

Test Drive Close up on Lightroom

Part 2

Duncan Grove concludes his overview of what Lightroom has to offer by explaining how a recent shoot gave him a taste of how this software, in tandem with Photoshop, could help him to manage a big assignment

WORDS & PICTURES: Duncan Grove

Last month I looked at the fundamental differences between Lightroom and Photoshop but also at how the two applications can be used in tandem for a fast and efficient workflow. Using a recent studio shoot of two families I had undertaken as an illustration, I explored how Lightroom could be used for tethered shooting, fast image review and selection and for post-capture processing of a batch of 1000 images. I also looked at how, once I had whittled my 1000 images down to 250 'keepers', I found it more convenient to switch to Photoshop because it tends to be more suitable for more detailed retouching work and I prefer to work on layers, which are not supported by Lightroom.

It is very easy to switch to Photoshop but critical to understand just what is happening to your files. To open a Raw file, right click on it, select 'edit in' then 'Photoshop' and the file opens in this software with the same file name, including the Raw extension (eg .NEF for Nikon images). The data in the Raw file has been rendered so as to display in Photoshop, but this rendering has not yet been saved. Make some edits, click save and the file will change to a .psd file (or whatever default you selected in Lightroom preferences) and the new .psd file will appear in the Lightroom catalogue, alongside the original Raw file.

This new .psd file can be adjusted in Lightroom but, again, the file is not changed, rather Lightroom instructions are shown over it. If you then attempt to open the file in Photoshop again you are given a dialogue box choice:-

'Edit a copy with Lightroom adjustments' opens the file as a freshly-rendered image that will eventually be saved with a new file name, and it will include any Lightroom adjustments that were

made after the file was saved as a .psd file. Any layers that were saved as part of the original .psd file will have been flattened and lost for use in this new image, but the original .psd remains unopened and intact on the hard drive.

'Edit Original' simply opens the .psd file in exactly the state that it was last saved in from Photoshop, with all layers still available. This is exactly the same as opening directly from Photoshop - just save any changes after editing and these will show in Lightroom. However, the thing I took a while to get my head around is what happens when you use 'save as'.

Take this scenario: I have a meticulously edited image of three models. It is named 'DSC1234-edit.psd' and I want to keep this image. However, I need to fulfil my client's brief to clone-out one of the three models and then save the edited image as a new file. I use 'Edit Original' to open the file, do the cloning and then save it in the same folder but with a different file name, perhaps 'DSC1234-edit model removed.psd'. When I go back to Lightroom, 'DSC1234-edit.psd' is still there and untouched but there is no sign of the newly named and saved version with only two models. It is safely on my hard drive because I saved it there, but nothing has told Lightroom that it should be in the Lightroom catalogue. This is easy to fix, however, and all you need to do is to right click on the folder, then click 'synchronise' and the new image is imported into the catalogue. If you are not aware of this action, life can get confusing!

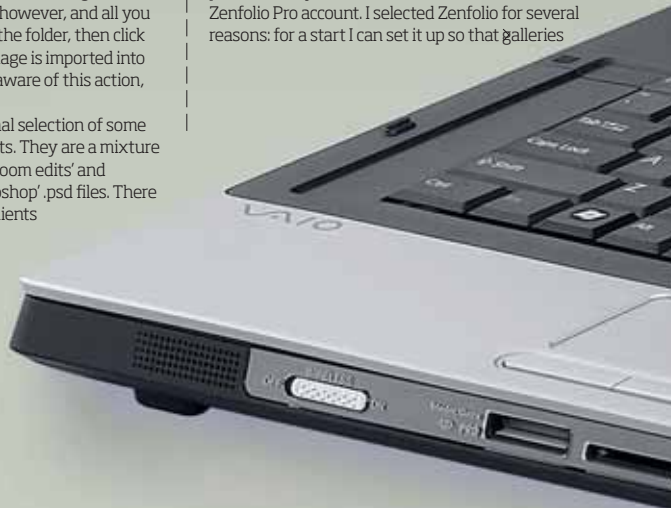
So, I am now down to a final selection of some 250 images to show my clients. They are a mixture of both 'Raw files with Lightroom edits' and 'rendered and edited in Photoshop' .psd files. There are rather too many for the clients

to go through in one sitting and, besides, each wants only to see shots of both families and shots of their own family. Consequently I decided to sort them into three Lightroom collections, called 'Both families', 'Fitzgerald family' and 'Richards family'. No automation here, but it's a quick and easy 'drag and drop' job. Having created the three collections I then simply select images from the photo shoot folder and drag them to the relevant collection.

What I urgently needed to do now was to present images to the clients so that they could select and order prints in time for Christmas delivery; using the web was the best way of doing this. Until recently I would have used Lightroom's web module to create galleries for uploading to my website. This is simple and I still sometimes use this system for uploading my portfolio galleries.

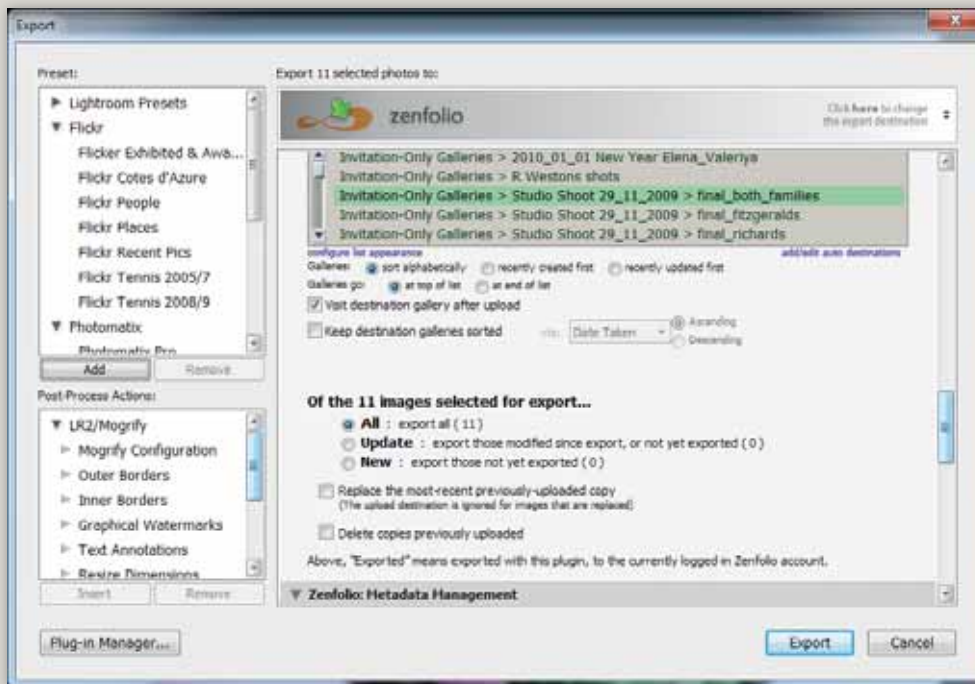
In this case, however, I wanted the clients to be able to quickly order and pay for the prints they required and I couldn't create e-commerce enabled galleries in Lightroom. Actually, this is not strictly true. There is a recently launched plug-in that enables you to do just that - see the side panel. Personally, I decided against it since the galleries provided display quite small images.

Instead of using Lightroom to display the pictures to my clients I decided to use a Zenfolio Pro account. I selected Zenfolio for several reasons: for a start I can set it up so that galleries





ABOVE: Creating and uploading a web gallery in Lightroom is very easy.



LEFT: Jeffrey Friedl's "Export to Zenfolio" Lightroom Plug-in does just what it says on the tin. He has others available for Picasa, Flickr and several more

appear to be hosted on my own domain, the images display nice and large and clients can order prints directly from the galleries. Critically, there is also a great plug-in available from Jeffrey Friedl (see side panel) that allows me to upload directly from Lightroom.

With other similar services I would have had to export my files from the collections, save them to my hard drive as JPEGs and then upload them to the gallery. I don't want this, since all of a sudden I would have two versions of each image on my hard drive. My mantra is that Lightroom must be the hub of everything I do; I want to have just the master version of each file, one version of each collection, all managed within Lightroom and then synchronised with my web galleries. If I change the images in a Lightroom collection, I want the changes reflected in my web galleries. There are alternative methods, but I have a catalogue of 45,000 images and was blessed with considerably fewer brain cells! I need a simple and foolproof way to keep track of everything.

Once I had uploaded my images to Zenfolio, I was able to give my clients a link to the galleries where they could view and order prints. I could have set it up so that Zenfolio's default printing lab processed and delivered the order. However,

I prefer to use my own lab since they inspect every image and always honour embedded colour profiles. Consequently, the orders were sent by Zenfolio to me and I undertook that extra step of sending the images to my preferred lab. The client's payment was made directly to my PayPal account.

Is the above the full extent of the advantages of Lightroom? By no means. Its database foundations allow all sorts of clever keywording with hierarchies and synonyms, and then searching via both these keywords and many other criteria. I recently spent a happy few minutes using Lightroom's functions to calculate what percentage of my shots were taken with my 14-24mm, 24-70mm and 70-200mm lens respectively. With the benefit of this new-found knowledge I was able to... well, conclude that I really need to get out more!

There are even those who contend that there is no need to file images in separate folders but that you should just use keyword searches to find any image you are looking for. Maybe they are right - but this will never work for me and I would encourage a date-based folder structure or similar, if only for reasons of backup and restore. I confess to having spent the odd Christmas in nerd mode, attempting to assign keywords to every image in my catalogue. I shoot a lot of tennis and have this

dream of clicking once to see all my shots of Nadal, then filtering them by star ratings to find the best amongst them.

Sadly, I fear that this is never going to happen. In all honesty, keywording is more time consuming than difficult, and if you do it at time of import I guess it is not too onerous. If you are managing someone else's library, I would say that detailed keywording is almost essential. However, even with 45,000 images I find that, because I shot them myself and saved them into folders in date order, I can generally quickly locate any image I am looking for without resorting to keywords.

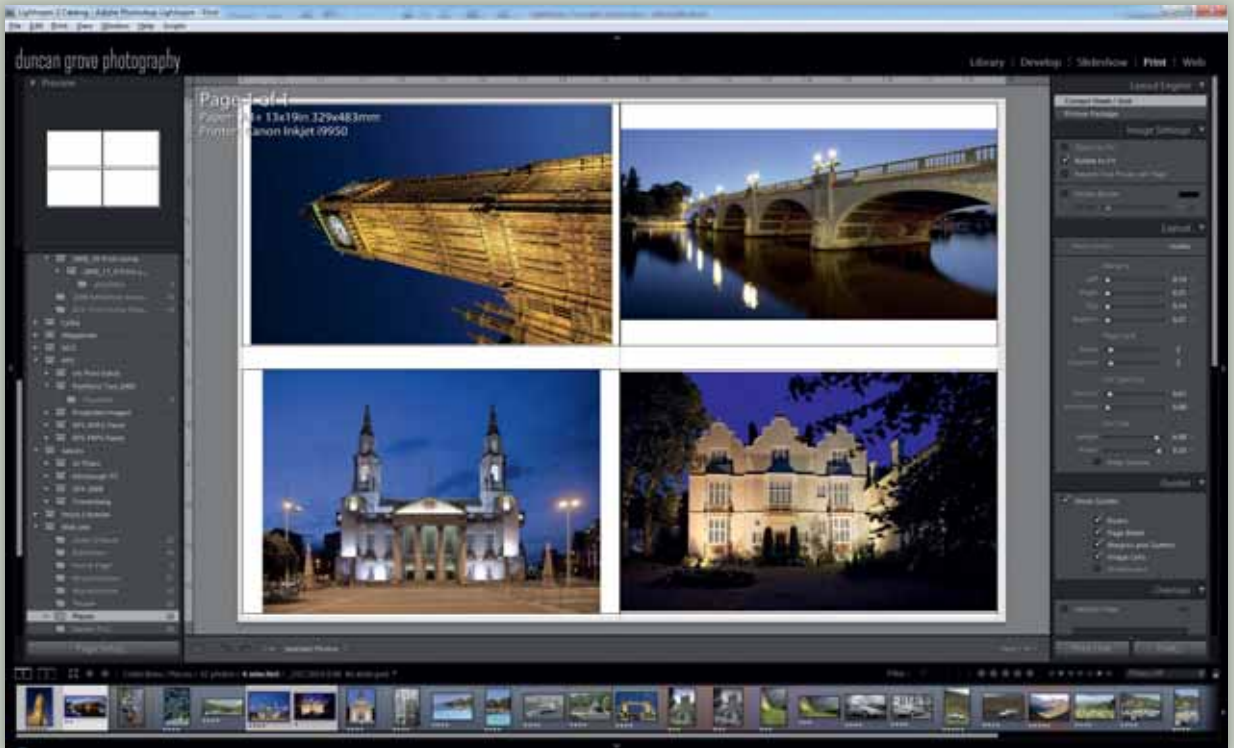
Only you can decide if investing time in keywording is likely to give you a worthwhile return. Personally, I find that the facility to label images by colour is far more useful. I tend to mark all my portfolio/exhibition images as purple, images awaiting editing as red, images awaiting upload to stock libraries as green etc.

I do use Lightroom for keywording images for stock libraries. There are several features designed to speed-up this task (which, as you have probably gathered by now I hate doing!) but I have to say that this aspect of Lightroom is not the most intuitive. If you use it for this same stock library task, I would counsel caution and recommend that you ensure you fully understand and test what happens with your keywords at time of export, especially if you use synonyms, which seem to get lost every time I export! In this particular respect, I am hoping for better things from Lightroom vs3, which is currently in beta.

On a more positive note, using Lightroom for printing is a doddle. It is easy to lay out multiple images on one page and proper colour management using profiles is supported. There is



"Lightroom is easy to master so it should only take a week or so before you are confident in navigating your way around"



also an excellent slide show module with a good choice of installed and user-modifiable templates.

In summary, I have tried to whet your appetite by explaining what Lightroom can do, rather than how to do it. The 'how to' is available on any number of websites, which is useful when you are in the middle of a task and come up against a minor hurdle. However, Lightroom is easier to master than more complex programmes like Photoshop, so it should only take a week or so before you are confident in navigating your way around.

Whilst web support is invaluable, I personally find there is nothing like having a good instruction book. I have no hesitation in recommending Martin Evening's *The Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 2 Book*, and essentially it tells you all you need to know. His Photoshop books are also truly excellent. If you prefer a slightly more jokey and vernacular presentation, Scott Kelby's books on the same subjects are also worth a read. Meanwhile, the side panel at the end of this feature also shows some useful links

If you would like to check out how the workflow I describe above has been put into practice, you are welcome to visit my site www.duncangrove.com and, if you click on the invitation link and then type 'friends100' (no quote marks) in the password box, you can see the photo shoot images and how the clients added comments.

My own prediction is that in five year's time Lightroom and Photoshop will have been merged into one application, perhaps with Photoshop being added to Lightroom's current five modules.

Of course there are alternatives and always will be, but for the last decade Adobe has dominated the imaging software market and there is no sign

of this changing soon. To some extent it is all a self-fulfilling prophecy. Any software of this type has, by necessity, a steep learning curve and, once you have invested time in learning Adobe's way of doing things, are you going to pay a relatively small amount to upgrade to the next version or switch to an inferior product that you have to pay full price for, since you have no upgrade path?

With Adobe's dominance, articles such as this and instruction books are all going to focus on Adobe products, which will further strengthen Adobe's R&D budget at the expense of other

ABOVE: Lightroom has excellent tools for quickly laying out and printing multiple images on a sheet.

software houses. Yes, the guys at Adobe will get richer but hey! they deliver a product that is streets ahead of the competition. We have to acknowledge this, hand over our money and reflect smugly on all the wrinkles the Adobe people will get from lying in their Californian sunshine! Try the free download but be warned that after 30 days you will feel compelled to invest. Grit your teeth, pay your money, then reap the benefits and enjoy. ☑

Useful links:

☐ See the photoshoot images and client comments referred to in the article by clicking 'invite' and then entering friends100 in the password box.
www.duncangrove.com

☐ Free 30 day trial of Lightroom 2:
www.adobe.com/uk/products/photoshopLightroom
 ☐ Free time-limited copy of Lightroom 3 beta:
<http://labs.adobe.com/technologies/lightroom3>

Adobe Exchange

www.adobe.com/cfusion/exchange
 ☐ This features a plethora of Lightroom (and other) plug-ins. Many are simply pre-sets that give images particular tonal effects but others are almost full applications in their own right. The majority are freeware or donationware. Check out Jeffrey Friedl's export plug-ins - there are versions for Zenfolio, SmugMug, Flickr,

PicasaWeb, Facebook, Expono and Photobucket. According to Adobe's data, there have been 102,000 downloads of these alone - I hope for Jeffrey's sake that every downloader made a \$10 donation!

Mathew Campagna's Turning Gate products are also worth checking out. Highslide Gallery Pro will enable you to use Lightroom to generate and publish a complete, fully-customisable e-commerce enabled web set.

☐ Although Jeffrey Friedl's plug-ins are listed on the Adobe site more details can be seen on his own site:
<http://regex.info/blog/lightroom-goodies>

☐ London-based photographer John Beardsworth is also a Lightroom guru. His site has lots of useful information and plug-ins:
www.beardsworth.co.uk