Photoshop Lightroom: a Review
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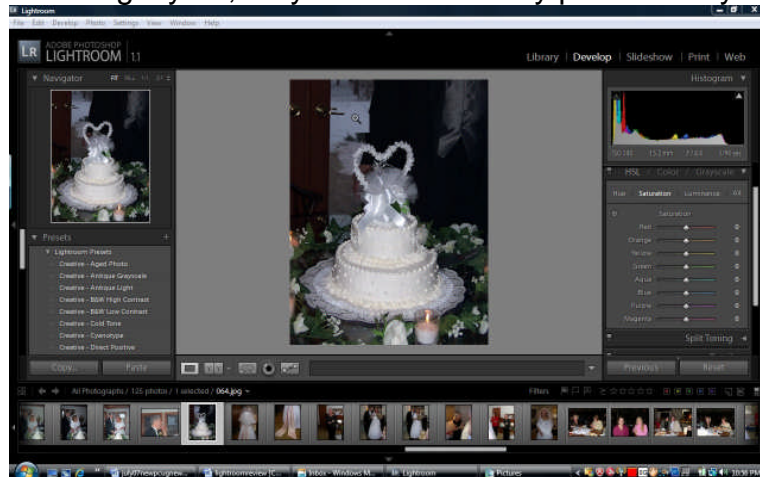tekvall@new.rr.com

Do you like to shoot plenty of pictures with your digital camera?

If you are like me, storing and organizing them is always a chore so that you can find the right picture when you need it.

Enter Adobe Photoshop Lightroom – the new kid on the block for handling your digital workflow. Designed specifically for professional photographers, Lightroom is equally fantastic and impressive for any photo enthusiast.

Lightroom is not designed to replace Adobe Photoshop or Photoshop Elements. However, It is the perfect complement to the programs, and for some who do not care for doing layers, may become the only product they need for digital imaging tasks.

While Photoshop is designed as a general-purposed tool to handle a variety of creative digital imaging tasks, Lightroom has only one focus—providing photographers with an effective, streamlined way to manage their photos, process them, and deliver a final product whether a print or web gallery.

The product incorporates many features I enjoy in Photoshop CS3, such as the state of the art black and white adjustment techniques and being able to edit JPEG and TIFF files in a non-destructive manner.

In fact, everything you do in Lightroom is handled in a non-destructive manner, so that JPEG images do not diminish in quality over time as editing changes are made. I like the way Lightroom lays out the photo editing tools on the workspace so that everything is at hand. Edits can be undone in the future and new changes made without having to create separate files for each change. Information is stored in a separate file associated with the image. The information is there in a Managed Photos folder whether you import the images into Lightroom's library or leave them in the original location.

Lightroom in fact is a cataloger of your photos, with the user having the choice where to store the images. It will even recognize pictures on removable drives or external hard drives as part of the catalog, something most browsers will not do. I chose to store my pictures in their original location for now.

When you start up Lightroom, you will notice a sleek, grayscale interface. The concept behind Lightroom is to provide a simplified workflow setup from shoot to finish with five modules identified on the top right hand section of the screen: Library, Develop, Slideshow, Print, and Web. Each module has a set of panels with pre-set information on the right hand side, task information on the left hand side, photo displays in the center and a filmstrip on the bottom of photos being reviewed. The filmstrip shows all in a particular folder, not just those opened up.

The *Library* is where photos are imported and cataloged with the ability to add keyword information, rate the photo on importance, and even mark it for rejection before a final deletion. It also includes Quick Develop controls that let you make simple edits with push button controls rather than sliders. Photos can be viewed in tandem to facilitate selecting, comparing, and ranking (stars and colors) photos for later processing.

The *Develop* module is where you do the non-destructive processing of photos including those in the .raw format. Whether you are in the library looking at a set of photos or in the Develop module, a histogram of the picture selected is always visible. This helps in evaluating which picture to keep or edit for printing.

The *Slideshow* provides a way to review photos or show them to someone else in an interesting format with the film strip of all the photos still showing on the bottom part of the screen.

The *Print* module provides all the choices for printing while the *Web* provides a tool for enabling the pictures to be viewed on the web either in html or in flash formats.

I love the way Lightroom is laid out on the screen as you can see from the accompanying image. Everything is so simple to use and user-friendly. I also love the Color Adjustment sliders that adjust both the primary and secondary color ranges (all eight colors) with regard to the hue, saturation and luminance (HSL) characteristics of the image as well as the tonal controls including a new Tone Curve feature.

Lightroom can probably handle most of my image-editing needs. However, there is still definitely a place for my Photoshop CS3 for those things which Lightroom cannot do.

What Lightroom cannot do is apply layers, masks, and selective editing to a photo nor will it allow you to do compositing and montages. It is not a "fix it" program when extensive retouching is necessary, nor does it have filters and brushes to create artistic effects, something I love to do. .Lightroom also does not work with video, which is no big deal to me.

Lightroom does provide for exporting the photo to Photoshop, Photoshop Elements or other image editing programs so that further work can be done to the photo.

Lightroom sells through Adobe (www.adobe.com) for $299. A 30-day fully functional tryout version is available for downloading from their web site.

Final thought. This is definitely a must-have program for those who want to manage their photos and process them in a non-destructive manner. To me what sets this apart from other organizers/digital asset management programs is the quality and depth of the photo-editing tools. It is obvious the program draws upon the experience of Adobe staff in developing image-editing products such as Photoshop, Bridge, and Camera Raw.

The system requirements include Microsoft Vista or Windows XP, 768 MB of RAM (1 GB recommended) and a Pentium 4 processor. I installed the software on an Acer laptop running Vista with Pentium 4 dual-core processors (1.60 GHz speed), and 2 GB of RAM. No installation problems. There are a number of books out on the market to help you learn more about the software. The one I use is *Photoshop Lightroom for Digital Photographers Only* by Ron Sheppard. I like it for its simplicity in presenting information in an easy-to-understand format. There are a number of other great books out there.