

How I Keep My Sanity When Processing Digital Images

by

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I have a bookshelf in my office filled with 3-ring binders holding thousands of 35mm slides. They are well catalogued, and I can find the photo I want pretty quickly, assuming I know what to do with it when I find it, which likely means digitizing. So, when digital photography came around I literally spent years trying different methods to organize and retrieve my photos which were in zeros and ones on a hard drive. I use Adobe's Lightroom CC and Photoshop CC exclusively for post processing of all my digital images, but neither one is very effective for organizing. Lightroom's biggest drawback is tracking down photos where the folder or file name has been changed. To me, organizing photos is like writing a story where numerous re-writes and edits are needed for final presentation. This is virtually impossible to do in Lightroom where chasing moved or renamed photos takes too much time and pushes my frustration level to the brink. Thankfully, I finally developed a system that creates a final edited product in a reasonable amount of time without creating multiple hierarchy folders that are too burdensome for navigation. Here's how it works.

Importing, Organizing and Coarse Editing

I use Downloader Pro (DP) and BreezeBrowser Pro (BBP) to import photos into the computer and make the first "coarse" edit. Arthur Morris of *Birds as Art* introduced me to this software some years ago and it has been a staple ever since. Downloader Pro pops up on the screen when you insert the memory card into the card reader if you set that option in Settings/ Devices/Auto Play in Windows 10. It will strip large RAW files from the memory card (or just copy them) in seconds and put them into any folder you

choose. I use the Photos folder in the C: drive in windows on a PC as the destination for the download. You can set a variety of combinations in *File/Preferences* that DP will use to set up the folders. DP will ask for a Job Code and other filing information. For photos I took at Wheatridge Green Belt (WGB) on August 4, 2018 I used:

Download Directory: C:\Photos\WGB\{J}{D}{b}{y}. That gave me a folder and sub folder
C:\Photos\WGB\04Aug18|file name.

If I take other photos in the future at WGB, say for birding or wildflowers, they are stored in the WGB folder in subfolders by date. If I'm on a long trip, say Scotland, I now have a record of photos taken in daily subfolders. With the proper settings in Preferences, DP now ejects the card reader and opens the photos in BBP for the initial editing process.

Ctrl A, Ctrl S, Ctrl S lets me scroll through all the photos full size on the screen and check the ones I want to keep. Clicking Esc and Ctrl F groups these together at the front of the collection; Ctrl I highlights all the rejects and Delete dumps them all at once. It's that fast. Since I have trouble rejecting photos I may go through this process a couple of times by pressing Shift+Ctrl U to remove the check marks and repeat the process to select the keepers.

Now I do the coarse edit. Ctrl D opens the selected photo in Photoshop. I may make some adjustments in Adobe Camera Raw (ACR), then I open the file, crop it, and use the spot healing and clone brushes to remove obstructions and generally clean up distracting elements, especially around the edges. When I'm done I add E to the end of the file name and save it in the parent folder, in this example WGB. This is where I make final decisions on file names, maybe appending additional information to the file name given by the camera. It might look like _AHM1234E_Columbine for a wildflower. Now I add keywords that will stay with the photo through all the subsequent processing and I'm ready to do the final polishing in Lightroom and publishing in Photoshop.

Fine-Tuning Edit for Publishing

Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop are interrelated programs for post processing digital images. They have an incredible range of capabilities most of which I will never use, but I'm learning from videos by Scott Kelby who is a master on this software. I upload all the photos in the parent folder into a folder of the same name in Lightroom and move them one at a time from Library to Develop where I make minor adjustments to optimize the photo quality. The latest version of Lightroom CC has an Auto feature under Basic that makes suggested adjustments to exposure, contrast, highlights, shadows and more that are totally reversible. I've been using this feature a lot since it does a very good initial job and cuts down on post processing time considerably. On occasion, I may need to send the photo back to Photoshop that has some better editing features than Lightroom, like spot removal. That's easily done by pressing Ctrl E which opens the file in Photoshop while preserving the changes made in Lightroom. When the corrections are made I click on Save (not Save As), close and reopen Lightroom. The corrected file is there with Edit added to the file name.

Now it's time to publish. I export all the finished files into two subfolders, _Lightroom and _Web just below the parent directory (WGB in the example). I set up the export parameter presets in Lightroom and export the full-size photo without sharpening as a TIFF file into the _Lightroom folder using the Print Preset I created. That lets me adjust the size in Photoshop before sharpening if I want to make prints. The Web preset reduces the size, sharpens and converts the photo to JPEG format for emailing.

I use the Actions feature in Photoshop for final publishing, I have set up actions for quick email attachments, slide shows, IPAD and website publishing that involve changes to color depth and profile, maximum pixel length, sharpening and saving in JPEG format where appropriate, all in one key stroke. When I press Shift+Ctrl f3 on images designed for my website it makes the programmed conversions in an instant, deposits the modified file in my Squarespace folder for my website and closes it in Photoshop. If

I use File/Automate/ Batch in Photoshop and enter the Action above and the source folder (now WGB/_Lightroom) it converts all the photos one at a time and adds the files to my Squarespace folder.

What was that old TV catch phrase? Try it, you'll like it! It took me a very long time to come up with this final solution that gives me more time to photograph, which is why we love photography, isn't it?

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