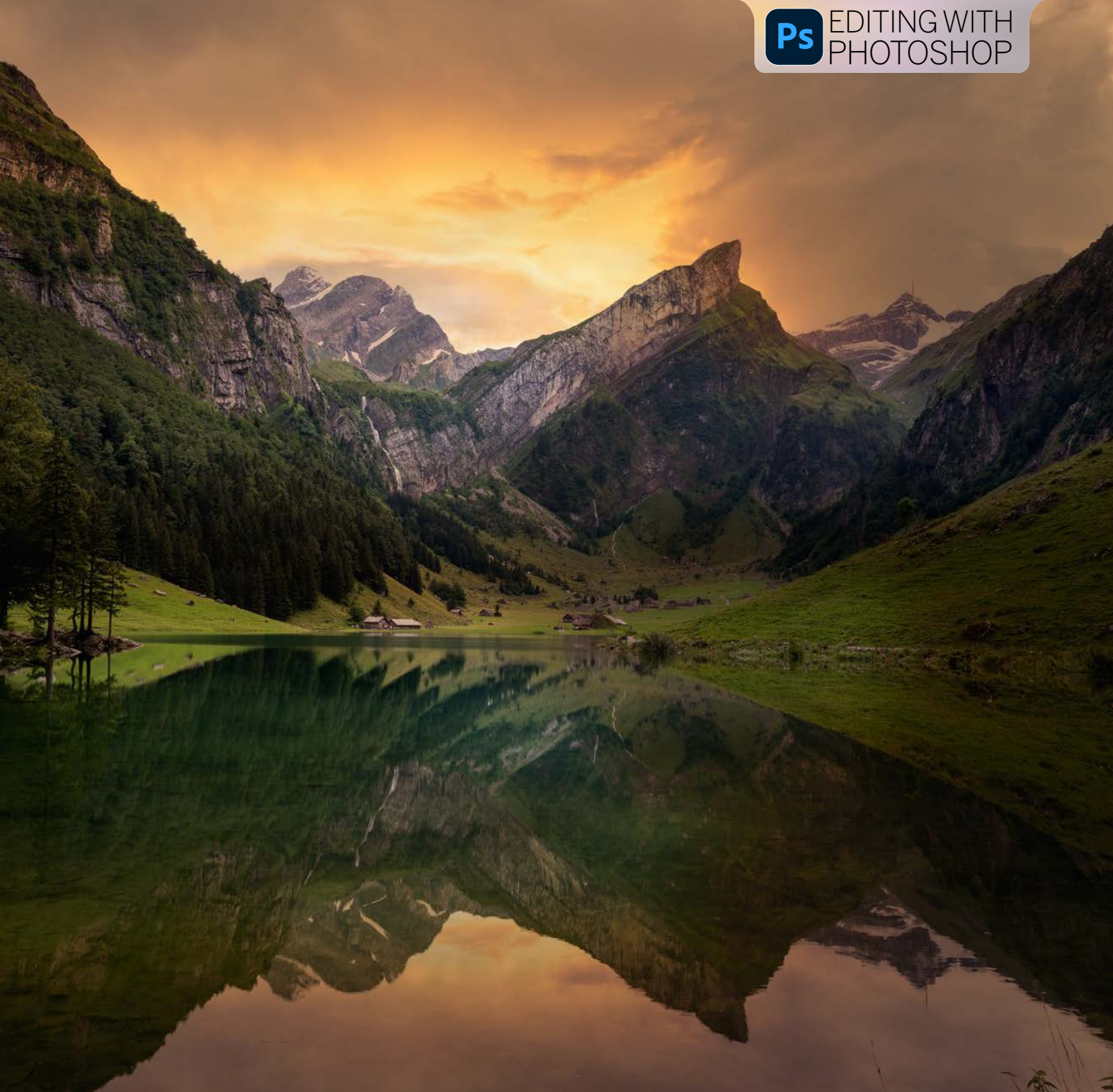
- Sky Replacement feature
- Dodge tool
- Quick Select tool
- Gaussian Blur filter



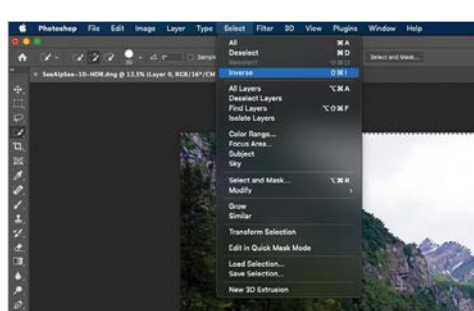
1 Pick a sky After retouching in Lightroom, right-click > Edit in Photoshop. Then go to Edit > Sky Replacement. Select a sky you like (you can upload your own skies). Flip your sky to match the direction of the light.

2 Adapt the sky Use the settings to set your sky as desired. Here we set Brightness to 53, Temperature to -15. For the Lighting mode, use Multiply and set Output to New Layer so that it's easy to modify.

3 Avoid fringe If you see a fringe around your subject, you can select the Sky Mask, hit Cmd/Ctrl+L, and change the Levels using the slider. You can also select the Dodge tool and brush over it to reduce the fringe effect.



1 Remove fringe This method works if you have reflections in your image. Drag a sky onto your photo and duplicate the layer. Vertically flip the copy, and place it below the sky so that both skies cover the entire photo.



2 Add sky reflection Merge both layers, and use Multiply mode. Go to your first layer, and, using the Quick Select tool, holding the Shift key, select the sky and the reflection. Go to Select and invert it.



3 Remove texture Come back to the sky layer. In the bar menu select Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur > OK. For a natural look, lower the Opacity and create a mask. Using a brush, remove the sky texture from your subject.

Main
Kanawa Island, Indonesia

Creating an Orton effect on this photo has really softened it and brought out the colours beautifully. I've added a mystical feel to the photo which replicates how I felt about the place when I was there

Create a dreamy effect

Introduce this trendy editing style for great impact

 Creating a dreamy effect, otherwise known as the Orton effect, gives your images the feel of a watercolour painting. It's a way of softening your images, and really complements my particular style of

editing. The Orton effect works particularly well with landscape photos, and it removes the overly sharp and sometimes digital look that the latest cameras can produce. With care, this method properly balances detail and individuality.

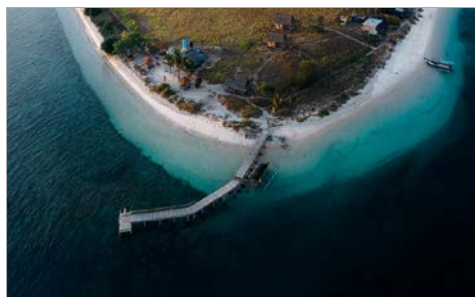
What you'll be using

- Duplicating layers
- Tone curve
- Gaussian Blur
- Brightness/contrast
- Opacity



Left
Kanawa Island, Indonesia – before

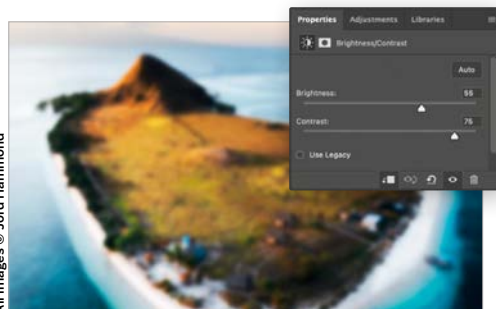
This is one of my favourite photos to come out of the pandemic. The conditions were perfect, and the scenery is dreamlike, so I want to match that with a dreamy edit too



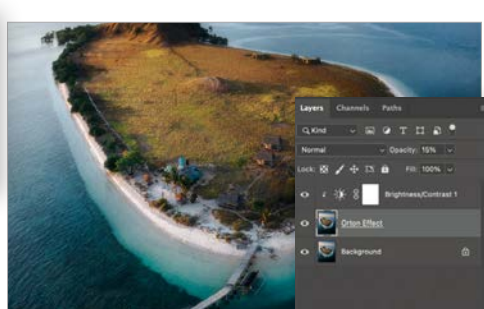
1 Duplicate the layer The first step when creating an Orton glow is to duplicate the layer and rename it 'Orton glow'. This is the layer we will be working on to create the dreamy effect.



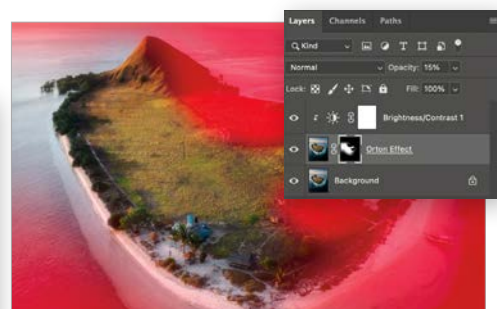
2 Gaussian blur tool Next, we need to add the Gaussian Blur to this layer. Go to Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur. I usually go for between a 25-35 radius, but I'd test this yourself to see what you prefer. Then, hit OK.



3 Increase brightness and contrast Next, we'll increase the brightness to +55 and contrast to +75. Then clip this adjustment to the Orton effect layer below it, so that it doesn't affect the original layer.



4 Reduce the opacity You'll need to reduce the opacity of the Orton effect layer to soften the effect. I would recommend anywhere between 10-20%, depending on your preference.



5 Target the adjustment We will now add a white layer mask. Then, using a black brush at opacity 40%, we will remove some of the effect. I have brushed out the effect from the sky and ocean. And voilà!

AFTER



Turn clouds into mist

Add mist to dark images using just a mobile phone shot of an overcast sky

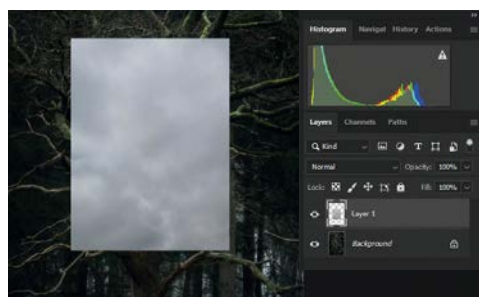


Judging the weather doesn't always go to plan, even when you use several weather services to be as sure as you can that the forecast is correct. When this image was taken, there was fog everywhere except

inside the forest itself. So, using this technique that only works with images made up of mostly darker tones, it's possible to create a reasonably realistic layer of fake mist. As always, subtlety is the key to the most impactful software effects.

What you'll be using

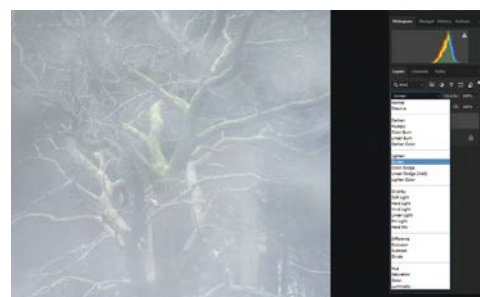
- Copy & Paste
- Transform
- Clipping Mask
- Curves
- Levels
- Blend modes



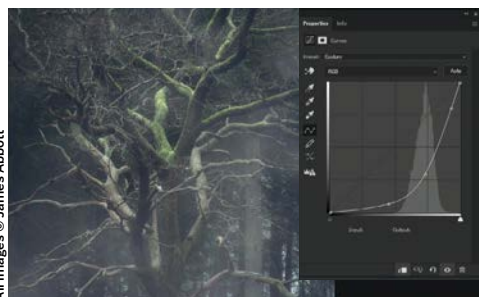
1 Open, Copy & Paste Open your main image and cloudy sky image in Photoshop and click on the tab for the latter. Press Ctrl+C to Copy, click on the tab for the main image and then press Ctrl+V to Paste. If the cloud image was taken on a mobile phone, it may be smaller than the main image.



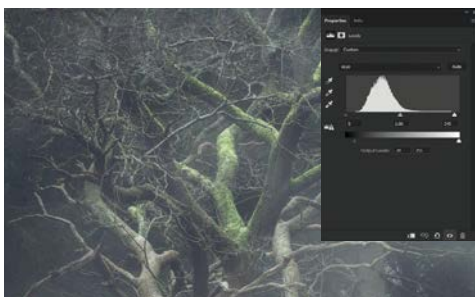
2 Transform the Layer With the cloud image layer active, press Ctrl+T to open the Transform controls. When the bounding box appears, hold down Shift to unconstrain proportions and drag the image beyond the edges of the main image and rotate if you wish. Hit Enter on the keyboard when finished.



3 Add transparency The cloud layer is still solid and needs a degree of transparency so it looks more like mist. Go to the Blending mode dropdown menu that's set to Normal by default and select Screen. The image will still look too opaque but we'll adjust this in the next step.



4 Use Curves Click on the Create new fill or adjustment layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and select Curves. Click on the Clipping Mask icon which is a square and downward arrow. Place three points to create a backwards L shape on the curve to add more transparency.



5 Enhance the mist Create a Levels Adjustment Layer and when the dialogue box opens drag the black Output Levels slider right to around 20. This will lift darker tones and create a hazy look that will help the cloud Layer blend with the main image. For this shot, the white point was also increased to 245.

KEY TIP AN OPTIONAL STEP

Step five is completely optional but it can be used to increase the haziness in the image so there's less of a contrast between the main shot and the overcast sky image.

Above Dark and moody

The moodiness of the shot works well with the tree subtly lit from above, and the dominance of dark tones in the scene make it the ideal candidate for this technique

Right A hint of mist

The non-uniform nature of clouds in an overcast sky make a plain image of the sky taken on any camera a great starting point for creating realistic mist

AFTER



BEFORE

Create a miniature tilt-shift effect

Reproduce the classic tilt-shift shallow depth-of-field look in Photoshop



Tilt-shift lenses are incredibly useful for avoiding converging verticals and controlling the depth of field, but they are also specialist lenses and tend to be fairly niche. Few photographers can justify the expense

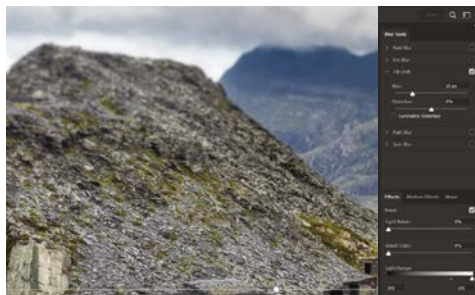
of splashing out on one, but if you would like to create the shallow depth-of-field effect they produce for that 'toy town' look, Photoshop does a pretty good job of mimicking this fun technique. Experiment with image type and blur intensity.

What you'll be using

- Hue/Saturation
- Duplicate Layer
- Tilt-Shift Filter
- Layer Masking
- Curves



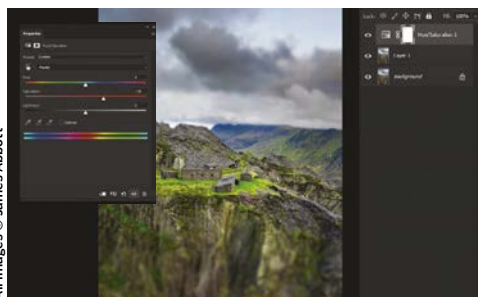
1 Copy the Background Layer Make a copy of the Background Layer where the blur effect can be applied to leave the underlying pixels untouched. To do this, make sure the Background Layer is active and press Ctrl/Cmd+J. Working non-destructively makes it easier to go back and fix any mistakes.



2 Apply the Tilt-Shift Filter Go to Filter>Blur Gallery>Tilt-Shift and drag the centre point to set the sharp area between the two solid lines and then zoom into the image. Hover the mouse over the solid lines and you can expand or contract the area that will remain sharp once the filter is applied.



3 Set blur graduation Zoom out so you can see the whole image. You can now move the dashed line to set the graduation from the sharp centre to full blur outside of the dashed line. Once you're happy with how the guide is set up, set Blur to 45 pixels and click the OK button at the top of the window.



4 Adjust Hue/Saturation Create a Hue/Saturation Adjustment Layer and, with the channels set to Master, increase Saturation to +30 or higher. Reds Saturation was reduced to -50 and Greens Saturation to -5. Greens Hue was set to +15 to make the grass greener. You can also adjust individual channels.



5 Final adjustments At this stage, you can make any additional adjustments as required. For this image, a Curves adjustment Layer was created to lighten the foreground. To hide the effect in the sky, the foreground colour was set to black and painted onto the Layer Mask using a large soft brush.

KEY TIP

SHOOT FROM A HIGH VIEWPOINT

To create the best tilt-shift style images, aim to shoot from a higher vantage point than the scene you want in focus. Shoot from the top of a multi-storey car park, a tall building or a hill. You can use a drone too, but don't forget – stick to the rules.

Insert

Two dimensional

Taken from an elevated position, this photo is perfect for a tilt-shift effect that adds a greater sense of depth and makes the scene look like a model

Main

A miniature scene

By adding the distinctive depth-of-field effect of tilt and shift lenses, the focal point is more prominent, giving it a 'toy town' look

AFTER



BEFORE

LANDSCAPE EDITING MASTERCLASS

Discover the editing secrets behind the most popular multiple exposure landscape photography techniques



Just like football, photography is a game of two halves. On the one hand, you have shooting, where we aim to get everything as close to perfect as possible in-camera to help achieve the best image quality; while on the other there's editing, where we intend to make our images look their very best – the icing on the cake.

Some purists believe that shooting JPEGs is the most faithful approach to photography because editing hasn't been applied, but this is untrue because JPEGs are processed in-

camera according to the picture style set. So, it's always better to take full control yourself rather than leaving image processing to an engineer working for a camera manufacturer.

There are some landscape photography techniques where the shooting and editing stages go hand in hand – the two are inextricably linked – and these techniques are heavily dependent on editing because they involve shooting multiple exposures to ultimately improve and increase detail in several different ways.

Focus stacking, HDR photography, panoramas and HDR panoramas are four such landscape techniques. We're going to explain how to shoot each with tutorials on how to process images for the techniques to achieve the most natural results possible. By the end of the tutorials, you'll be able to shoot these techniques individually or combine them to take the level of detail in your landscape shots to new heights, ultimately, giving your shooting and editing skills the shot in the arm they deserve.



Balancing act

As photographers, we're often inclined to put more effort into the shooting side of the image-making process, but editing is just as important

All images © James Abbot

Master focus stacking

Capture exquisite levels of sharpness in your landscapes from the front of the scene to the back

Capturing landscapes that are pin-sharp from just centimetres in front of the camera all the way to the distant horizon may sound like the stuff of dreams, but it's a technique you can use right now to make your landscapes the sharpest they can be.

Focus stacking is a technique that's much more commonly associated with macro photography because it overcomes the problem of an extremely shallow depth of field, even when shooting with a macro lens stopped down to f/11, for instance.

With landscape photography, the foreground interest may be less than a metre away from the lens, while the horizon is several miles away. And the problem

with stopping down the aperture to f/22 to achieve a large depth of field is that diffraction becomes a problem, which is basically a loss of overall image sharpness.

When focus stacking landscapes, you shoot at the lens sweet spot of f/8 or f/11 and take three or four shots focused at different points through the scene but close enough together that the depth of field, or the sharpest parts of each image, overlap one another from one shot to the next. The result is the sharpest image your lens is capable of producing because the exposures were shot at the sharpest aperture of your lens, alongside a depth of field that's much larger than you could ever achieve in a single shot, even at f/22.



Above

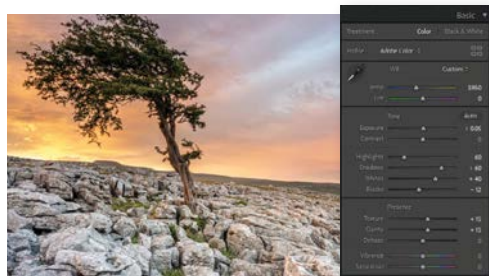
Focus stacking

Each individual exposure exhibits a large depth of field, but the entire scene isn't in sharp focus

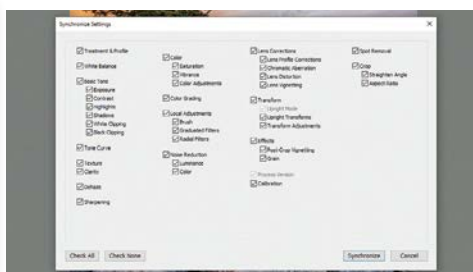
Right

Sharp focus

This scene is pin-sharp from the rocks in the front of the image, all the way to the fells at the back



1 Process the first image Rate your three or four shots with five stars in Lightroom so you can easily identify them, then click on the first image to make it active and apply all adjustments required to process the image. Get the image to the point where you would normally export it to share, print or continue editing in Photoshop.



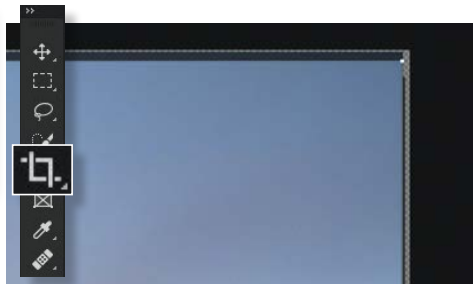
2 Synchronise settings With the first image still active, hold down Shift and left-mouse click on the last image of the set. Click on the Sync button on the right and when the dialogue opens click Check All then Synchronize. Finally, check the Exposure in each image and adjust any as required so that exposure is identical in each image.



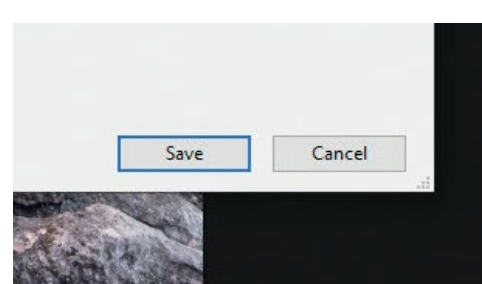
3 Open as Layers Keep all images active, right-mouse click on them and go to Edit In>Open as Layers in Photoshop and when the images load, hold down shift and left-mouse click on the bottom Layer so all are active. Now go to Edit>Auto-Align Layers, make sure Auto is selected and that the Lens Correction options are unchecked before hitting OK.



4 Auto-Blend Layers Go to Edit>Auto-Blend Layers and when the dialogue opens, Photoshop will have automatically identified that the Blend Method required is Stack Images. Make sure Seamless Tones and Colors is checked, Content Aware Fill Transparent Areas is unchecked and press OK. Photoshop will now blend the images.



5 Crop the image There will be transparent areas at the edges of the image where the Layers have been aligned and merged. Press C on the keyboard to activate the Crop Tool and set the crop ratio to Original Ratio. Left-mouse click and drag the guide over the image before zooming in to fine-tune positioning. Hit Enter to crop.



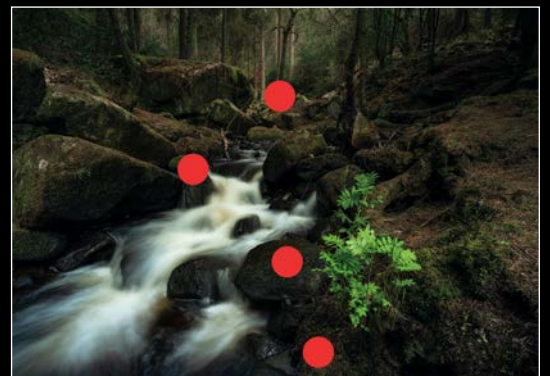
6 Save the image Click on the menu at the top-right of the Layers panel represented by four horizontal lines and select Flatten Image. You can now apply any image editing or adjustments using Layers to complete editing, so you can either save the image as a TIFF and reduce the bit depth to 8 Bits/Channel or simply save as a JPEG.



Points of focus

When focusing your three or four shots you can use autofocus and you simply need to focus at the front of the scene and then gradually further back with each subsequent shot. Three is often enough exposures, but shooting four will provide more depth of field overlap and increase the chance that the images will blend successfully during editing. Any missed planes of focus in the scene results in 'blobs' of blur in the merged image which can sometimes be cloned out, but not always.

In the image right, the points of focus have been highlighted in red and you'll notice how they gradually become further away from the previous point – this approach works well with landscape scenes. When focus stacking use Live View to compose the shot and to set AF points; if your camera has a touchscreen LCD you can set focus points by tapping the desired point of focus in the scene.



Achieve natural HDR

Create HDR images that present high-contrast scenes which look natural

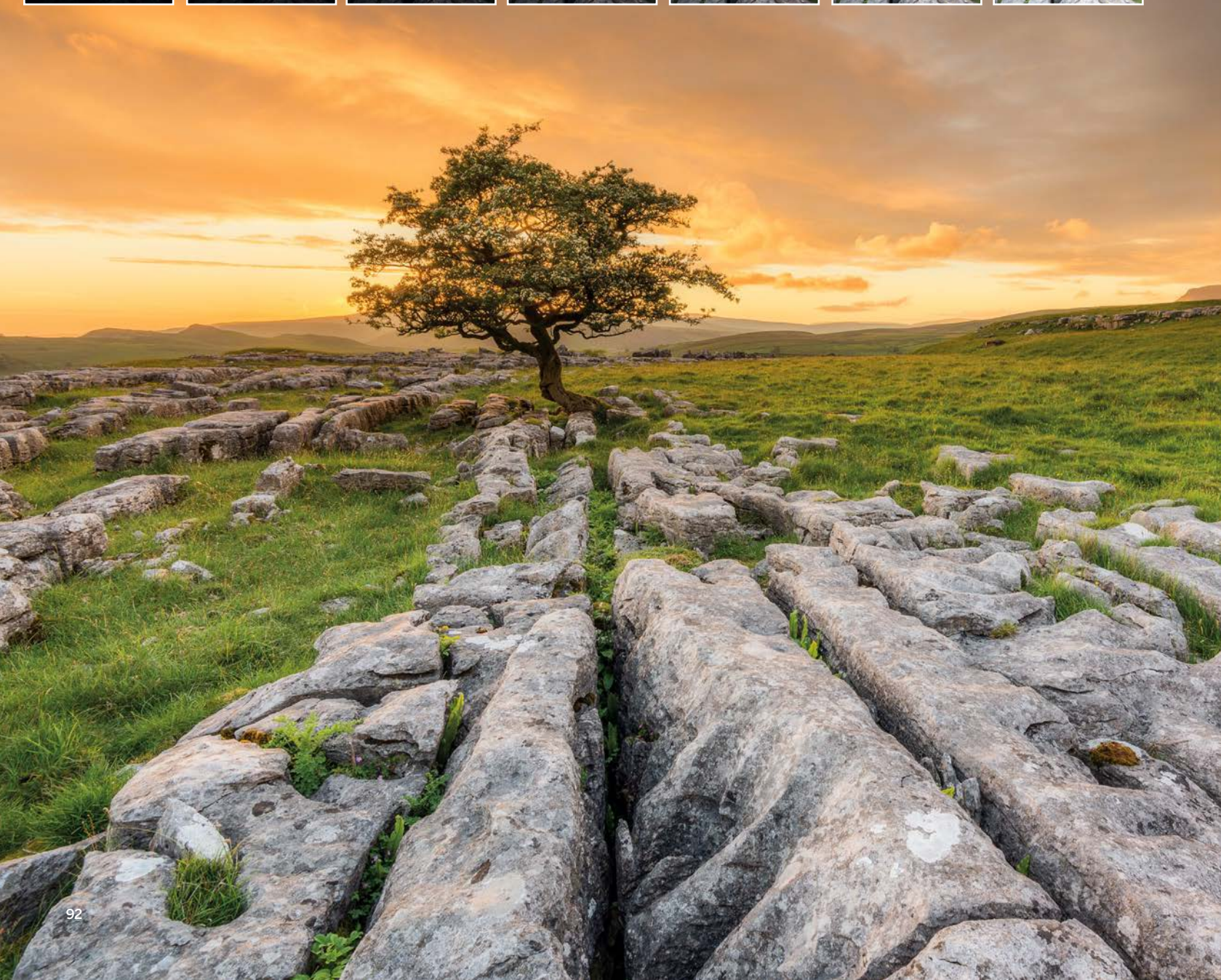
HDR photography needs little or no introduction these days, but for those unfamiliar with the technique it's simply a method of capturing detail from the deepest shadows through to the brightest highlights by shooting three, five, seven or nine bracketed exposures. The bracketed exposures are shot at two-stop increments if shooting three and five shots, or one-stop increments for seven or nine exposures. These are then merged into a

single image where, through processing, detail is revealed throughout the scene.

The advantage of HDR photography is that it can eliminate the need to use ND grad filters, but it can also be used in conjunction with filters to tackle extremely high-contrast scenes where the sky is considerably brighter than the foreground.

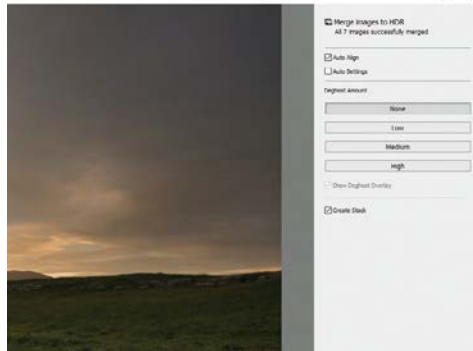
The main problem with HDR photography comes down to editing. The technique

has gained a bad reputation because poor processing technique can result in muddy mid-tones and the introduction of artefacts such as halos along high-contrast subject edges. The thing is, processing HDR images in a way where the application of the technique is so natural that it's essentially invisible to the viewer is easily achieved, and that's what we're going to focus on here. Read on to find out how...



Reduce the variables

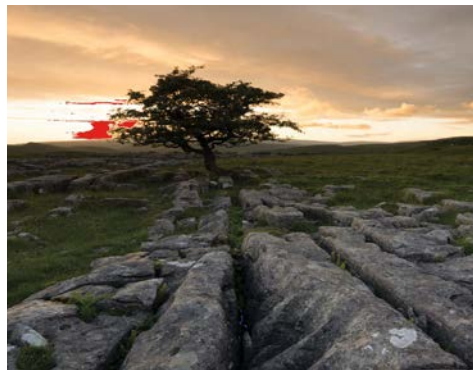
The key to success when shooting HDR photography is to reduce the number of camera variables that can change to just one. Shutter speed. Aperture, ISO, focus and all other settings must remain fixed, while the camera is securely attached to a tripod to avoid movement between exposures. Bracketing the exposures is then achieved by changing the shutter speed, and the best way to do this is to set the camera to automatic exposure bracketing (AEB) in aperture priority mode. With AEB, you can set the number of exposures and how many stops apart these are and most cameras allow for up to five exposures to be shot. Alternatively, shoot in manual mode and change the shutter speed manually, or shoot in aperture priority using exposure compensation to set the bracketed exposures.



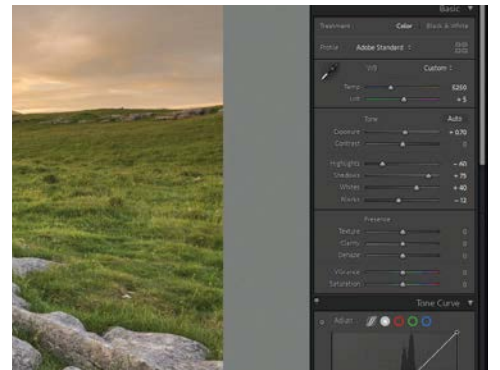
1 Merge to HDR Left-mouse click on the first bracketed exposure of the set in the Develop Module in Lightroom, hold down Shift and left-mouse click on the last image. Right-mouse click on the selected images and go to Photo Merge>HDR. Make sure Auto Align, Create Stack and Show Deghost Overlay are checked, leaving Auto Settings unchecked.



2 Remove ghosting By default, the Deghost Amount is set to none so click on High. If there is ghosting a red mask appears over the image. If it does, click on medium to see if the same amount is highlighted; if it is try Low. The idea is to use the lowest setting possible to remove the most ghosting if present. If there's no ghosting, select None.



3 Show clipping Click on OK once finished with the merge and Lightroom creates a new DNG file at the top of an image stack. This file contains data from all the exposures in the merge. Click on the squares in the top corners of the histogram to show shadow and highlight clipping, then apply Lens Corrections.



4 Recover detail Adjust Exposure so the mid-tones are correctly exposed and apply Highlights and Shadows but don't push them to the maximum. Here, Highlights were set to -60 and Shadows +75. Boost the whites and reduce blacks to maintain contrast. Here, Whites were set to +40 and Blacks -12.



5 Enhance detail At this stage you can apply Texture to accentuate textures in the scene, and Clarity to increase mid-tone contrast which has the effect of enhancing detail as a whole. Keeping these sliders below +30 will help to maintain a natural look. Now, you can go back to step four to make fine-tuned adjustments, and after the next step, if necessary.



6 Apply localised adjustments You may have blown highlights and clipped shadows, represented by red and blue respectively. Alternatively, you may simply want to lighten or darken specific areas of a scene and this is where we can use the Graduated and Radial Filters along with the Adjustment Brush. Focus mostly on Exposure and adjust Shadows and Highlights minimally.

Merge panoramas

Present a wider view that's closer to human vision by stitching a series of portrait images into a pano

We've all become accustomed to 16:9 ratios and wider thanks to cinema and, of course, modern widescreen televisions. So, while panoramic landscape photos have been around since the days of film, it's perhaps now that they look more natural than ever to us. These are easy images to shoot, but with the right editing they can look flawless.

Panoramic images are often best shot with focal lengths between 35mm and 200mm to avoid perspective distortion from shooting with a wide-angle lens. A longer lens requires you to shoot further away from your subject, so even though the field of view is narrower than a wide-angle, once the individual

exposures are stitched together you still achieve a wide view of the scene. An L-bracket is great for shorter lenses, while telephotos will have a tripod collar for tripod mounting.

The best way to shoot panoramas is with the camera in portrait orientation. Not only does this hugely increase the resolution of the final image, but it also simply provides a better result than shooting in landscape orientation where the image becomes too short and wide. By overlapping each image with the previous by a third of the frame, the constituent images will stitch together seamlessly. Let's take a look at how to stitch a series of individual images together.



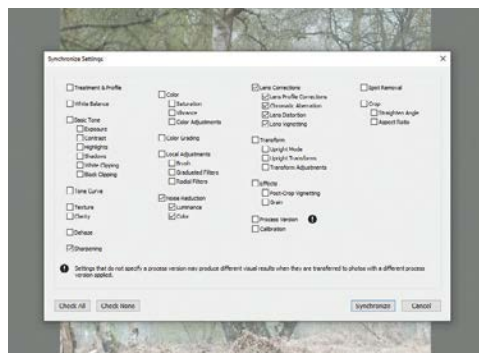
Inset images
Before stitching
Individually, the images that make up the pano are unremarkable but that changes once they're stitched together

Above
Flawless finish
While any image can be cropped to a panoramic format, none will contain as much detail as a true pano

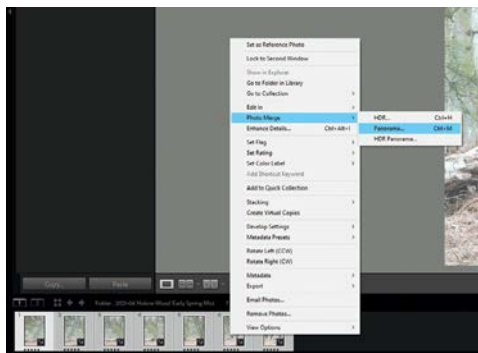
Level your tripod

You can shoot panoramas handheld, you can shoot them with a monopod or tripod, but to get the most bang for your camera's megapixels, you have to make sure that the camera is perfectly level for each exposure. By doing this, you'll reduce the amount of cropping that's required during editing, which ultimately gives you more room for cropping.

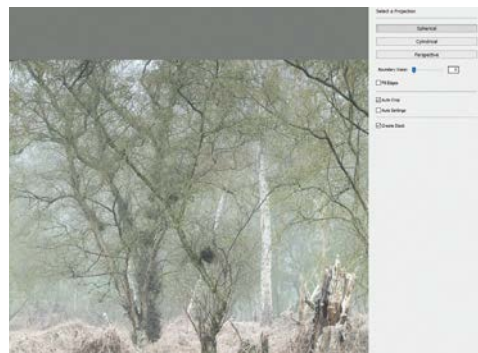
Of course, shooting with the camera mounted on a tripod is half of the battle, but to get the most level images you must ensure that the top of the tripod – where the centre column is inserted, is level. Most tripods have a spirit level in this area that you can use to level off the legs, which may need to be adjusted individually. Once level, even if the camera is pointing up or down slightly, your shots will be level as long as the horizon is straight in the frame.



1 Apply Lens Corrections Before we combine the images into a pano, apply Lens Corrections. Check Remove Chromatic Aberration and Enable Profile Corrections, select all the exposures and press Sync. When the dialogue opens click on Check None then select Lens Corrections. Select noise reduction and Transform if you change these.



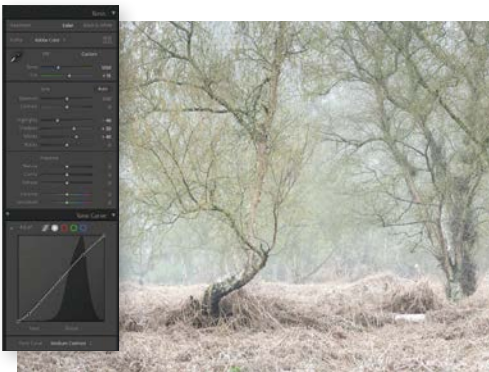
2 Merge to Panorama Don't change any settings other than those mentioned in the previous step, although if you do it won't cause any problems. I prefer to edit panoramas as a whole rather than as individual images. All the shots should still be highlighted and active – right-mouse click on them and go to Photo Merge>Panorama.



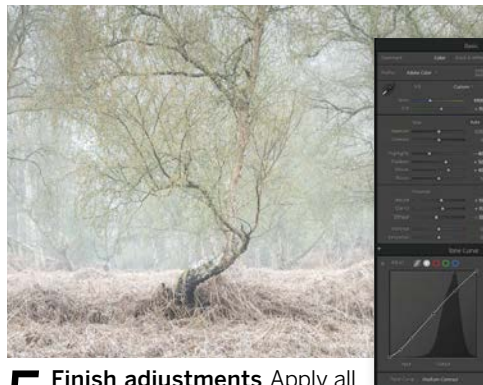
3 Choose a projection When the dialogue window opens the Projection will be set to Spherical by default, but try the other two to see which you prefer. Boundary Warp fills empty space around the image but can distort images so take care with it. Auto Crop can be used alone or with light use of Boundary Warp. Uncheck Auto Settings and hit OK.



“The best way to shoot panoramas is with the camera in portrait orientation. This hugely increases the resolution of the final image”



4 Set basic adjustments If you checked Create Stack in the last step, the merged pano DNG will sit at the top of the image stack, otherwise it will sit on its own and will usually appear next to the original images. Apply all basic adjustments to the image as a whole starting with White Balance, Exposure, Shadows, Highlights, Whites and Blacks.



5 Finish adjustments Apply all adjustments as required to get the image looking how you like it, and this includes using the local adjustment tools such as the Graduated filter too. With this image taken on a misty morning, reducing Dehaze to -10 softens the tones along with accentuating the mist already present in the scene slightly.



6 Crop the image We had Auto Crop checked during the merging process, but this doesn't always produce the best crop so it's worth checking what Lightroom has done. Also, it focuses on cropping out empty space and not on the overall composition. Click on the Crop Overlay icon and then on the lock for a custom crop. Adjust and hit Enter to commit.



Blend HDR panoramas

Combine two multiple exposure techniques to create an image full of detail

Take your multiple exposure skills to the next level by combining HDR and panoramas into a single image. It's less complicated than it sounds and the process of shooting and editing all the individual exposures provides the perfect foundation for more complicated

techniques such as focus stacked HDR images. Learning how both the shooting and editing processes involve linear steps is essential for success.

Any technique that requires multiple exposures to be shot can seem like an

unnecessary faff, but all techniques are incredibly easy to apply and always produce the desired result of increasing detail in some way. Capturing HDR panoramas adds a level of complexity to shooting, but by using automatic exposure bracketing you can shoot



1 Highlight images In Lightroom's Library Module, find your HDR pano images and use the Color Labels to mark each set of three bracketed exposures, alternating between two colours to make each set easily identifiable. Click on Survey View and select the first set of exposures and check they're the correct three images before the next step.



2 Merge to HDR Right-mouse click on the selected images and go to Photo Merge>HDR. For more information about HDR processing, we feature multiple tutorials in *Digital Photographer*. For each HDR merge, leave Create Stack unchecked. Repeat the process for each section of the pano until all HDR sections have been merged to new DNGs.



3 Select sections Before combining the images into a pano, apply Lens Corrections to each by checking Remove Chromatic Aberration and Enable Profile Corrections individually or by syncing settings between them. Next, right mouse click one of the selected images and go to Photo Merge>Panorama where the pano will render.



an HDR pano almost identically to a regular pano – you just have to wait for the three or more exposures to fire off before rotating the tripod head.

When it comes to editing, Lightroom provides the ability to combine HDR panos in a single dialogue but this isn't recommended. When using the HDR Panorama Photo Merge option, deghosting isn't applied to the HDR images which can often result in the ghosting of moving subjects, so it's always best to process the HDR images first and then merge the resulting images into the pano, which is exactly what we'll do here.

Minimise bracketed exposures

HDR panos can require many exposures to be taken to cover the bracketed shots at each step of the pano, so it makes sense to limit the HDR shots to three bracketed exposures; one shot exposed for the mid-tones in the scene, another two stops underexposed and a third two stops overexposed. In most situations, this will be more than adequate to capture detail from the shadows to the highlights.

Shooting more bracketed exposures is, of course, possible, but doing this results in many more images to deal with, taking up storage space and computer processing power for little gain in this particular situation. But, if the level of contrast in the scene between the shadows and highlights is greater than four stops, shoot five bracketed exposures at two stop increments. This will drastically increase the number of images you'll take but will allow you to capture the full dynamic range of the scene.



Above left, inset shots

Multiple exposures

The number of images required for this image totals 21 exposures – seven sections of the pano bracketed with three exposures

Above left, main shot

Natural-looking detail

This pano was taken with the lens at 35mm which has resulted in a natural-looking perspective while HDR has maintained detail throughout the scene



4 Merge to Panorama The Projection will be set to Spherical by default, but try the other two to see which looks best. Boundary Warp fills empty space around the image but can distort images so take care with it. For full information about processing panoramic images in Lightroom, we also run regular projects in *Digital Photographer Magazine*.



5 Process the image Once the new pano DNG is created, select it and move over to the Develop Module to process the image. Apply all processing as necessary, both globally and using the localised adjustment tools. Just remember you won't need to apply Lens Corrections because these were applied to the individual HDR section images.



6 Crop the image Click on the Crop Overlay icon to activate the Crop Tool and then click on the lock for a custom crop so you're not fixed to a ratio. Adjust the guide to obtain the strongest possible composition and hit Enter to commit. At this stage, you can export the image for further editing in Photoshop or to share online or print.

STUDIO FREE MULTI-LIGHT PORTRAITS

Create professional grade studio-type lighting in confined locations, using only speedlights and reflectors

Difficulty level: Advanced

Time taken: 2 hours

All images © Peter Fenech



While having a photo studio can be a great benefit to a business, not every photographer chooses to invest in one. Many prefer to work remotely when they do not require studio lights often enough to justify the cost of renting a space. Even professionals who do have a fixed-base studio will occasionally have to work without the freedom that such a space can offer.

For both commercial and individual clients, you may find yourself shooting in their office or even their own home, environments that are far from ideal with regards to ambient lighting and the available space to work. Low ceilings, cramped conditions and no large

expanses of seamless wall make capturing a portrait that looks like it was shot in a dedicated studio incredibly challenging. This is especially true when shooting more than a headshot – a shoulder or full-length portrait.

One solution is to learn how to balance the light from off-camera flashes for the close quarters of a small room and to identify potential sources of colour contamination. These can then be excluded from the immediate environment of the subject.

Let's take a look at how to create a moody portrait image using only two or three remote speedlights, small-scale light modifiers and a restricted textured background.

What you'll need

- Tripods/light stands
- Multiple speedlights
- Speedlight softbox
- Radio triggers
- White board
- Zoom lens

Right

Dramatic simplicity

Even without using strobes, it is possible to create wide, soft and sharp, narrowly-focused lighting effects. Here, the texture of a wall was used as an asset to add depth



Shooting steps

1 Set camera height Shooting in confined locations may already mean using a wider focal length than is ideal, so we need to avoid distorting the subject any further. Raise the camera to eye level to enable perpendicular shooting. Where you can't extend the tripod legs, raise the centre column.

2 Exclude environment There is a large red surface nearby in our shot, so we have to take care to prevent colour spill. We achieved this by covering it with black material. We also needed to convey the impression of a larger space, so we zoomed in to cut the room detail.

3 Set the exposure With all flashes off, focus the subject and manually set the exposure to cut ambient light. Choose the aperture first, starting around f/8-11, then adjust shutter speed accordingly. Aim for an almost black frame, as this indicates the dominant light source will be flash.

4 Activate main light Turn on the main flashgun with your softbox attached. Start at 1/16th power to avoid blowing highlights in the confined environment and over-lighting the room. Leave your exposure set and move the flash as close to the subject as possible, tuning the output accordingly.

5 Add key light Activate your second flash and aim it at the subject from behind, at a 45° angle. Deactivate your main light again to easily visualise the rim lighting effect and select the ideal ratio. Set the zoom to between 50 and 105mm. Watch out for lens flare.

6 Adjust fill If one side of the face looks too dark, place a white reflective surface close to the subject, at around head height. Here, we used a wood cutoff as it was easier to position. We also added a third speedlight at low power to lift the shadows.



ZOOM LENS

A 24-70mm or 17-55mm is ideal for working in confined locations. Primes are restricting here

RIM LIGHT

This can be a more basic flashgun as, in this case, less output control is needed than for the main

MAIN LIGHT

If your speedlights aren't all the same model, choose one with the maximum power control for your main light

Diffuser

Use this to soften the light from your main flash to avoid hotspots and blown highlights

Triggers

IR triggers can be used in small spaces, but radio models still offer great reliability

The setup

Neutral location

Maintain controlled lighting by placing your subject away from coloured surfaces. Choose an area of the house or office with the fewest coloured surfaces and the most white or grey surroundings. For this shot, we picked a corner with a white wall for the subject to stand against and a white door that could be moved to both reposition the rim light and act as a makeshift V-flat, reflecting some light back towards the subject and limiting the amount of spill. We feathered the main light to illuminate the subject and add a subtle spotlight to the background while limiting colour shifts from reflected light.



Edit the shot

1 Lens corrections Start by applying a distortion correction to help mitigate the effects of using the wider-than-ideal focal length, which was required to include enough of the subject in the frame. Equally, look to avoid stretching the subject with these corrections. Crop the image to taste.

2 Soften hotspots Brush with negative Clarity to soften skin detail slightly and also to blend the variances in brightness. Use a feathered Radial Filter to reduce the visibility of bright spots on the background. Conversely, use increased Clarity and Highlights to bring out hair detail.

3 Control shadows Using a large, soft brush in RAW editing software, lift any remaining deep shadows on the face to balance the exposure further. If this brings out any noise, brush over the area again with some light noise reduction. Avoid global brightness adjustment, as this could change the whole background shade.

4 Local sharpening With a textured background, it can be difficult to separate the subject, especially in a small space and when stopped down. Adding some targeted sharpening to the eyes, using the Sharpen Tool, can help make the overall subject look crisper and give the shot more depth.

5 Extend background To give the subject some breathing room, extend the canvas using the Crop Tool and then apply Content Aware to fill the area. We also sampled another area of background, copied this to a new layer and flipped it to match the light gradient.

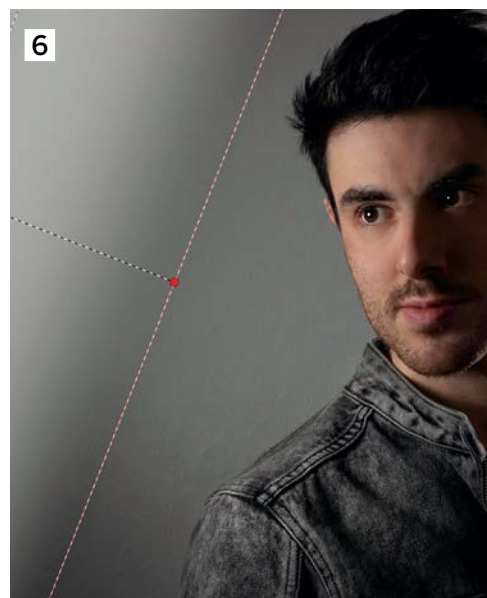
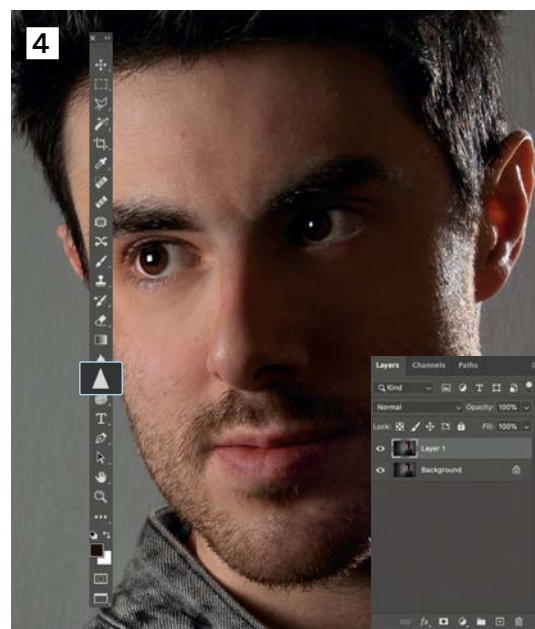
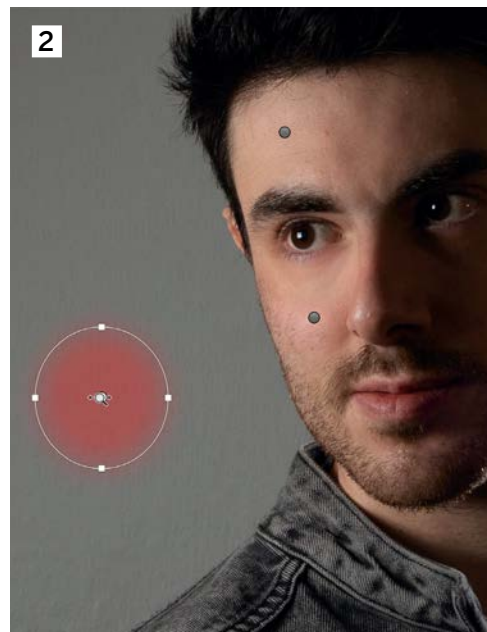
6 Retouch environment Next, we added a further gradient to the background, for a more natural light fall-off. We then used the Spot Healing Tool to remove any wallpaper seams and signs of wear. Desaturating a duplicated layer and masking this removed any colour variance from reflected light.

Right insert Available space

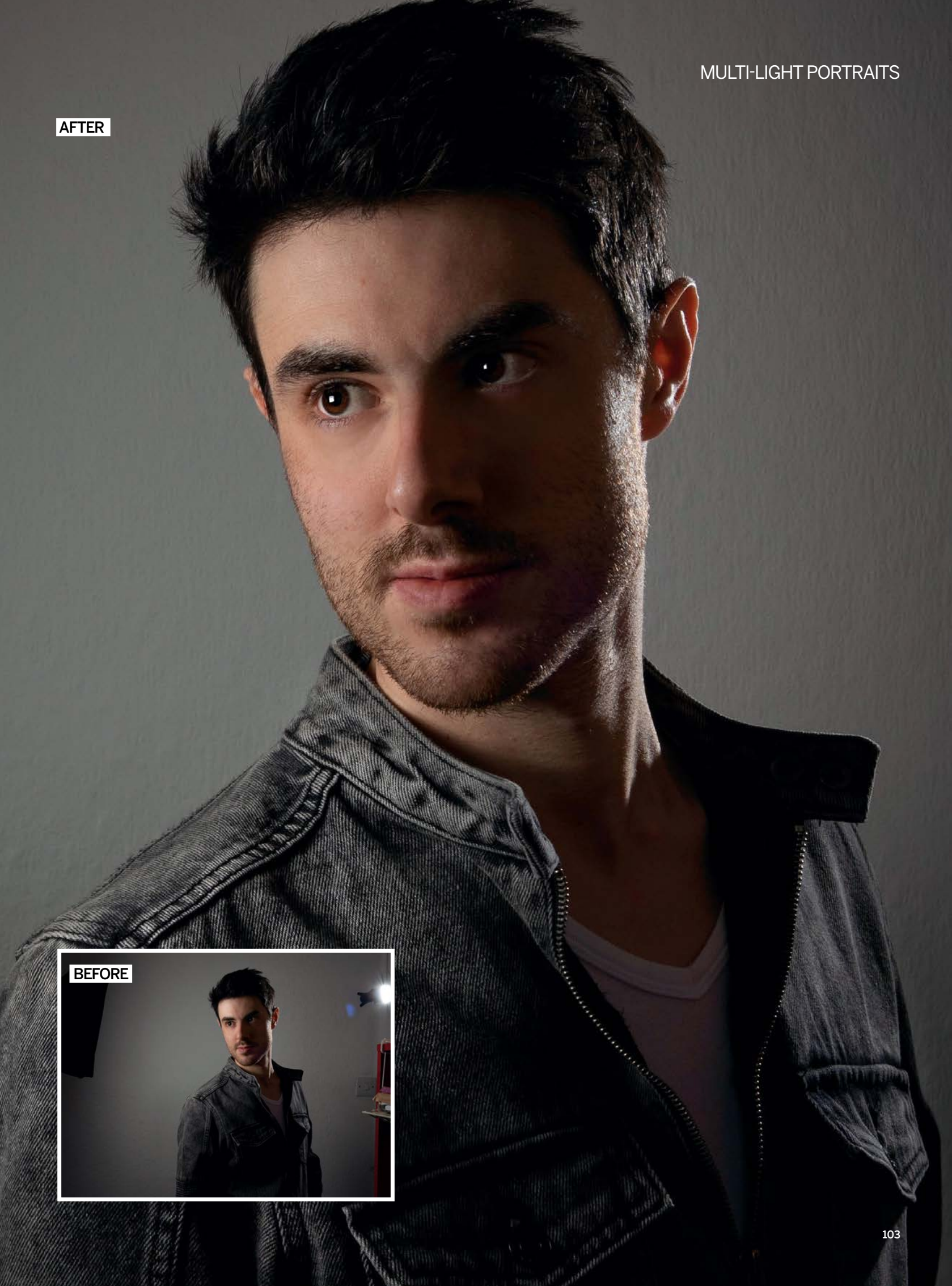
With little separation between camera and subject, it was difficult to use a longer focal length, which added unwanted room detail. There are also some exposure irregularities on the face

Right Room to breath

Overpowering ambient light and extending the background creates the impression of space and results in a believable studio-like lighting style



AFTER



BEFORE



Pictured

Natural blend

Compositing is often seen as a digital art but it has practical applications for photographers in every genre. With sufficient care, the software process should be invisible

© Jeremy Cram Photography/Moment Open via Getty Images

CREATIVE COMPOSITES

Blending image components is an art form. Learn the skills needed to light, shoot and edit composite images to control colour and detail



Compositing is actually not a new concept – it has been a part of the photo editing process since the days of film photography. In decades past, it was still possible to seamlessly blend image components together in the dark room, only this was done by physical means, rather than electronic. With the onset of digital imaging and photo-editing software such as Adobe Photoshop, the possibilities for believable image blends are more accessible than ever before.

The potential uses are wide-reaching and in the modern marketplace, there is an almost insatiable appetite for photorealistic compositing work. From environmental portraiture to product photography, landscapes, advertising and property, it is a skill that finds uses in almost every line of contemporary genres.

Compositing is a broad term, covering everything from simple sky replacement – a step taken by landscape photographers for as long as photography has been around – to high-end selections and rendering. In some cases, the use of

computer-generated elements blurs the boundaries between photography and digital art. While this can be off-putting to many professional photographers, far from being a purely artistic endeavour, it is a highly pervasive style trend.

Getting to grips with compositing will not only open up practical benefits but can also lend a particular look to images, which can help set your work apart from the competition and generate demand for your commercial imaging. So, let's explore the essential skills you'll need to become a compositing expert.

LIGHTING DIRECTION

With the same shot, but in different lighting, rearranging elements through compositing can 'improve' the composition of any given scene

WIDER RANGE

Blending multiple exposures allows us to manually control the range of tones visible in an image

Why create composites?

Learn the practical and creative reasons for blending multiple image elements

At the extreme end of the artistic scale, compositing work can produce highly visible blends and stylised images. Many photographers who focus on this type of work are not trying to produce seamless shots, where the boundaries between each component part are well hidden. Instead, they choose to embrace the less than natural colour and lighting continuity for creative images which stand apart from traditional concepts of photography.

While this may initially seem unappealing to a photographer, the look produced is more familiar than you might imagine, appearing

in cinematic works, such as film posters or artwork used in the music industry.

In many other day-to-day compositing applications, however, we find ourselves working to match the lighting and colour of each composite element, to create final images which look like a single shot. If done correctly, this allows us to separate image elements and shoot them in isolation for combining at a later stage. This is ideal for product photography or group portraits, where lighting the complete arrangement isn't possible in cramped conditions, or where your lighting is not powerful enough. This way you

can move freely around each object, control the distribution of shadows of every element and piece together the perfect composition.

Location availability is another reason to produce composites. For environmental portraiture, a great background is paramount, but accessing a location at the right time and getting permission to bring a whole shoot on-site can be a challenge. Creating a bank of background images and using them to compile the ideal image in post-processing saves a lot of time and money, not to mention the hassle of bringing models into the field.

Sharpness and detail are further huge benefits of composite work. Instead of shooting a wider frame or a scene, of which each element only occupies a few percent of the coverage, shooting each one close-up reveals more fine detail in high resolution. This is ideal when a client asks for enlargements. Furthermore, having the subject and background as individual components allows rapid background colour changes on command, should your client require variations down the line.



COLOUR CONTROL
It is possible to shoot each image element at the optimal time under ideal lighting and combine them

© Marco Bottigelli/Moment via Getty Images



© JJ Jordan

Left Impossible arrangements
Compositing plays a critical role in product and advertising photography. For images such as this, the deconstructed effect can only really be achieved easily by shooting each element separately

Above Impractical access
For capturing subjects in extreme environments, the safest and most practical way is often to shoot the subject separately in a studio and then the background details in a controlled way later



© Serge Ramelli

“Composites are ideal for product photography or group portraits”

Suitable subjects The ideal subjects for compositing treatment



© Ketut Subiyanto

PORTRAIT LIGHTING
Capturing balanced portrait shots out on location is challenging and sometimes impossible where lighting equipment cannot be carried on site for safety reasons. Shooting the background and then the subject in the studio is a more effective use of time and resources. Larger group shots also benefit.



© Anastasiya Moku

SKY REPLACEMENT
This can be incredibly useful for stock photography where either more or less detail is needed for end use. Photographically, we might replace a bland sky with one that has better defined clouds or colour, while for design purposes, dropping in a seamless blue sky might look better.



© Stein Egliland

PRODUCT DEPTH
Capturing equal sharpness in product arrangements can be difficult, especially without stopping down past f/22 and introducing diffraction. Shooting each element individually offers quality and lighting advantages, while enabling perfect background crafting. Easy recomposition is also possible.

Essential Lighting gear



**CONTROLLED
MAIN LIGHT**
Match the direction,
colour and softness of
your main light to the
expected lighting of the
background for credible
final lighting structure

BACKGROUND LIGHTING
Adjust shade by adding a light or
switching this off. Generally even,
two-light setups provide the most
successful extractions

FLOOR CONTRAST
For full-length portraits ensure you
can easily select the subject's feet
and shadows to believably place
them in a new environment

SUBJECT HEIGHT
Relative angle to the camera can make or break the credibility of the composite. Use stools or boxes if extra height is needed.

RIM LIGHT
This adds a highlight to the edge of the subject providing a little extra contrast from the background for tighter selections

CONTRASTING BACKGROUND
A neutral or chroma background is different enough from the subject to make sharp selections easier and therefore more credible extractions



© Brooke Shaden

Preserve shadows

Make your composite seem more natural by keeping original shadows

One aspect which really gives away the fact an image is a composite is unnatural shadow position. This can be remedied by preserving real shadows from the subject. Shooting on a white background really helps with this, as a selection of the shadow area can be made, copied onto the new background and the blend mode of this layer changed to Multiply. This removes the white and blends the natural shadows onto the underlying texture.

Capture backgrounds

Shoot the composite environment for your subject

One of the challenges of pro composite photography is knowing which elements should be captured first. Which works better – finding a subject to fit a background or a background to match your subject?

In an ideal world, we would have a concept of what the final image will look like when shooting the elements, as this would ensure lighting and colour were aligned throughout the whole process. Though this isn't always possible, we can optimise our working practises to make pulling content elements

together as smooth as possible. Generally speaking, we should approach the image from the perspective of the subject first. Since this is where we want viewers to look, we should get this area right before building the environment around it.

Compositing expert Brooke Shaden explains how even a basic overview of your intended final image can make the process more efficient and streamlined. “Before you begin, or as you create, try to envision the final image. Knowing what you’re aiming for,

and why you’re aiming for it, will inform your decisions about location, props, wardrobe, subject, colour, composition and more,” she says. “Pay attention to every detail, but especially the height of your camera in relation to the objects you’re photographing, lighting – including temperature, direction, and harshness – and focal length.”

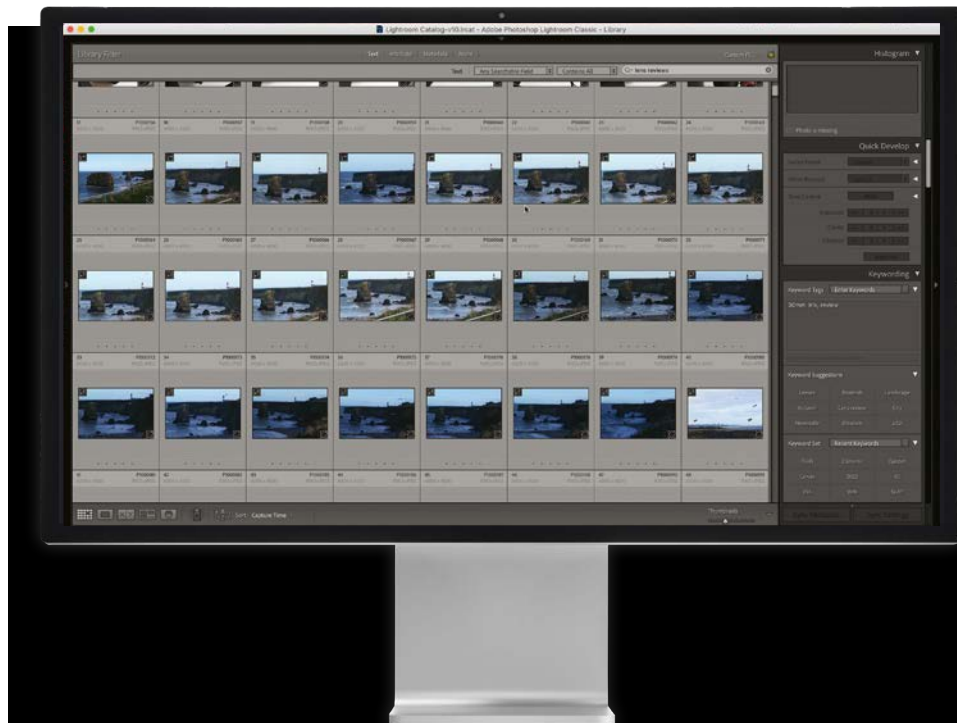
When shooting your background, the trick is to maximise your creative options as much as possible. Shooting RAW is a must, as this will enable you to make extreme colour and exposure adjustments. This can be useful when building collections of environmental images for future use. In pro compositing, small variations can be your friend, as minor changes to image parameters between files in a sequence allow you to quickly find the perfect arrangement of components.



Build a background archive

Compile a collection of future background elements

When shooting backgrounds for a specific image or simply when out shooting for non-compositing purposes, try to capture a range of backgrounds and textures that can be used in future compositing projects. Look for walls, lighting elements and neutral locations, which might fit various themes. Car parks and brick walls suit dramatic composites while elegant interior details may benefit future bridal fashion shoots or location portraits. Always shoot multiple angles and focal lengths and place these sequences in collections for easy retrieval.



Shoot your background

Easily and reliably capture the new environment your subject will inhabit



1 Make notes When shooting your subject, write down the details of the subject distance from the camera, focal length used, camera elevation and exposure settings. This allows you to capture backgrounds that are better matched to the final requirements.



2 Adjust camera height Set the height of the camera, relative to the subject. To make this more accurate, place a marker at the expected subject location in the final image and use a tape measure to lock height and assess the angle.



3 Bracket exposures Set your camera to Auto Exposure Bracketing mode and capture a sequence of three or five images, one stop apart. This covers the whole exposure range while reducing the size of the working file, once open in software.



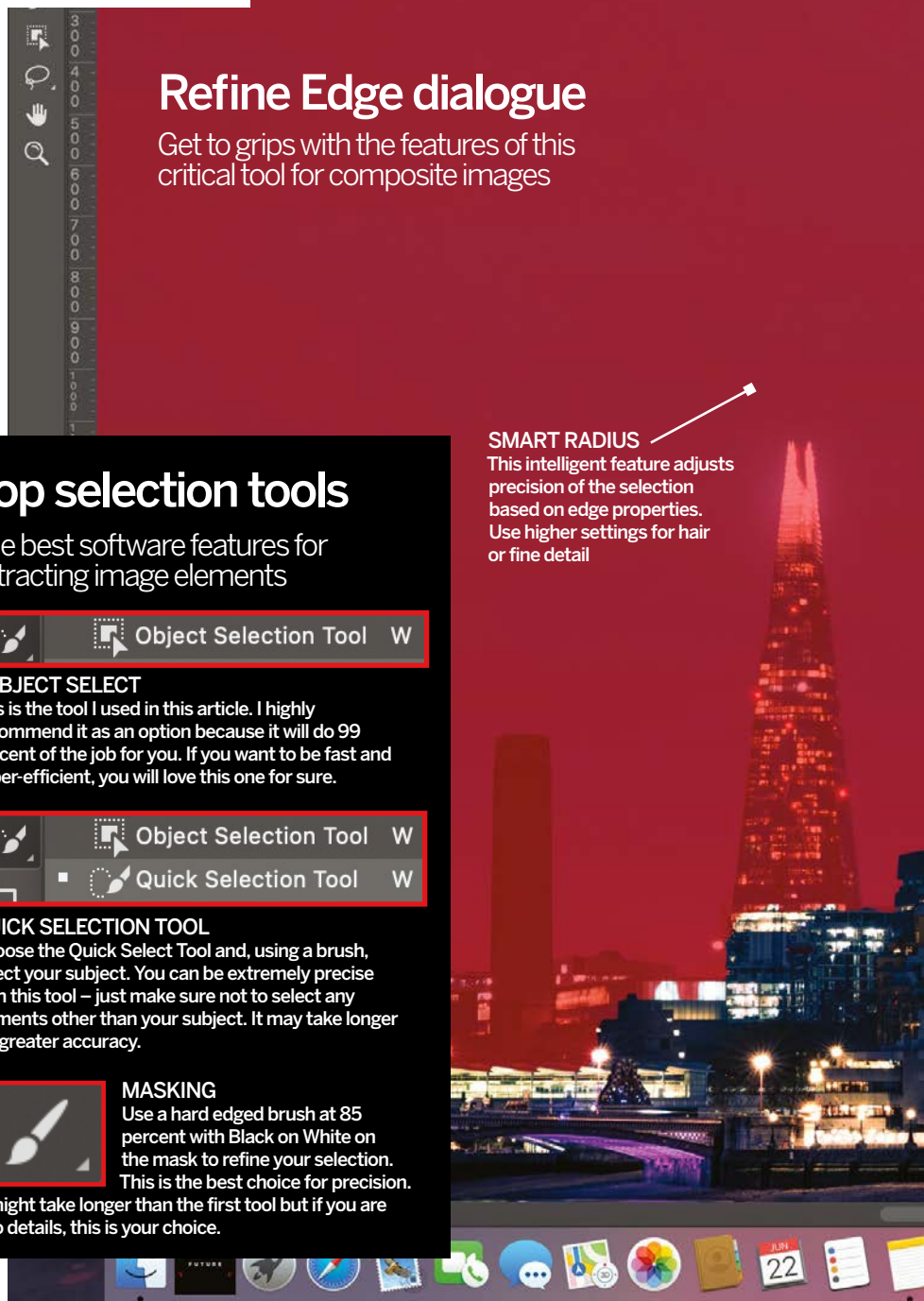
4 Shoot various f/stops Try to capture images with both shallow depth-of-field and deeper focus. This will make it easier to find a background file that better matches the intended style, without having to attempt the use of unnatural blur filters.



5 Capture variations Set the focal length to the same as that used to make an image of the subject. Make some micro-adjustments either side of this to compensate for any imprecision of the markers on the lens barrel and loss of metadata at any stage.



6 Additional lighting Consider using artificial lighting in your background scene to make blending the subject easier. A lighting structure in all areas and elements helps sell the composite. Continuous lights are ideal, but flash could also work.



Refine Edge dialogue

Get to grips with the features of this critical tool for composite images

Selecting & extracting

Serge Ramelli

(photoserge.com)

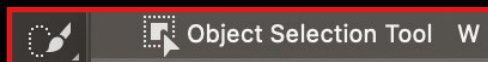
explains how to extract and blend elements in editing software

Photoshop is used in many ways, but the one thing that comes in handy for any photographer is selecting and extracting. Making selections can be challenging, but it has to be done right otherwise, the whole emotion of the scene might not be credible and ruin the whole photo. Each detail is important. There are different ways to select your subject and extract them in Photoshop.

In this example, I will show you the easiest and fastest way to do that. Photoshop has evolved so much that in a few clicks, you can do things that would have taken you hours before because it had to be done precisely, zoomed in, and it was not the most enjoyable part of retouching photos. So let me show you the most recent and efficient technique I have been using to select and extract a subject from its environment.

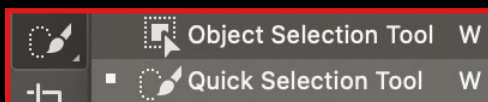
Top selection tools

The best software features for extracting image elements



SUBJECT SELECT

This is the tool I used in this article. I highly recommend it as an option because it will do 99 percent of the job for you. If you want to be fast and super-efficient, you will love this one for sure.



QUICK SELECTION TOOL

Choose the Quick Select Tool and, using a brush, select your subject. You can be extremely precise with this tool – just make sure not to select any elements other than your subject. It may take longer for greater accuracy.



MASKING

Use a hard edged brush at 85 percent with Black on White on the mask to refine your selection. This is the best choice for precision.

It might take longer than the first tool but if you are into details, this is your choice.

SMART RADIUS

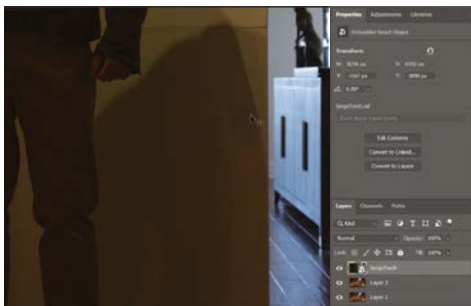
This intelligent feature adjusts precision of the selection based on edge properties. Use higher settings for hair or fine detail

Separate the elements

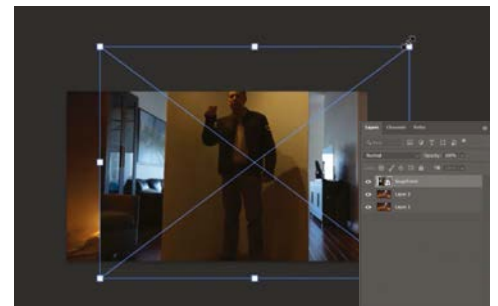
Begin to stack the components of your final blended image



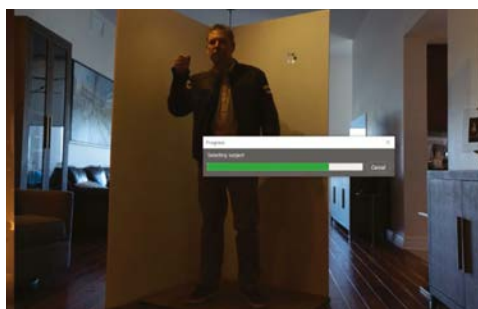
1 Mock up final picture You can add a mannequin or stand in to preview the perspective and shadows. Here I created a background in 3D using Unreal Engine so it made it easier to create a model and then add my subject.



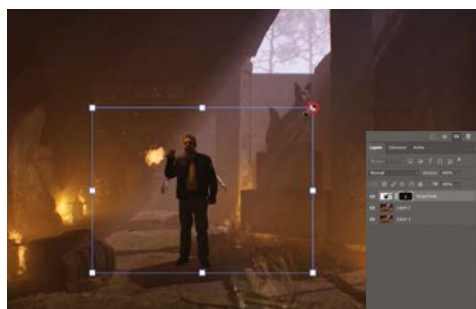
2 Drag in your subject You can also use a version with no model. Once you have the photograph of your subject, you can use the move tool to drag and drop, holding the shift key. Doing it this way means that you can retain two different layers.



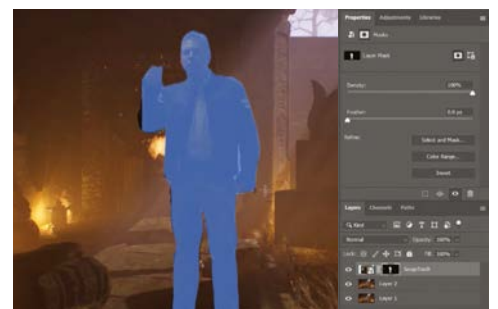
3 Set the subject Now that you have your picture of your main subject, make sure to set it to a realistic size to match the scenery. Zoom out and use Transform (Ctrl/Cmd + T) to reduce your RAW file to the correct size.



4 Quick Selection Tool Now that your portrait is a more realistic size, you can go to the Quick Selection Tool and click on Select Subject. It might not work optimally the first time, depending on subject contrast, but in this case it worked fine.



5 Further rescaling Add a Layer Mask and your subject will be overlaid in your image. Now simply click on (Ctrl/Cmd + T), which will allow you to either reduce or enlarge your subject to make sure it really fits in terms of size and perspective.



6 Final touches If your selection wasn't satisfactory the first time, you can always use the Quick Selection Tool and tweak it until you are happy. Try zooming in for a more accurate view and adjust the mask to hide and reveal detail.

Colour correction and retouching

Finalise your composite with fine colour matching and detail alignment

Once you have your image elements selected and extracted from their source files, it's time to start blending them all together. This is often the stage when photographers new to high-level compositing make mistakes. For a composite image to truly work, each element must look as though it fits organically within the new setting, which can be a challenge even when you have attempted to achieve uniform light and colour at the shooting stage.

One of the major improvement points is edge halos and colour spill. Light from the background can reflect onto the edge of your subject, outlining it with distractingly contrasting colour and tone. This makes it tricky to seamlessly blend the object into the surrounding detail. Halos can be reduced

using the Decontaminate Colors option in the Refine Edge dialogue of Photoshop, while the Matting option can perform a similar function (Layer > Matting > Defringe).

Object brightness and shadow density must then be adjusted to match the lighting structure of the background. Pay close attention to how the position in the scene would affect the way light hits the subject. If it falls within a light beam, the shadows may be less dense, while moving it back into the frame would deepen the contrast.

Here, Serge has created a background environment using Unreal Engine, so had to apply adjustments to the subject to make the whole image seem consistent in terms of detail and lighting.



Right

Cinematic style

Blending photographic and rendered elements, Serge created an eye-catching image with precise selections

Left

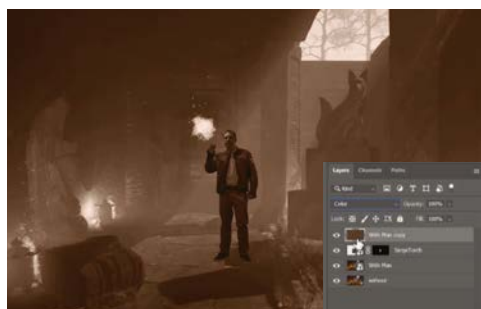
Desert Dune

For some applications, absolute realism isn't the aim. Apps such as Unreal Engine are relatively new in photography, so can produce surprising effects for clients

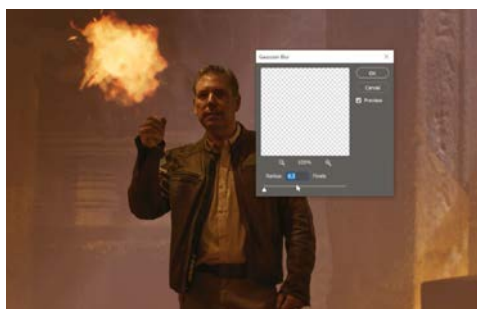


Blend the elements

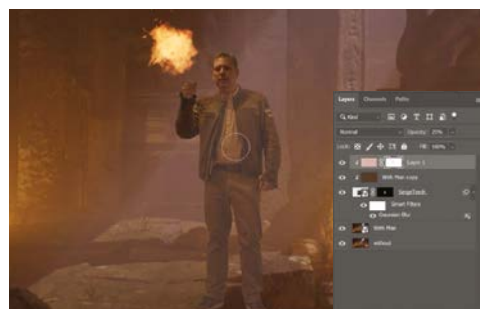
Make fine corrections to the positioning, structure and colour of your composite



1 Fix the colour Apply basic fixes in Camera Raw. In Photoshop, use Ctrl/Cmd + J to copy the layer and Filter > Blur > Average. Change to Color blend mode, and add a Clipping Mask, so it affects the subject layer. Control the effect with the opacity slider.



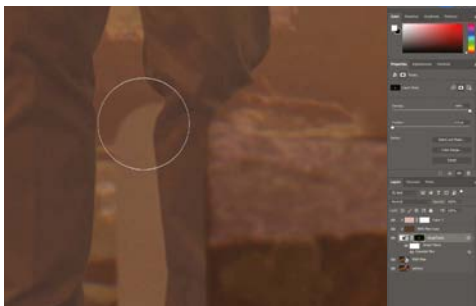
2 Control sharpness Go to Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur, and set the Radius to 0.3 or to taste, depending on your image. This will ensure the subject and background fit better together, without any unnatural variations in sharpness throughout the shot.



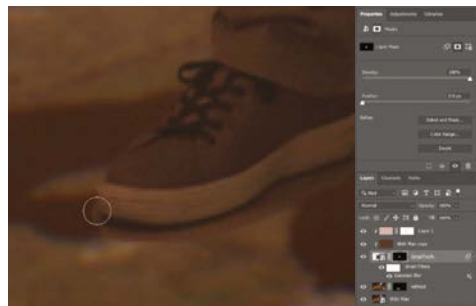
3 Match visibility Add a new layer, fill it with a light colour and add a clipping mask to apply only to your subject. Lower the opacity slider to make the look natural. Remove the effect with a mask, using a large, soft brush with low Flow.



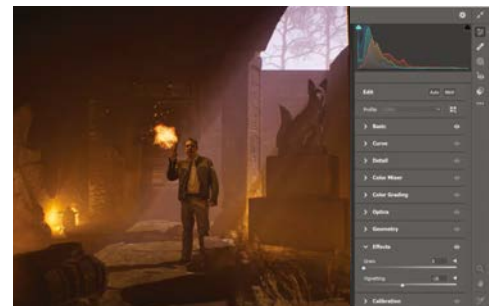
objects to hide any imperfections



4 Create depth Layer elements from foreground to background to create depth. Select the subject mask and use a hard-edged brush with black foreground colour to put the subject behind a foreground element. Press X and brush to correct errors.



5 Bring back the shadow Use a brush at zero percent hardness and paint with white as foreground colour to bring back the shadow around the subject. For precise areas, use a smaller brush with 87 percent hardness and, with a portrait, add shadows under the feet.



6 Final steps Press Ctrl/Cmd + Shift + Alt + E to merge all layers and right-click to convert it into a smart object. Open the Camera Raw Filter. Retouch the image with contrast, shadows, black points, temp, tint, texture, and clarity. Or add a vignetting effect.

Key compositing tips

Take these ten steps to better composite images

CONSIDER LIGHTING DIRECTION

When lighting your subject, do so with the background lighting in mind for credible results

THINK BACKGROUND SELECTIONS

Shoot each element against a background that makes selecting and extracting as easy as possible

WATCH FOR COLOUR SPILL

Aim to reduce colour from the background bleeding onto your subject through reflected light

CONSTANT FOCAL LENGTH

Shoot each element at the same focal setting for a more believable perspective consistency

MAINTAIN SHADOWS

Aim to retain or introduce realistic shadows around subjects based on the light sources

NATURAL BLUR

When artificially blurring areas remember the natural way bokeh graduates moving away from camera

RETAIN LAYERS

When saving your composite files keep layers in-tact for maximal re-workability in future

SMART OBJECTS

Open RAW files as Smart Objects so you can easily reopen them in RAW processing software

FEATHERED OR SHARP

When selecting choose hardness based on how much you want the objects to blend with new backgrounds

SHOOT VARIATIONS

Capture many perspectives of each image component to maximise blending options later in your workflow

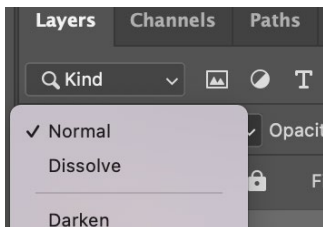


Photoshop glossary

Ps

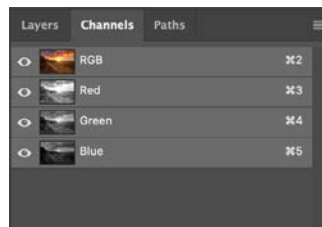
Master Adobe Photoshop by understanding essential terms

Workspace jargon buster Essential tools you need to learn to become a pro in Photoshop CC



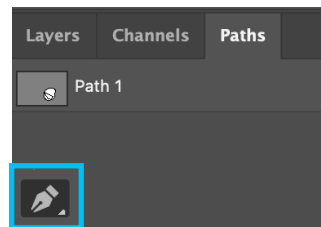
BLENDE MODES

Change how layers in the stack interact with each other. Screen mode will brighten the layer below, while Multiply mode will darken it.



CHANNELS

Access image information based on colour alone. RGB contains all data while Red, Green and Blue contain the corresponding tones only.



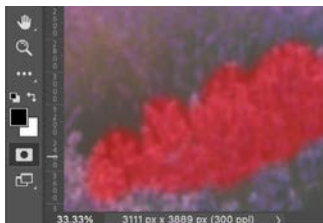
PATHS

Lines used to create complex selections by drawing around objects within an image using the Pen Tool. Paths can be made into active selections.



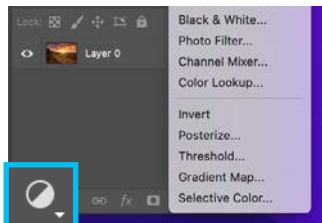
IMAGE MODE

Determines the number of colours that appear within an image. Change this depending on destination - CMYK for print, RGB for web use.



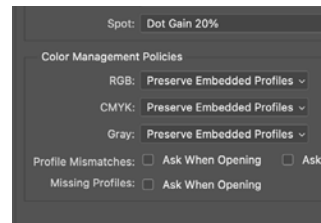
QUICK MASK

Hit Q on your keyboard to enter Quick Mask mode. Paint over areas using the Brush Tool to define a selection or erase areas to remove.



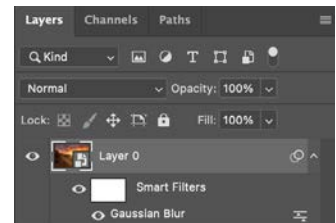
LAYER TYPE

Adjustment Layers contain and organise edit information, such as Curves, Levels or Gradients. A Fill Layer contains a solid colour which can be blended.



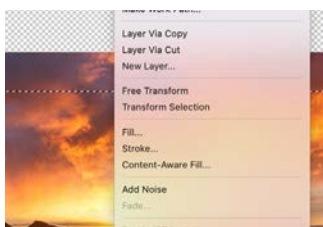
COLOUR PROFILE

A set of colour information which determines how each is represented. This can be downloaded and installed for specific paper or printer types.



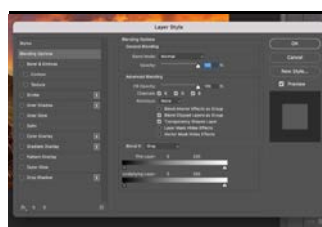
SMART FILTER

A non-destructive filter which can be revisited and the setting parameters adjusted at any time, unlike regular Photoshop filters, which cannot be undone.



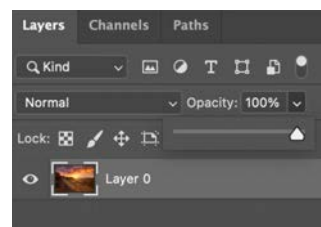
CONTENT AWARE

The Content Aware Fill, Patch and Move Tools intelligently sample the surrounding image area to automatically fill gaps and cover selected blemishes.



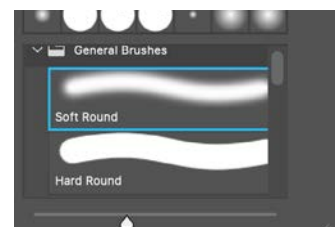
LAYER STYLE

Effects which can be applied to layers to alter their appearance. Add textures, colours, gradients, bevels and more, to add depth to shots.



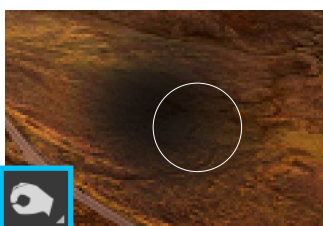
OPACITY

The maximum visibility of a layer or brush effect, expressed as a percentage. 100% is solid, and 99% or less is partially transparent.



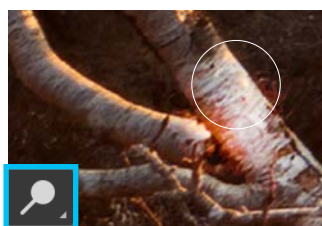
FLOW

The speed at which a brush effect is applied. At maximum flow an effect is immediately full-strength. A lower value builds-up effects gradually.



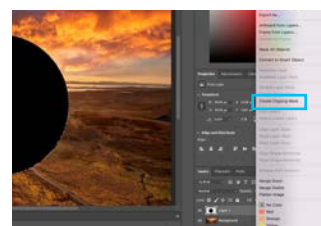
DODGE

To make an area or object within an image brighter, specifically by using the Dodge Tool, found in the Tool Panel. Precisely target a tonal range.



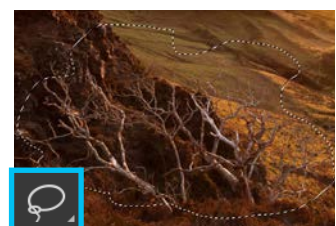
BURN

To make an area or object within an image darker, specifically by using the Burn Tool, found in the Tool Panel. Start with a low exposure.



CLIPPING MASK

A group of layers in the layer stack to which a layer mask is applied, selectively hiding and revealing parts of the image. Right-click a layer to select.



LASSO

A type of tool used to draw selections, either free-hand or using anchor points, where the Polygonal Lasso or Pen Tools are chosen for use.

Impossible macro

Difficulty level: Advanced
Time taken: 1.5 hours

Shoot and edit closeups with incredible detail and stunning backgrounds



One of the great things about shooting on cameras with APS-C or Micro 4/3 sensors is that the crop factor these formats apply can help us achieve even greater magnification from our lenses, macro optics or otherwise. In close-up photography, this can be a benefit, especially if your lens doesn't allow life-size magnification on its own. However, the closer crop means, if we shoot at a life-size 1:1 setting, we exclude much of the background.

While this might not sound like a problem in many cases, there are times when you want both incredible detail in your subject – the level only seen at life-size – and location elements behind it, to set the scene. This is one advantage of shooting macro on a medium format camera: you can get close to small subjects but the larger sensor captures more of the surroundings. This creates a unique blend of wider composition and attractive bokeh.

In digital photography, we can take things even further. By stitching multiple macro images together, we can create a shot with huge amounts of detail in the subject, plenty of background elements, for context and beautiful bokeh to smooth out any distractions. This blended image is impossible to create in a single frame, truly giving it the wow factor. It's important, however, to carefully follow the workflow shown here to achieve reliably successful results.



Pictured

Flower power

By merging several frames shot at 1:1 magnification, you can capture a wider composition while keeping artistic bokeh. This is impossible to do in a single image

What you'll need

- Software with image blending
- Tripod with reversible column
- Macro or close-capable lens

Shooting steps

1 Match subject height

Although a common tip for extending depth-of-field in macro photography is to shoot at 90° to the subject, and our goal is to reduce DOF, lowering the camera to ground level enables an interesting bug's-eye view. It also allows for attractive natural backlighting.

2 Choose maximum f/stop

To maximise the visibility of the 'impossible' depth-of-field effect, choose your lens's smallest f/number, in this case, f/2.8. This is especially helpful where you don't own a true macro lens and have to shoot from further away.

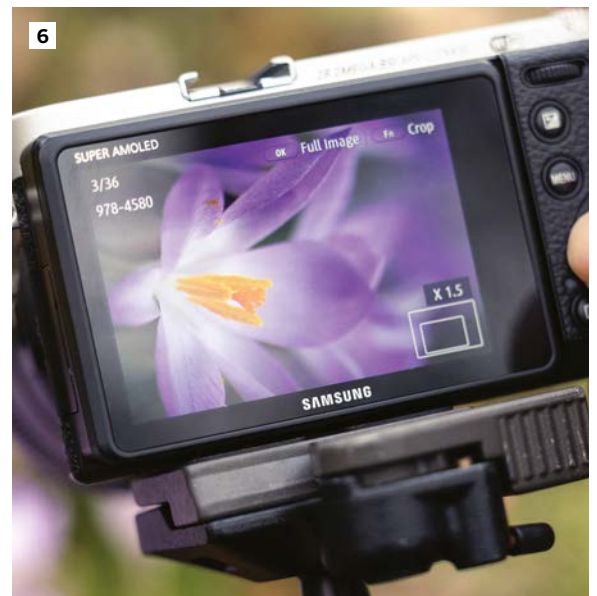
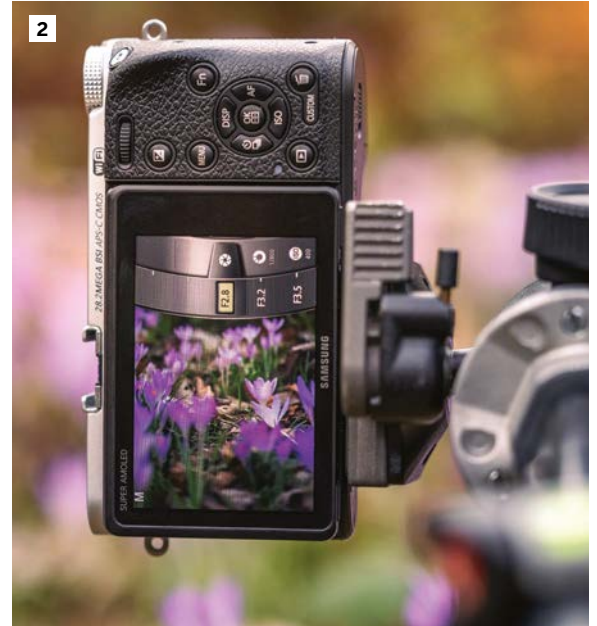
3 Find closest focusing distance

Capture as much subject detail as you possibly can by ensuring that you are using maximum magnification. Set the closest focusing distance your lens provides, frame the subject and then slowly move the camera back until you can achieve a sharp focus. Zoom into the preview image to check critical detail.

4 Shoot centre frame Compose the first frame so that the composition is optimal for the subject. Use this frame to ensure you have sufficient space above and below the main areas of the scene to allow for cropping or filling of stitching 'gaps' during editing.

5 Reframe and refocus Rotate the camera or, if using a rail, slide it to the left to compose a frame to one side of the subject. At such close focusing distances, even small shifts in focal plane position can blur the subject, so zoom in to check identical focus placement.

6 Shoot excess frames Repeat the step above, but this time, capture an image to the right of the main subject. Once you're happy with it, try shifting the camera up and down to capture more 'space' to work with in processing. This will allow you to have multiple crops and formats to suit the scene. Scrutinise each frame for sharpness.



DEDICATED MACRO LENS

An optic capable of 1:1 life-size magnification allows extreme detail capture

MIRRORLESS OR DSLR CAMERA

A camera with advanced live view features is particularly helpful

BALL HEAD

This type of head allows maximum freedom of camera placement

LOW-LEVEL TRIPOD

Being able to remove, swing or reverse the centre column allows near-ground level work

The setup

Control lighting

Introduce flash to ensure consistency between frames

One of the challenges of stitching panoramas in software is changes in lighting between shots, which can create further blending inconsistencies. While this is difficult to control in landscape photography, in macro, we can maintain global exposure and lighting direction by overpowering the ambient light with flash. Use a low power output, diffuse the light by shooting through a diffusing material and mimic the position of the sun with flashgun placement.



Editing steps

1 Sync settings

Select all your frames and activate the synchronise settings function. You can then apply basic adjustments, including Exposure, Contrast and Temperature across all images to be stitched. Also, reduce noise and apply essential sharpening at this stage.

2 Create panorama In Lightroom, keep the images selected and go to Photo > Photomerge > Panorama. Leave the photomerge method as Cylindrical or Spherical. Ensure images are arranged in the correct sequence before merging.

3 Realign segments

Due to the expanse of bokeh, your software may struggle with the panorama. Here, a gap was left between two segments. Since we chose to retain layers, we selected the orphaned image and, with reduced Opacity, manually placed it.

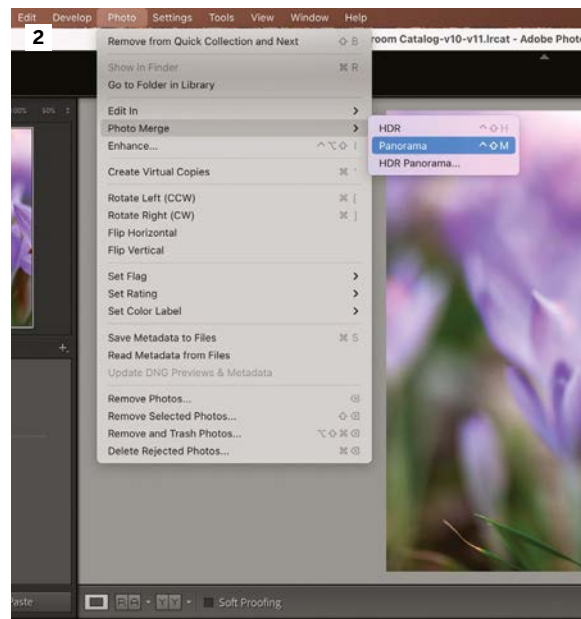
4 Retouch seams Due to the blending challenges and manual placement, there were some remaining seams where segments met. Using the Spot Healing Brush and Patch Tools, we brushed over gaps and cropped white spaces at the edges, choosing a wide aspect.

5 Dodge and Burn Duplicate the Background (Ctrl/Cmd + J) and navigate to Filter > Camera Raw Filter. Randomise the light by adding some exposure spotlights with the Radial Filter. We also dodged some background highlights to give the raindrops some extra sparkle.

6 Adjust colour balance Re-open your merged image in your RAW editor to apply final colour adjustments. In our shot, we felt that the green stems were too visible so reduced Yellow Saturation in the HSL tab. We also tweaked the petal colour using the Calibrate tab.

Right Purple haze

Using Lightroom's Photomerge function, we can create an image with lots of detail and smooth background bokeh that would be difficult to capture in a single frame







Main

Coffee morning

Though shot entirely in the studio, the lighting structure creates a believable outdoor environment for this advertorial image

Create the Sun

Use a multi-flash setup to create a warm sunlight style, for this autumnal-themed product shot in the studio

Difficulty level: Advanced

Time taken: 3 hours



Autumn is here and no day out during the season is complete without the ubiquitous pumpkin spiced latte. It has become a staple of this time of year and now is the exact moment all of the major coffee shop brands roll out their advertising campaigns. Whether you consider it a guilty pleasure or nothing more than an overpriced, sugar-filled glass of milk, it makes for an intriguing thematic image.

Autumn is known for its fiery colours and low, raking sunlight, which combine to make a dream scene for photographers. When we started planning our brief for this advertorial image, we knew they had to be integral components. One option was to shoot outside, but this would have required waiting for the sun to rise or set. A key skill for studio and flash photographers is being able to overpower ambient light and mimic any natural light source, with artificial units.

For an autumn sunrise, we need to have a warm tone to the light, which will have to be at a shallow

angle. We used two speedlights to create this effect. For the composition, we created a moodboard, gathering seasonal artefacts such as fallen leaves, nuts, seeds and spices, including cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg and fennel.

The aim was to suggest that the product has been forged from these elements. So, we arranged some objects, avoiding regimented lines, and then used the aforementioned lighting technique to create the impression of a beautiful morning sunrise in an autumnal garden. Let's explore this useful transferable lighting skill.

What you'll need

- Wide aperture zoom
- Tripod
- Speedlights
- Radio triggers
- Props

Shooting steps

1 Layout props Arrange your items to create layers of detail, leaving minimal gaps. If you want a sparse frame, use only two or three objects for intentional space. Otherwise, cover all of the foreground to avoid uncomfortable empty areas. Consider the colour distribution too, for balance.

2 Set compression Use focal lengths of 70mm and above to bring the scene together. To achieve the feeling of the drink being created from the environment, we needed to reduce stretching of the foreground which would have emphasised gaps. Adjust lens pitch to control background visibility.

3 Meter the scene Start by setting the overall ambient exposure for the scene. With TTL metering in-camera, this will not account for the off-camera flash, but we need to set a baseline exposure that contains a good range of tones. Don't worry about some blocked shadows at this stage, as these will be filled once the flash is active.

4 Calculate flash ratio Switch on your background flash, starting at the lowest power output. Move the flash position until you are happy with the subject back or rim lighting. Next, activate the fill flash, position it and then alter the output of both lights until the balance looks about right.

5 Adjust exposure We had the flashes zoomed to their maximum focal length, which has created some tight beams of direct lighting. We liked the intensity of the backlight since it is a sunlight substitute, so didn't mind a few blown rimlights. A slight exposure decrease kept this locally limited.

6 Add finishing touches With the lighting fixed and the camera in Manual mode, finalise the prop arrangement. We waited until this stage to make the coffee and add the toppings, as this meant it looked its freshest. Some resetting of the drink was required after each frame.





CREATE THE SUN

FULL FRAME CAMERA

While it isn't essential, the larger sensor will help control focus fall off more easily.

RADIO TRIGGERS

A transmitter and then a receiver for each flash unit are needed to create a dynamic off-camera lighting setup.

THEMED PROPS

For an ad shoot such as this, find items that push a narrative—in this case, autumn.

F/2.8 ZOOM

A zoom lens offers the greatest compositional freedom. A 70-200mm lens would also work where space allows or requires it.

MULTIPLE FLASHGUNS

Two speedlights or strobes are required; one for a backlight and another as a fill.

DIFFUSER

A softbox was used here to soften the fill light, preventing a 'cutout' look on the subject.

The setup

Add creative flare effects

Create some sparkle by introducing dazzling foreground highlights

To add to the impression of the sunlight intensity and to give the shot an airy lifestyle aesthetic, we used candles to produce some foreground flare patterns. Shooting in manual, against a black background, we captured multiple frames with the candles at different distances from the camera. These frames could then be added in later (see editing step 6). With focus locked, the distance effect will appear natural. Take care when using real fire!



Edit the shot

1 Curves for contrast We wanted to create a washed out, dreamy look. To achieve this, in your RAW editor, pull the bottom of the Tone Curve upwards, then add a point a quarter of the way up the line and drag it to the centre.

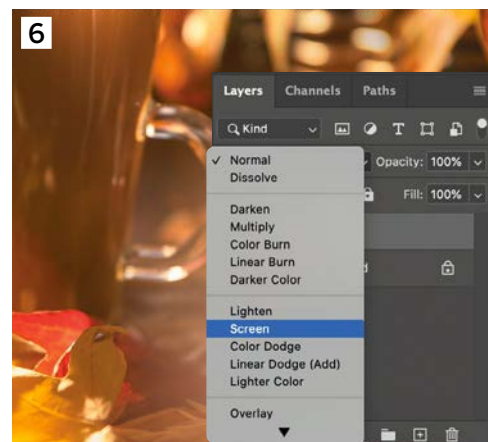
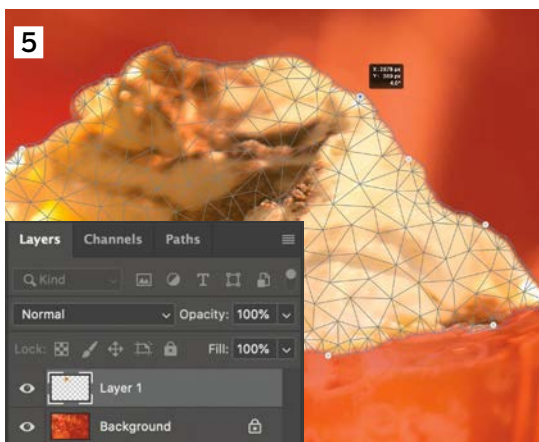
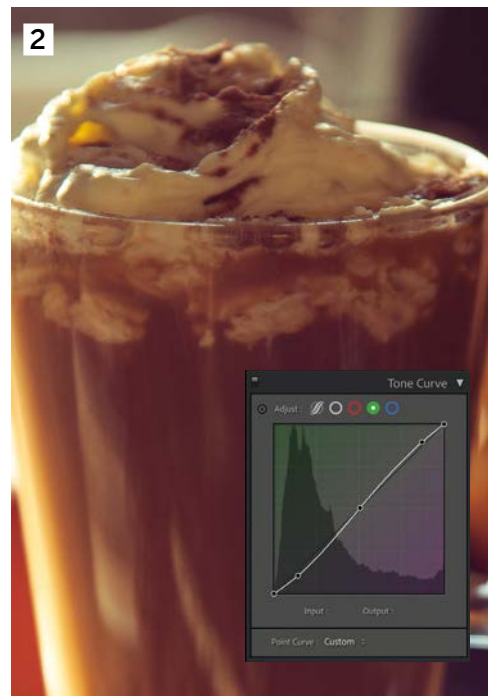
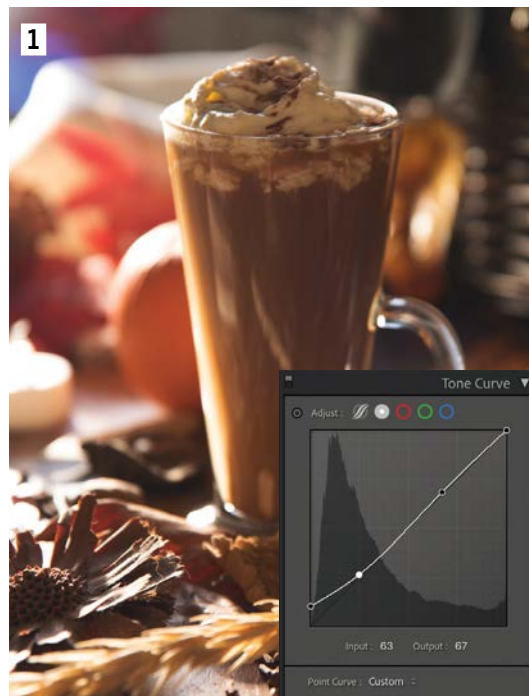
2 Colour grading In Curves, go to the Blue Channel and drag the top of the curve down, to add yellow highlights. Drag the line up around half way down to restore shadow neutrality. Apply the inverse to the Green Channel.

3 Local adjustments With colour set, use your RAW editor's selective adjustment tools to add local clarity, drawing out details like the coffee glass and cream. We merged frames with varying lighting and prop placement.

4 Control the edges While the bright, airy lighting is attractive we need to focus attention on the subject a little. We simply added a subtle vignette in Photoshop, using the Camera Raw filter. In the Effects Panel, drag the slider to the left to slightly darken the frame edges.

5 Cosmetic adjustments After some dust removal and other basic retouches, we decided to adjust the shape of the cream topping. We selected this and put it on a new layer, then used Puppet Warp to improve the symmetry. Add pins to control which parts of the layer are transformed.

6 Add flare effects We're going to introduce the flare bokeh we created earlier. We shot multiple versions, so picked our favourites then dragged the files onto our document. Since they were shot against a black background, we can simply use the Screen Blend Mode to composite these in.



Right top Out-of-camera

The RAW file is a little on the cool side to convey the sunrise effect. While very few highlights are burned out they are distractingly bright, which needs fixing

Right bottom Cosy autumn theme

By adding a warm tone to the highlights, the lighting looks more natural. We also shot multiple frames with objects in different places, which we combined for the optimal layout

BEFORE



AFTER





Develop your **EDITING** **STYLE**

Embrace creative freedom and learn to use experimentation to hone your own signature post-processing recipe

For many photographers, post-processing is a fundamental step in the finalising of an image, but is not necessarily a desirable artistic opportunity. For other creatives however, photo editing has become the dominant stage in the production of their signature photographic style, with the majority of work done at the computer, rather than behind a camera. Some may dispute that this stretches the definition of traditional photography too far, yet with care and consideration we can create images that would otherwise be impossible using traditional photographic methods. With so many photographers producing imagery, this can be beneficial for introducing unique qualities to otherwise similar compositions of already well-studied subjects. While it is possible to become overly preoccupied

with finding a style, especially as a beginner, devising a balance of exposure, colour and detail that best suits your favoured shooting style will help you develop a sense of creative identity. This can have commercial benefits if you are able to demonstrate that you can introduce unique 'looks' to potentially formulaic image setups. The initial stages of this process are not without their challenges however, as without care it is possible to override an existing style that has merit but is as yet under-developed, thereby inhibiting the evolution of the photographer's technique. Over the following pages we will discuss the core areas on which we can focus to identify our creative likes and dislikes, and in turn, define the parameters for crafting an individual editing style with intrigue and character.

Individual character

Using the multitude of software features available today, photographers have never had greater opportunities to produce images that convey their creative vision

© TJ Drysdale

Work with exposure

Discover how altering global and local brightness can vastly change the appearance of an image

Digital photography has made exposure management easier than ever, aided largely by the efficiency of modern sensors and image-processing engines, which are capable of capturing detail in tones many EV stops apart. However, it is not always to an image's benefit to aim to capture every possible detail. While a uniform histogram would indicate a technically accurate exposure, this may not be able to convey the atmosphere of the scene. For example, a lack of truly dark shadows means there is very little 'weight' to the image, which appears washed out as a result. Similarly, there are occasions where

exposing the highlights with the single aim of avoiding all clipping can result in a dulled image, lacking in pure whites. In these cases, slight overexposure can add a bright, lively feel which adds appeal to the composition. When looking to develop a unique editing approach, it is useful to consider how you would like to use brightness to control where the viewer looks within the frame. Differential brightness has a strong impact on the direction the eye travels across the composition and in turn sets the overall tone for the image.

When observing the online portfolios of photographers, it is often clear whether they

favour a bias of brighter or darker tones. The former situation produces high-key images, which are popular for lifestyle and advertising photography. Try pushing the exposure slider in your RAW editing software to the right, to brighten the overall frame, then work with the Highlights or Curve controls to selectively clip the brightest areas. Inversely, pull the Blacks slider further to the left, to introduce some dark base tones, lower the exposure and brighten the upper highlights, to increase contrast. This creates a moody atmosphere which can produce an effect similar to shooting at night.

Add greater impact

Andrew Kirby describes his post-processing workflow for introducing the eye-catching contrast that is his signature

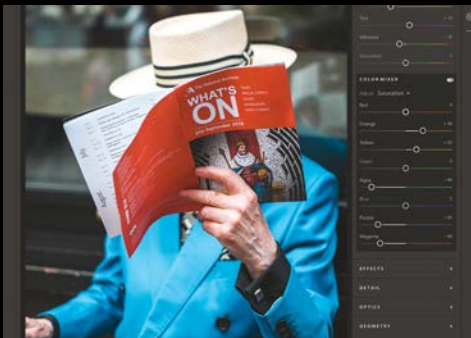
While strong contrast, featuring deep shadows and bright highlights, is a popular strategy for producing images with impact, this look does not suit every scene. As Andy demonstrates here, reversing the usual process and carefully reducing contrast can produce an attractive filmic effect.



1 Original image Here's the photo straight out of camera. My 'go-to' street photography lens is a 35mm 1.4. Prime lenses are great for street photography as they simplify the process and make you compose with your feet and get close. I usually slightly underexpose my images and shoot wide open at f/1.4.



2 The magic of light The most important part of photography is light. I increase the exposure, shadows and whites, while reducing the highlights and blacks. The most powerful tool is the Point Curve. This allows you to control the light and darks to create atmosphere and it's a vital part when creating film simulations.



3 Colourful characters Depending on the colours in the photo I adjust the hue, saturation and luminance of each colour individually in order to enhance key colours and reduce distracting ones. This is another key part of creating a unique visual style and mood.



4 The right effect I make a few final tweaks to slightly increase the clarity and add a discrete vignette, to draw the eye to the subject. On occasion I'll also play with split tones. Most commonly I will set highlights at 60 and shadows at 210, with a very slight saturation on either or both.

Pro focus



Andy Kirby
www.mrkirby.
photography
Instagram:
@mrkirby.
photography

"My main influences are Vivian Maier, Fred Herzog, Saul Leiter and Joel Meyerowitz. My editing style is influenced by film

types such as Kodachrome. I try to go my own way and not worry too much about what others are doing. The greatest challenge is time – you need a lot of it to get to a point where things start coming together. Many people ask about my editing style, believing there is some secret sauce. It's just trial and error and the final result is a very minimal process. My editing style is to simply enhance the image – processing takes no more than 1-2 minutes."

FADED SHADOWS

By inverting the traditional S-shaped curve, a distinctive faded look can be introduced to shadow areas

UNEVEN BRIGHTNESS (VIGNETTE)

Focus attention to where you want viewers to look by experimenting with exposure gradients across the frame

LOWERED CONTRAST, HIGH COLOUR

Since contrast and colour are often related, try unlinking them. The results may not always be natural, but will hold attention

MAINTAINED DARKNESS

To maintain atmosphere, keeping accurate dark tones can be a way of introducing a theatrical feel to an image

DEVELOP YOUR EDITING STYLE

Above

Make it obvious

Subtlety does not always benefit an image, especially when trying to define a clear style. Ensure an intended effect cannot be overlooked, to grab attention

Experiment with contrast

Decide on the perfect balance of highlight and shadow detail for varying atmosphere

The standard practice when adjusting the contrast of an image is to set the Black and White points, to ensure no highlight or shadow clipping occurs, and then find the best balance of tones between these extremes. However, this can produce a highly standardised look. Consider where intentional clipping may be permissible or even desirable, to generate a high- or low-key style. The advisable approach is to ensure good detail is captured across the tonal range, in-camera, while shooting RAW files, to offer the maximum flexibility in software. Set the Blacks and Whites first, then adjust the Shadows and Highlights sliders, to tailor your intended effect.



Use creative colour

Play with colour bias to find the perfect mix of tones for your photographic signature

Colour balance is another area of photo editing that is often governed by a subjective definition of correctness. While a truly colour-corrected image will be devoid of a warm or cool bias, with neutral tonality in each of the shadows, midtones and highlights, this will not guarantee a successful file. As is the case when working with exposure, a photo can only be considered correct if it fulfils its intended function. Once brightness has been decided on, colour adjustment will likely be the next stage in devising a novel processing workflow. Global colour will often not be the focus of experimentation during this process, as the effect of altering the overall colour cast may be too strong for refined manipulation. However, deciding on the appropriate colour theme for your shot will lay the foundations for the final style. From this, it is possible to predict how more targeted alterations will impact on the mood of the shot. Local colour changes will introduce some contrast of hues within the frame, adding depth through

spatial separation. This can be achieved by using Photoshop brushes or the Adjustment Brush in Lightroom, to paint additional colour over isolated zones. This affords the photographer total control over where in the frame different colour appears, providing the freedom to style each shot appropriately. Alternatively, Split Toning – adding differential colour to highlights and shadows – creates a chromatic juxtaposition based on brightness. While classic Split Toning, commonly involving the addition of blue tones to shadows, is a long-established technique, there is an almost unlimited scope for trialling new combinations of colours. Often this can produce usable results, although it can sometimes be helpful to have a particular influence in mind. For example, cinema is a significant reference for current and evolving processing styles. By studying how contrasting and complementary colours are used together in poster images and on-screen, a photographer can learn to adapt various mixes to a range of subjects.

Pro focus



TJ Drysdale
tjdrysdale.com
Instagram:
@tjdrysdale

"Before photography came along, my first love was actually filmmaking. Once photography entered my life, I quickly tried to take the looks of some of my favourite films and apply them to my images. Colour influences my style greatly – I've long been inspired by the beauty of 19th century paintings and I really try to achieve that look in most of my photographs. I just love how the artists used colour to create the scene. I pay a attention to each and every colour in my photographs. It can take years to develop your own style – the challenge is remaining patient."

CONSIDER ALL TONES

To push a theme or colour bias, apply devised editing processes to each of the shadows, midtones and highlights in turn

UNCONVENTIONAL TONING

Some colours are naturally more appealing to the human eye. Work with lesser-used colours to produce washes of artificial toning

CONSIDER COLOUR RANGE

Expand or restrict visible variances in colour to produce an inclusive or unnaturally weighted palette

MATCH COLOUR AND DETAIL

Decide whether you would like these aspects to dominate or compete for viewer attention

Master targeted colour processing

TJ Drysdale guides us through his usual processing workflow, for dramatic yet natural colour



1 Colour casts I typically apply the Paint Bucket tool as my first step. I find a colour within the image, apply it to a new layer, change the blend mode to Soft Light to cast

an overall warm hue to the image and lower the opacity, to make the effect gradual.



2 B&W layer Next I add contrast using a Black & White adjustment layer. I'll often play with the reds and yellows to add drama. I create a vignette with the Elliptical Marquee Tool, and change the blend mode to Soft Light.



3 Levels adjustment I'm almost satisfied with the colours I have, but I definitely want to add a little more pop to the image. I use the Levels adjustment layer to add a little more life to the image.



4 Color Lookup Using Color Lookup, with the Candlelight.CUBE option, creates a warm atmosphere and adds a matte finish. Using the mask, I'll erase this effect on the subject, as I want her to stand out.



5 Selective Color My last step in the colouring process is to use the Selective Color adjustment layer. I mostly use the red and yellow sliders to bring out more detail in the foliage.



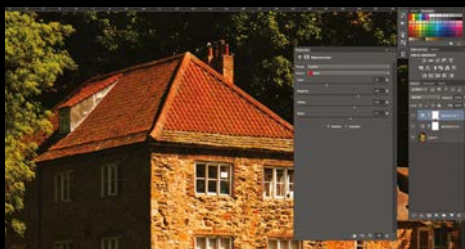
6 Curves adjustments I use Curves to brighten specific areas of the image. For the curve, I drag up in the centre to brighten, add one more point a little higher up the curve and drag it up to create contrast.



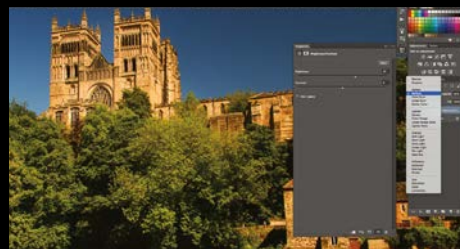
7 Luminosity curve I create another Curves layer and change the blend mode to Luminosity. I drag down in the centre of the curve until I reach my desired look. I finish by erasing the effect in areas I want to stand out.

All images © TJ Drysdale

Perfect fine colour control Master the main Photoshop colour adjustment tools



Selective Color Despite being an often overlooked tool, Selective Color is a highly capable option for customising the balance of targeted colours within an image. A slight change to the hue of a single colour can produce a unique look.



Blend modes While not an immediately obvious choice for colour correction, setting entire layers or, often more usefully, brushes to different blend modes is a highly precise way of mixing colours to form novel effects, and the baseline for a signature theme.



Curves for colour The Curves dialogue is incredibly versatile. Modifying each Channel individually allows the user to split tones between highlights, shadows and midtones in an unstepped manner, providing almost unlimited opportunity for unique grading.

X3 © Peter Fenech

Adapt for the scene

Edit for subject content and luminosity

The photographer should essentially have one of two aims when deciding how to edit an image: to either correct or create. Some images have a very simple function – to provide a photographic record for example, and in these cases technical precision is the primary value. For shots like these, a neutral colour balance and centred exposure would be the goal. When a photographer is attempting to create a discernible style however, pushing image parameters to their extremes is usually the best strategy for identifying their artistic likes and dislikes, from which they can build a replicable processing recipe.

Repetition is a key characteristic of a successful editing style, as only when a similar look can be applied to multiple images can a common theme be recognisable across a portfolio. However, it is also important to establish how best to introduce these characteristics to each scene, on an image-specific basis. Applying a blanket process to every image is not advisable, since the range of highlights and shadows and the ambient colour balance will differ from location to location, meaning that some files may appear over-processed while others will be lacking in effect strength. Although the basic actions will remain the same, customisation will help to ensure that your style fits with any subject or lighting condition.

Sometimes this in itself can help a photographer find the core structure for their editing regime. It is a common practice to adopt certain colours and exposure work for different types of scene – subject context, environment and age all have styles that viewers have become accustomed to seeing. Modern architectural shots often receive greater contrast for example, while it has become popular for golden-hour landscapes to feature expanded dynamic range. Therefore, it is useful to try inverting settings in order to yield novel results.

Pairing contemporary subjects with classic effects could be the catalyst for a more surreal method, as would using cross-processed toning for natural landscapes. Employing common techniques in new contexts can reveal extraordinary and unexpected impact to which your audience is drawn, purely because they are unable to identify why your images look different to the multitude of similar photographs they may have recently observed.

© Andy Kirby

Far right **Broad exposure**

For images with a wide range of brightness, you must consider how this will dilute or concentrate your chosen editing effects

Right **Consider content**

If your style involves boosts to certain colour channels, be aware that some scenes may have a bias towards those colours already



Edit for mood

Try unique combinations of brightness/colour

Often colour and brightness conditions have common associations in the minds of viewers, most often warm colour with greater exposure and cooler hues with darker tones. This is because of frequent real-world conditions. This provides an opportunity to try creative, unexpected combinations.



© Peter Fentech

Bright and cool

Generating a lighter frame by increasing exposure, then introducing or enhancing high Kelvin colours, can produce a unique wintry and tranquil atmosphere.



© TJ Drysdale

Warm and dark

Another inverse colour-exposure pairing, this image has a warmer tonality, but lower brightness, creating tension. This look can be either tranquil or unsettling.

Edit for composition choice

Identify when and how to adjust your editing workflow based on your approach to in-camera composition

How you choose to arrange the elements of your frame directly influences how the out-of-camera file appears. Your selection of angle, perspective and focal length must all be taken into account when starting to build a repeatable sequence of software adjustments.



Visible light source If you'd like to shoot towards the light and incorporate it within the frame, choose to either recover highlight detail, or follow the inverse procedure and bleach information from the extremes of the tonal range. This will ensure an intentional appearance and create a satisfying exposure balance.



Position of subject With human vision, there is a bias of attention towards the centre of our field of view. Consider how realistic you want your images to be and decide on how much enhancement the periphery of your shot requires.



Strong colours When shooting brightly coloured objects, experiment with matching other composition elements. Choose to equal the saturation for an even colour theme, or derate other areas for stronger contrasts and tighter focus on key zones of the scene.

FOCAL LENGTH CHOICE

How much of the scene is included in your shots will impact the distribution of subjects in the frame, dictating how you crop and process the periphery of the composition

DETAIL FREQUENCY

Flat areas such as the sky need to be treated more subtly than zones of high frequency detail, which are at lower risk of noise or colour breakdown. Adapt accordingly

COLOUR RANGE

Wider shots demonstrate a more noticeable gradient in required white balance, as areas of varying distance from the light source are shown. Be mindful of this when establishing colour themes

LOCAL BRIGHTNESS

Wider perspectives also illustrate greater variances in scene brightness, which may influence how you choose to make local adjustments. Do you want to even out exposure or embrace contrasts?

Edit for shooting style

Learn to view your approach to shooting and editing as interconnected processes

An often forgotten aspect of developing a reliable editing process is the need to build this around your approach to shooting images in the field. If a photographer attempts to edit an image in a way that visually contradicts the look and feel of the content of a photograph, this can create an uncomfortable mismatch, which makes their artistic intent unclear.

Shooting approach in this context refers to a preference for longer or shorter exposures, brighter or darker frames, focal length choice, shooting angle and so on. All of these facets define the digital information present in the outputted file, which must be appreciated when deciding how best to handle this data

in software. If, for example, a photographer prefers lower-contrast scenes, such as those under overcast natural light, then it makes little sense for them to make extensive global boosts to contrast. Similarly, should a landscape photographer favour shooting in misty conditions, in order to capture delicate colours, it is not advisable that they add a large amount of saturation, for risk of breaking the tones of the image. The dissonant relationship that these processing techniques have with the scenes to which they are being applied limits the attractiveness of the final image, but also the adaptability of the style to others in a portfolio.

File format is another consideration – while it is advisable to shoot RAW images, especially if you have the long-term intention to apply significant processing, some photographers may have to shoot JPEGs, such as wedding or sports professionals, who require large image bursts at high frame rates. Editing with this in mind will help refine your process and reduce file damage, due to over-editing of the 'lossy' format. It can be useful to learn to shoot with the final edit pre-visualised, as this will ensure you have captured enough tones to work with later; however, during the process of devising a style, use your shooting preferences as a reference. Observe your choice of white balance and base further colour adjustments on strengthening that bias. Then consider the balance of shadows and highlights – begin by darkening or brightening images with shadow or highlight dominance respectively, pushing your camera work choices to the extremes, to see if that produces the end product you envisioned.



“STEP UP PROCESSING”

An effective idea is to base initial editing tests on your shooting preferences. Identify which parameters made you feel your images were worth keeping when out with your camera, and amplify those in software.

© Peter Fenech



DEVELOP YOUR EDITING STYLE

© TJ Drysdale

Above right Integrated approach

Think of the in-camera and software stages of image creation as a single process, to foster a forward-thinking mindset to exposure and colour choices

Achieve processing consistency

Develop a reliable style that can be easily replicated, regardless of tonal complexity

One of the reasons new photographers struggle to define their editing style is that they allow their approach to become too complex. While applying many techniques and editing actions will generate new looks, it is easy to lose track and fail to re-create these later. Restrict your use of presets or techniques to only one or two per image, at least initially, to streamline and simplify your editing workflow.

TIME OF DAY

Consider how the intensity and colour of light found at your preferred shooting time will impact on the depth of highlights and shadows in your images

CAPTURED EXPOSURE

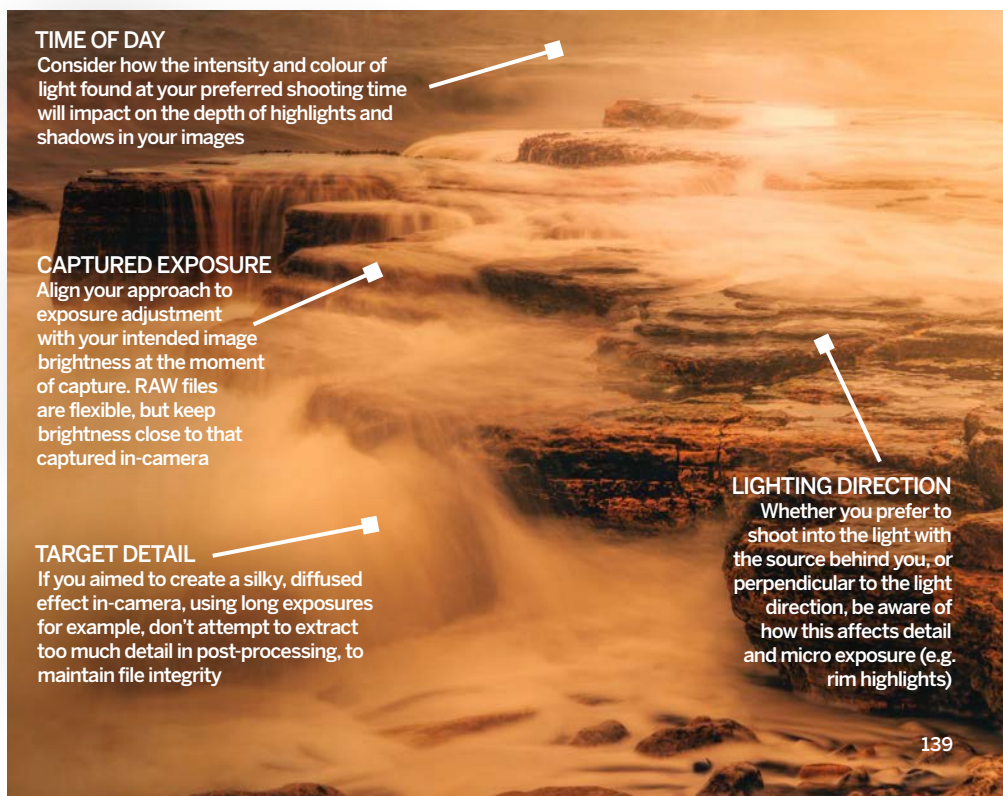
Align your approach to exposure adjustment with your intended image brightness at the moment of capture. RAW files are flexible, but keep brightness close to that captured in-camera

TARGET DETAIL

If you aimed to create a silky, diffused effect in-camera, using long exposures for example, don't attempt to extract too much detail in post-processing, to maintain file integrity

LIGHTING DIRECTION

Whether you prefer to shoot into the light with the source behind you, or perpendicular to the light direction, be aware of how this affects detail and micro exposure (e.g. rim highlights)



© Peter Fenech

Essential style development solutions

Master a new processing style today by using these ten professional tools and techniques

It is true that developing any complex process involves trial and error, patience and a little luck, but it is possible to streamline the process to make the experience more precise and creatively fulfilling. Photoshop, Lightroom and other similar editing suites incorporate features for speeding up common steps and saving sequences of related actions together. Therefore, exposure fixes, detail extraction and colour grading effects can be introduced in a more reliable way. Professional photographers include the

use of these features in their workflows as a matter of course, as they recognise the importance of reproducibility in marketing their photographic styles.

Beyond the most commonly used applications, satellite software – such as third-party plugins – is tailored to generate specific effects that cannot be easily simulated using standard Photoshop techniques. Adding these to your arsenal of processing tools will help add sophistication and unique character to your editing

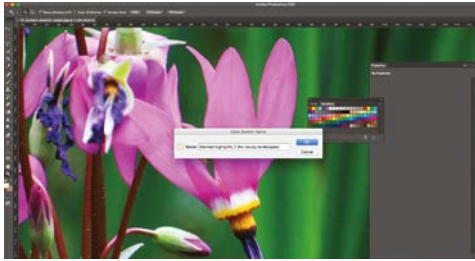
signature. For effective results that are notably different from the work of other photographers, thinking at a local level, rather than global image editing, will offer more opportunities to craft looks that are not easy for your competition to emulate.

When trying to produce anything new, thinking unconventionally – using existing resources in new ways – will provide a catalyst for individuality. Here we explore some easy ways to get started in customising the appearance of your image portfolio.

Incremental evolution

Developing a unique style you are happy with takes time and experimentation. Often photographers will build up their 'look' in stages

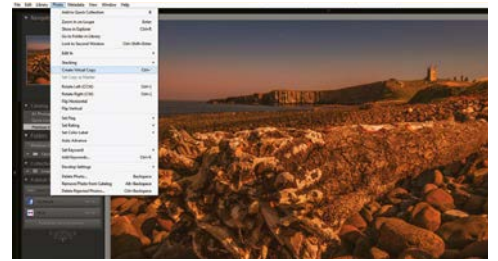
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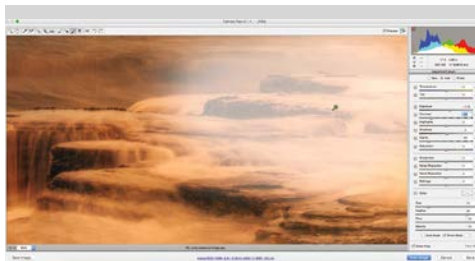
Compile mood boards Gather together colours and textures that appeal to you, along with images featuring possessing styles you admire. This can be done with physical materials, but more usefully, create swatches in Photoshop by sampling colours in finished images. These will provide the inspiration for your personalised colour and toning mode.



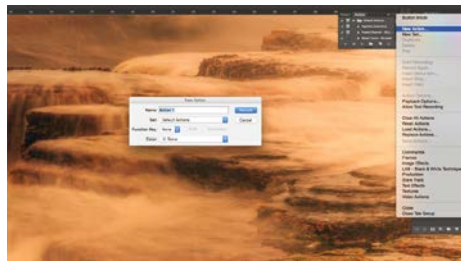
Make presets In Lightroom or Camera Raw, save all of the current slider positions and settings choices by making presets. Name the preset using a standardised system – such as image content, style appearance or image name – for easy identification. Create a new preset for every major change in your style, so you have one for any situation.



Create virtual copies A highly useful feature of Lightroom is the function to create duplicates of edited images within a Catalog. These can be used to make multiple variations of editing processes, without having to save multiple files. Versions are also grouped together in the Catalog, so it is easy to decide which you prefer during the review process.



Reverse your settings An effective strategy for overcoming a creative block is to invert your common preferred setting combinations. If you usually apply positive Clarity in Lightroom for example, try using a negative setting to soften detail. If you usually favour lower contrast, try working with greater tonal spacing to see how this impacts your subject.



Create actions When using Photoshop, save regular processes in recorded sequences to be applied to similar images. Actions allow complex edits to be quickly re-created in a single click, without having to navigate to and manipulate individual tools. Usefully, it is possible to download actions from online resources, to help get you started.



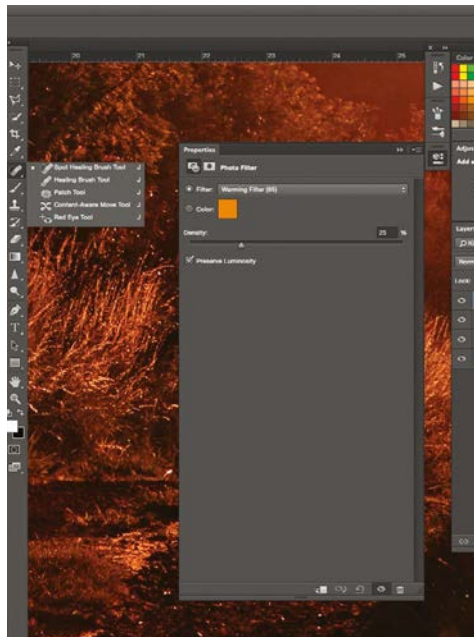
Shoot RAW Adopting a RAW workflow is arguably the most important step wherever extensive editing is involved. It allows greater changes to be made without file corruption, so the photographer can essentially perform whatever actions are required to achieve their vision. Shoot with your preferred white balance and tailor colour and exposure later.



Use plugins Employ additional software, such as the DxO Nik Collection or Topaz suite, for specific effects. While it may not be necessary to use a plugin filter all of the time, shooting and editing to allow its use can be a route to a particular style. Apply to new layers to permit local application, using masks.



Use local adjustments The Adjustment Brush and Gradient Tool in Lightroom and Camera Raw, plus the use of layer masking in Photoshop, all allow edits to be made to smaller areas of the frame. Perfect your ability to introduce subtle detailed processing for added individuality.



Utilise multiple tools The most popular styles are those that are difficult to break down and replicate. Successful photographers often employ more than one software tool to achieve their look, obscuring the process behind the effect. This also enables more precise alterations to be made.



Pick the right subject Often editing style is formed around favoured photographic subjects, but for a digital photographer it is possible to begin with a target processing look. Adapt what you shoot to match – if moody, cinematic editing is what you desire, capture the correct lighting to allow for that style.

Fairytale lighting

Maintaining a regular shooting style can help you overcome many problems at the editing stage. With experience you'll be able to identify potential challenges in the field, making style execution easier

Overcome common challenges

Identify and address the potential mistakes and sidestep predictable difficulties during style development

Arguably the biggest problem with attempting to develop a personal editing style is that every digital photographer is using the same types of software, plugins and apps to create their processing recipe. As enormous as Photoshop is as an editing suite, there are only a limited range of tools that are commonly used to produce certain effects. This means that, while we can try to adapt these features around our images, there will always be a point where we experience a plateau of ideas for creating something new. When this occurs, the best strategy is to think outside the box and devise novel ways of employing the well-used functions.

Due to these difficulties, it is important that we also turn our attention to avoiding any additional mistakes and challenges that we may be failing to recognise, in order to simplify our editing workflows and create a baseline image from which to build a creative masterpiece.

Your recipe doesn't work on all images A well-established process may fail to produce the effect you expected. This may be due to the differing range of tones in your shot.

Solution: Create a shadow, midtone and highlight version of your 'normal' editing recipe, with adjustments made to compensate for the native brightness and contrast of a file. If one preset fails, try another variant.

You can't exactly re-create your style Frustratingly it is possible to find that no matter what you try, you can't precisely introduce the same effect on two images.

Solution: Check the embedded camera profile in your RAW file has not been changed and that all Photoshop defaults are the same. Ensure all sliders are set to zero or their default positions.

You regularly lose image data If your chosen processing technique pushes shadows and highlights to their extremes, you may find that one or more colour channels become clipped, causing printing problems later on with areas of missing detail.

Solution: Capture more tones than you need by shooting bracketed exposures. By shooting over and underexposed files you have extra image data to work with.

You experience back-compatibility issues You may find that after opening an image in an older or newer version of software, that your 'look' is not accurately represented, necessitating complex adjustments.

Solution: Save files in the most universal format, such as TIFF, to future-proof images. If using Photoshop, opt for this over PSD as the latter arguably has more limited longevity.

Top tips for

EDITING

LIKE A PROFESSIONAL

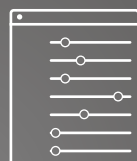


TAKE BREAKS

Hours of editing can blind you to mistakes and increase the risk of excessive use of tools. Stop and benefit from a fresh perspective.

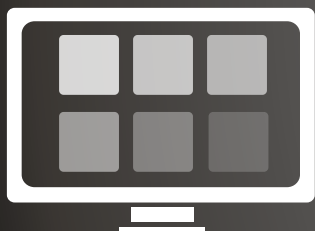
CUSTOMISE PRESETS

Not every preset will suit your photograph. Adjust the settings to your personal colour and contrast preferences.



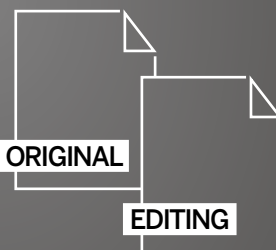
Know your program

Explore specific tools for your project needs to increase the variety and accuracy of the image enhancement.



Use calibrated MONITORS

Work with true colours to not only optimise skin tones, but also gain control over colour grading.



Don't edit the originals

Save your image as a copy. If your editing goals change, there is always the opportunity to start all over again.



Highlight with care

Don't overdo highlights, especially in portraits. This mistake is often made when whitening eyes and teeth.



Don't over-crop

Remember the basic composition rules and don't exclude important elements. Avoid isolating your subject unnaturally.

BALANCE SHARPNESS

NOISE



Take great care not to introduce noise when sharpening your images. This looks unnatural and can ruin your photos.

HDR

Reduce effects

When applying general tools, such as HDR effects or vignettes, use them sensitively and avoid overloading your images.

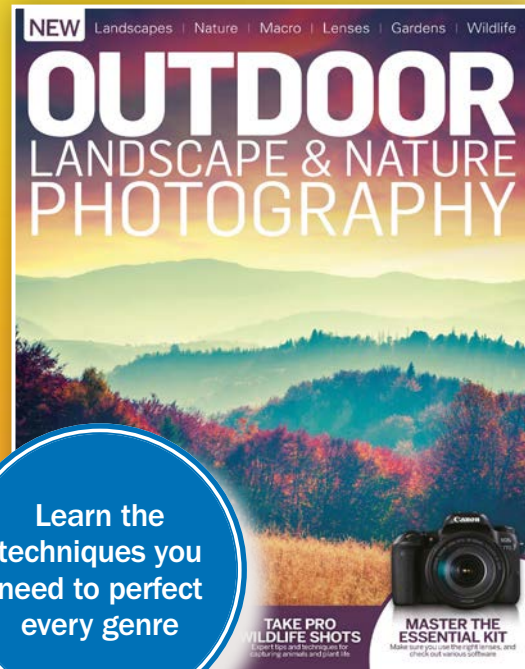
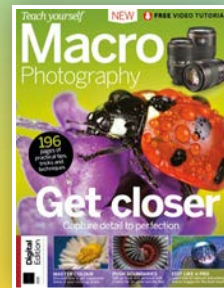
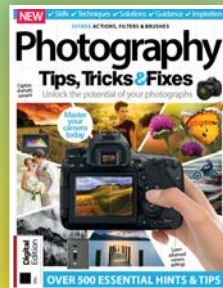


Pay attention

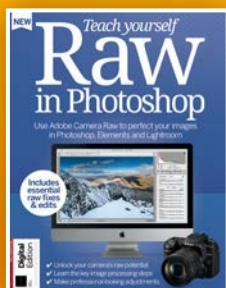
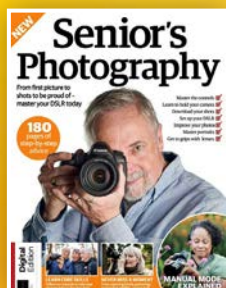
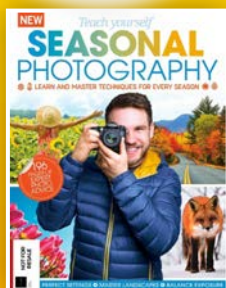
Check your result with a refreshed eye to find any editing mistakes that were unnoticed during the initial workflow.



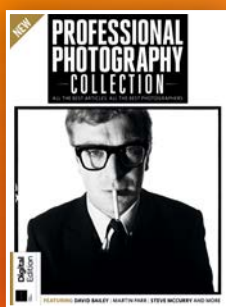
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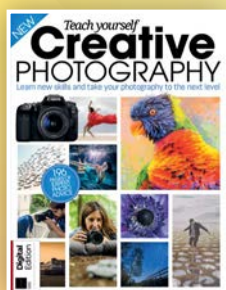
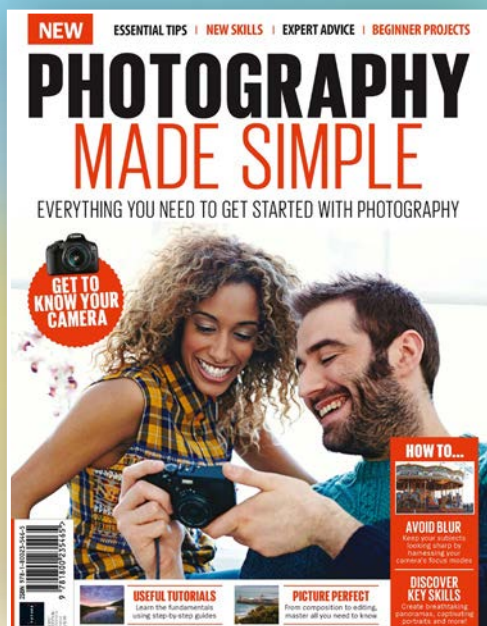
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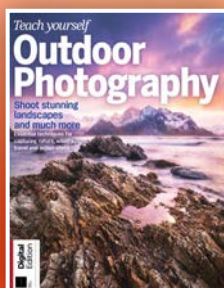
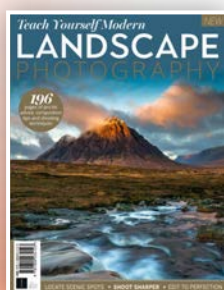


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