Lightroom Tips and Tricks

Lightroom Classic Editing from Start to Finish

By Chuck Palmer

Note to Photoshop users. . . Adobe Camera Raw has similar tools and functions as Adobe Lightroom Classic. You can use many Lightroom tips and tricks in Camera Raw too!

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I have been using Adobe's Lightroom for editing digital images for almost 10 years now. Once you get to know the program, you will be amazed at how easy it is to enhance your favorite photos. In this Lightroom Tips and Tricks, let's follow my typical Landscape Photo workflow from Start to Finish. I will use a Bok Tower image recently taken on a Camera Club of Brevard field trip for my edits. You can download my original before image to follow along in your own copy of Lightroom at the link provided at the end of this article.

The Bok Tower – Lake Wales Florida

The original raw image was slightly under exposed (See Before Photo Below) with the hope I could bring out a little detail in the dull overcast sky in post-processing. Applying basic toning global adjustments and a few local enhancements, resulted in the After image shown below. Let's review my workflow that achieved this result.
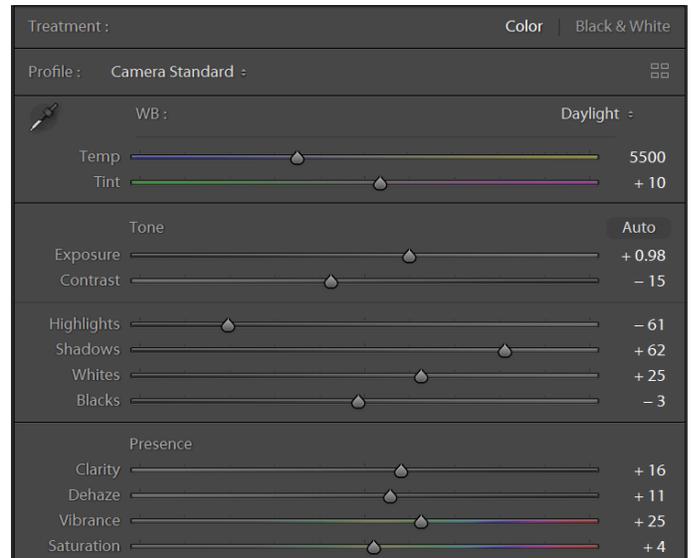
Before   After
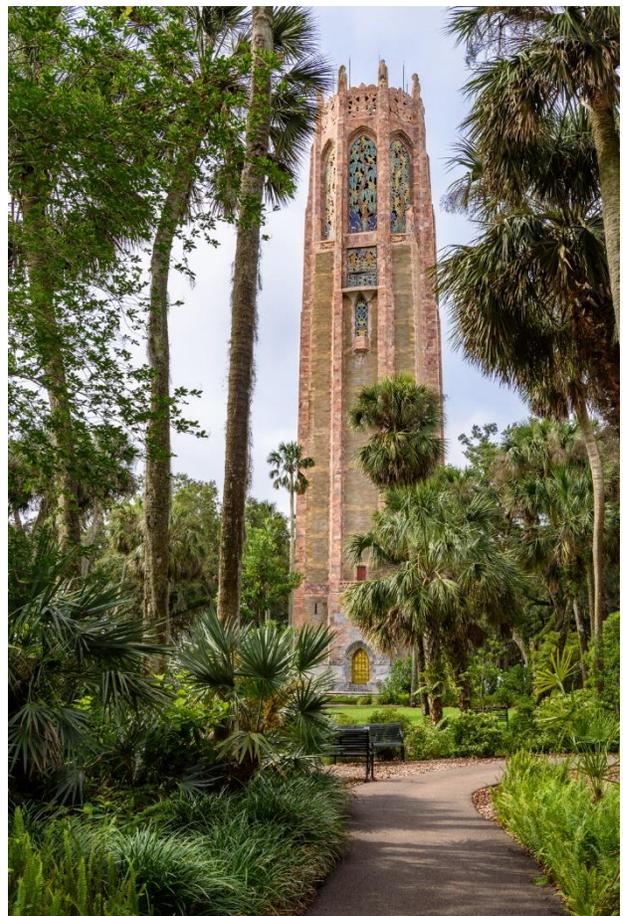
Step One – The first thing I do to a raw image is adjust basic toning. Heading to the Basic panel in Lightroom's Develop module, I start by clicking on the Auto button. This sets the basic toning as Lightroom's toning algorithm "sees" the image. I rarely use these settings as is, but I find it a good starting place. For my Bok Tower photo, Lightroom's Auto toning left the image too dark, so I boosted the Exposure, Shadows, and Whites sliders to reflect how I remember the scene at the time of capture. Note that Adobe's Auto Toning algorithm will typically reduce contrast and increase shadows too much for my liking, but I still find it a good place to start.

Step Two – Set the Color Profile – At the top of the Basic Panel, the color profile is set to an Adobe Default Profile. In the latest version of Lightroom, you can change this profile to a variety of special profiles or

Final Basic Panel Settings

Camera Profiles specific to your brand of camera. I typically like Camera Standard for landscape photos taken with my Nikon camera. Try several Profiles to discover the color starting place you like best. Pay attention to how the profiles change the highlights and shadows in your image. If you are using an older version of Lightroom, you will find Profiles in the Camera Calibration panel.

Step Three – Set the White Balance – In the Basic Panel, a selection of White Balance presets is available in the dropdown menu provided or you can make your own adjustments with the Temp and Tint sliders. An Eye Dropper tool is also provided so you can select a neutral gray area of your photograph to automatically set the white balance using this neutral color reference. For my Bok Tower image, I selected the Daylight preset which warmed the image slightly from the "as shot" settings.

Step Four – Set the "Presence" and finalize Toning – In this step, the Presence sliders are adjusted to include Clarity, Dehaze, Vibrance, and Saturation. I will often add Clarity (mid-tone Contrast) but rarely add Dehaze. However, in my Bok Tower image, I found a slight adjustment to Dehaze added to the image. You can think of the Dehaze slider as Mid-Tone Contrast on steroids. A little bit goes a long way. After a Camera Profile, White Balance, and Presence Sliders are set, you often must go back to the Tone Panel to fine tune your image. This is an interactive process, as the toning sliders interact with one another. See my Final Basic Panel Settings in the graphic above.

Step Five – Tone Curve Adjustment (Contrast) – Heading to the Tone Curve Panel, I adjust first the Darks slider to -14, and the Lights slider to +12 for this image. If you don't see these sliders in your Tone Curve Panel, click on the little square box in the lower right of the panel to reveal the sliders. I rarely touch the Highlights and Shadows sliders in the Tone Curve panel. I find adding Contrast to an image with just the Darks and Lights in this panel is more visually appealing than the Contrast slider in the Basic panel. . . at least to my eye. After Tone Curve adjustments you may have to go back to Step One to make one more final adjustment to your Tone sliders to fine tune toning enhancements.
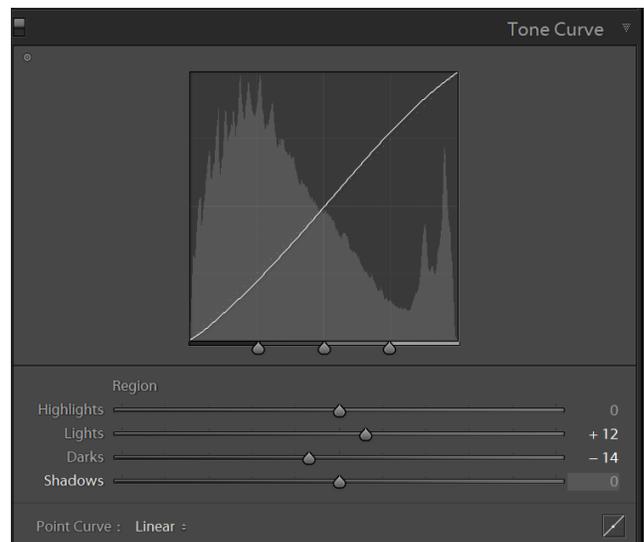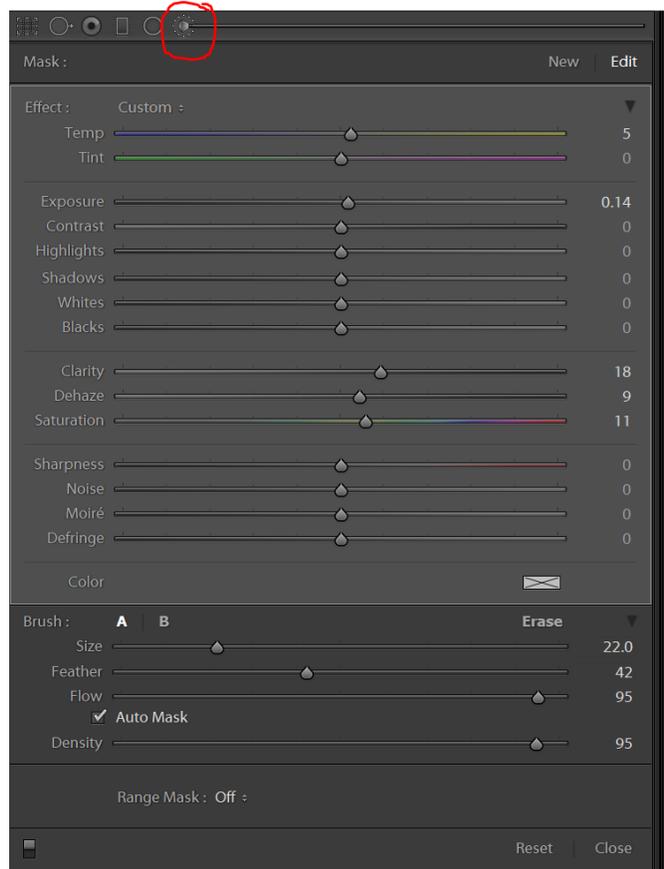
Step Six – Straighten and Crop – Now that we can see the image more clearly, it is time to Straighten and Crop the Image. – At the top of the Basic Panel, select the Crop tool from the tool panel. I elected to only Straighten this image since I liked the resulting Crop out of Camera. Note: I always set Lens Corrections (Remove Chromatic Aberrations and Enable Profile Corrections) in the Lens Corrections panel as a Preset when importing my images to Lightroom. If you don't set Lens Corrections in your Import Process, go to the Lens Corrections Panel and set the check boxes in both options displayed before you begin Step Six.
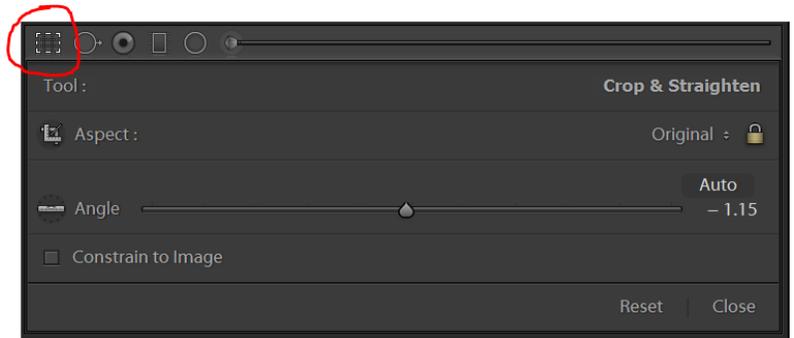
Step Seven - Local Adjustments – Here is where you can really make your main subject stand out to create a truly remarkable image. In my Bok Tower Photo, I made 4 local adjustments using the Local Adjustment Brush. You will find the Brush Tool in the Tool Panel at the top of the Basic Panel. My first local adjustment was to add some detail and warmth to the Bok Tower. Selecting the Adjustment Brush, I hit the keyboard letter "O" to toggle the mask overlay so I can tell where I am painting (See image below). Make sure the "Auto Mask" checkbox is selected so the tool will follow the edges of your desired area to be painted. After painting the tower, I made the following adjustments in the Local Brush panel. Temp +5; Exposure +0.14; Clarity +18; Dehaze +9; Saturation +11. Using the same methodology, I added Exposure and Clarity to the golden door on the tower, Contrast, Clarity, and Dehaze to the walkway leading line up to the tower, and to that dull sky, I reduced the Exposure, Highlights and added a blue Color to the sky using the Color panel in the tool adjustments.
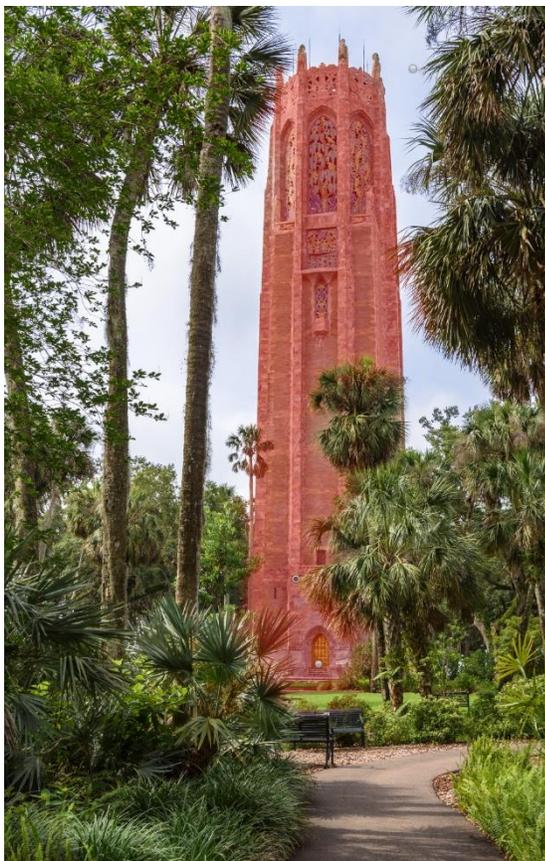
Brush Tool Mask Overlay Turned On   *Brush Tool Local Adjustments Panel*

Step Eight – Finishing and Detail – The final step of my workflow is to go to the Detail Panel to Sharpen and apply Noise Reduction if necessary. For my Bok Tower Image, I applied the following Sharpening settings: Amount +85; Radius 0.8 (Sharpening applied to the equivalent of 0.8 pixels size for Landscape Photos); Detail 35; Masking 30. Set the Masking slider by holding down the Alt Key (Option Key on MAC) while adjusting the slider. The Alt Key changes your image to a high contrast black and white graphic showing you where sharpening is being applied (Sharpening is removed from Black areas). In my Bok Tower Image, I wanted to avoid sharpening the sky, so Masking set to 30 sharpened all elements of the image except the sky. I did not find any objectionable Noise in the image, so I elected not to apply any Noise Reduction. Although I did not feel it necessary for this Bok Tower image, your final step for other images may be to go to the Effects panel to apply a post-crop vignette to guide your viewer to the center of your image.

My final Bok Tower Photo is displayed in the After image at the beginning of this article. You will note that my style of post-processing attempts to maintain what might be described at a natural looking image. Your style may be notably different than mine, but I hope sharing my workflow will help you develop your own, and that you learned something new. As always, have fun with your photography, and may only the remarkable images be yours.

Chuck

Original Bok Tower Raw Image File Available

If you would like to download the image file used in this article to follow the outlined workflow in your Lightroom, you can obtain original raw file at this link - https://www.dropbox.com/s/2l7gugoyka56hvq/ChuckPalmer-_DSC2968.nef?dl=0