Making a Lightroom Import preset – from a DPCA Lightroom talk Oct 2016

There are "settings" (adjustments, edits, etc.) that can be applied all at one time to your images by using "presets." These are very simple scripts or menus that include settings that you choose and save, much like Photoshop's "actions." They are real time-savers. Presets are one reason that Lightroom is so popular worldwide, because you can apply your favorite group of settings in a single preset – even to hundreds or more of photos at once.

How can you tell what adjustments are needed without seeing your photos first? Why use a preset universally, as you would during importing? Because some of the settings LR offers are basically good improvements to almost all photos that come out of your camera. Such a preset can automate your editing and correcting many photos down to a few seconds, not only saving time but assuring you don't forget to make those corrections. Why not apply them in a package when you Import your photos so you don't have to remember to do them later?

Let's look first at how to apply desirable global settings and how that works, and then what the various prospects are to embed those settings into an overall Import preset.

You should do a little planning first. Start in Develop mode and look down the right-hand column in one panel after another to see what settings you might like to take effect on every image.

As a minimum, candidates are in the Detail sub-panel, where both Sharpening and Noise Reduction are available. If you're shooting in JPG mode, these are applied in-camera; if in raw mode neither are applied yet both are likely needed. Color Noise reduction is always worthwhile because unlike Luminance Noise reduction that slightly reduces sharpness, Color does not. These settings are best made from tests prior to setting an import for them.

A certainty for an adjustment application is in the Lens Correction sub-panel. Here you would check "Profile" then on the next window that appears, check the boxes "Enable Lens Profile" and "Remove Chromatic Aberration."

You also might want to always correct for converging lines caused by aiming the camera up or down, or to always go to a certain folder for image storage. Later we'll look at more possibilities, including making different import presets, some with universal settings and others that apply those plus special but often-used settings.

All this and more can be done collectively and automatically while Importing.

Chromatic Aberration - First, what's CR? It's color fringing at image edges that have large changes in brightness.

It's caused by your lens not being able to focus all colors (different wavelengths) at the sensor surface. Generally, green light is in the middle of our visible spectrum, having an average wavelength. At the edges of the lens, it gets bent so as to focus exactly on the sensor. But red, which has a longer wavelength, isn't bent as much and focuses behind the sensor – blue is shorter and focuses in front of the sensor. So those latter colors don't appear at the same place on the sensor, and the result we see is color fringing.

Inexpensive lenses may have just a few glass elements and not use the special glass composition in some elements that will correct most of this CR; and of course, expensive lenses use exotic materials to correct most of it. It's said that no lens is perfect regarding this, but why buy based on low CR when LR can remove it completely? (You may buy a great lens for other reasons – that's OK). In the film days, you got whatever your lens gave you, but with LR you can completely correct CR, even in scanned film images.

If you intend to always present your images in Black-and-White, you may say you don't care about CR. But you should, because unlike mono film, the image is made up of the three colors that all digital cameras record. If you don't correct CR, in B&W the detail in image edges won't be as good as it can be.

As suggested earlier, checking that "Remove…" box corrects for common "lateral" CR (at edges with high contrast) and should do it completely, automatically most of the time and for most lenses. Or, you can zoom in on the CR you still see in the image, and in Lens Corrections/Manual, click on the panel's eyedropper. Touch it to that fringe on the screen and LR will set the sliders for you. This corrects all lateral CR, which probably occurs only near all the edges of your photos.

For "axial" CR (that can occur anywhere on the image but is rarer) there are other controls for any remaining CR problems. If automatic CR correction isn't working right for you, it can be fine-tuned by checking Manual at the top of that Sub-panel. A new panel shows "Defringe" sliders applicable to both lateral and axial CR. There, while observing an image that shows CR (shoot a bare tree with branches in the sky and look for fringing at the image corners), you can alter the automatic correction amount as well with these sliders.

Be sure to first set the Amount slider somewhere above zero – try 5 – so that the other sliders will be effective. Then the two sliders below permit selecting a range of the colors to remove – one in Magenta to Green, the other in Blue to Yellow. Experiment with this - there's no sure way to predict what will work for that photo. If you set them too high you can get weird undesirable effects on the photo, so test. More about this at: http://bit.ly/2fuW4UT

Distortion - From there, (go back and check Profile, not Manual) you'll see a list of ways to apply lens profile corrections, which are basically distortion and vignetting.

LR has embedded in it data tables with the known optical errors in almost any lens that's made. Your lens reports digital information to the camera about its brand, focus range and current focal length for that photo. The camera relays that data into the header of the image file written to your card. LR accesses that data, brings up the correction factors from its tables, and when you've checked the right boxes, applies those corrections individually to each image, even if you're changing lenses or cameras.

What are these corrections? Most important are the distortions inherent in presenting perfect flatness of the real object through many curved glass surfaces onto a flat display. If the edges of your image are bowed out, it's called "Barrel" distortion; bowed in is "Pincushion" distortion. (The "Distortion" sliders in both the Profile and Manual sub-panels adjust for both barrel and pincushion). These errors and names have been around since early telescopes, and the terms are still used.

Be sure the "Profile" box is checked and under Setup, check "Default" in the list. Under Lens Profile are three lists: one is the lens make, the next is the focal length range or model designation, and the last is the Adobe data file name to correct that lens. That should cause LR to read your lens data and apply its corrections correctly and automatically.

There should be no need to do anything here unless LR hasn't recognized your lens and the Setup entry reads "None." If LR doesn't recognize your lens it could be because the camera's report isn't always read from JPG files, when you exported as a JPG you stripped off most metadata, or because if you're shooting raw you've set LR "Setup" here to other than Default.

If so, you should change that entry to Default. If the correct lens still isn't identified, most likely you can find and click your lens in the dropdown list that appears when you click on the tiny up-down arrow at the right of Make.

If you want to tweak the settings - perhaps distortion is not fully correcting for your particular lens - you can make changes with the sliders and save them as a new default setting.

Vignetting - Another lens error is darkening of the corners of the image due to designs that don't make light passing through the corners of the lens equal to that in the center. The resultant corner-darkening - as much as a full f-stop - is called "vignetting," and it is easily corrected in digital processing. That lens data in LR's table contains how much this particular lens vignettes and at what focal lengths. LR will use this data to eliminate it by brightening the corners just enough.

Because this is likely to affect your exposure corrections later, it's best to make this correction first. (Some newer cameras read the lens data and correct vignetting in-camera).

This correction is separate from LR's intentional light or dark vignetting ability that you can control under Effects. Here, the adjustment follows any cropping you might have done and applies it to the new cropped image for creative effects that can be very desirable. It's not a lens error, which, under Lens Corrections is corrected only on the original, uncropped image.

Exposure adjustments – It may not be intuitive to want to correct exposure of all your images before you even see them. However, digital cameras have limited "dynamic range" (as film does) and cannot present the very bright and very dark parts of high-contrast scenes while keeping detail there. There's more to this explanation, but let's just say that you might like to contain the information that your camera did shoot within the range of the print paper and screen's dynamic range.

That's possible to do in the Basic panel by setting the Shadows slider much higher than normal, and the Highlights set lower, perhaps all the way to the left at -100. Some pros do this all the time to retain detail inherent in the image file. It's not the same as reducing contrast because it doesn't affect the midtones as much as the contrast adjustment.

If it's not right for some files, you can later reset these sliders (or drag the histogram curve in Develop) for those files. But these are good general settings, particularly for outdoor sunlight photos and in city streets where the local detail may be lost in shadows. Or, if you like the idea but want to apply it only on images where you see a high-contrast problem, you can leave it out of the Import preset and instead make a Develop preset with just those settings in it, then click it as a "button."

> If you use the Tone Curve for exposure adjustments, you can get a similar effect by setting in a slight reverse S-curve, mostly at the ends.

Lens Corrections and Transform - One more change that's very useful is to have LR straighten tilted images and make parallel lines not converge at the top or bottom (which happens if you aim the camera up or down). This is done in the right-hand column's Lens Corrections (LR 4 and 5) or in Transform (LR 6 and CC) panels. The latest versions have an "Upright" (not a button) group of 5 or 6 rectangular buttons. Try "Auto" first because it's a simple command to use on nearly all images. If you have an image that needs this, try it out. Auto doesn't always suit all images, either under- or overcorrecting, in which case click the "Off" button then go up to Manual and work with the sliders. If it does look good, be sure to leave it "on" in that panel when you create this important preset we'll call here: "Import group."

> It's hugely useful if you shoot building interiors, where the eye demands straight walls and ceiling lines. Trimming up with Manual controls can get you closer to perfection.

Make the Develop preset - As previewed above, creating a preset will aggregate settings made in the Develop mode. They all are created in the left column in the "Presets" sub-panel. Just click at the right end of that panel on the "+" (plus) sign, and give your new preset a name. To get an idea for what you'd like to use in an Import preset, set up these settings suggested above to anything you like, then create a preset and name it something that will stand out among others, perhaps in upper-case ("IMPORT GROUP") for example. That name should now appear in the User Preset folder in the Preset sub-panel at left.

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Import Commands - You're now almost ready to generate the Import preset that contains this Develop preset by that new name. But there are other automatic operations you can add.

Go to the Import window (in Library, click at the bottom left on Import) to set up some conditions beyond just Develop settings that you'd like to automate. For example, under Destination you can set it to go directly to your Pictures folder. Then the import preset will always send you to that folder first. If you are shooting in raw mode, at the top of the window you may select "Copy as DNG." (This has no effect on JPGs).

You might want to always set up "Eject after import" (checkbox at the upper left) to assure that you can remove the camera card after importing without fear of damaging files. You may want to always generate Smart Previews, or make a backup copy (upper right check box under "File Handling)."

Another useful one is "File Renaming" where you can delete and add items at import. One choice that makes filenames more useful is to replace "IMG_" or "DCS_" or other prefix with your initials (or nothing), leave the serial number ("number suffix") of that image, then add the date/time of that image. (IMG_1234.CR2 becomes DKD_1234-161113.CR2). It's important to keep your filenames standardized for easiest organizing.

Setting up a standard for renaming is arranged in the metadata template. Click the "File Renaming" sub-panel and it will open, then click the "Rename Files" box and then on the up/down arrow beside "Template." Click on any one to see the template renamer, and cancel if you want to see another. If you like a type of renaming in that default list, click it. If not, either edit one that's close and save it as "edited" or a new name, or develop one of your own (click edit at the bottom of the list). That name will then appear in that list. Check the (one) box that may be a constant for your importing. Near the top, LR shows a sample of what your new name will look like. (Always check this to be OK because reversing a rename is tedious).

It may be clear by now that you can make many import presets and just choose an applicable one at each import, setting up adjustments and import conditions for other

types of images. One might be Landscapes, another Wildlife, another Night Shots. There is no limit on the number you can make, and each one can have unique settings and folder destinations. You can include various presets in all, some, or none of them.

Add the Develop preset - Now, you can tie together the Develop preset you made with the Import preset about to be made. In the Import window at top right, open the "Apply During Import" sub-panel and you'll see where your Develop preset is to be inserted. Click the up/down arrow to get the default list from the Develop module and click there on "User presets." The resulting fly-out box will show all the Develop presets – Lightroom's defaults and your own - (above, it was "IMPORT GROUP".) Click on that (one) and the list will close.

Next, you may be inserting metadata (your contacts, copyrights, a preliminary star rating, etc.) in the next list in the same manner.

You may want to insert a keyword into all files to be imported, every time. However, remember that this is intended to be a universal Import preset, so you may not want to include keywords that don't belong in all files. You can add keywords after importing that will apply to just this set of images as well as keywords on each image.

There may be more universal changes you'll identify and want them in your Import preset, so feel free to experiment. You can always add or remove settings: first use the aggregate preset, then make your manual changes to your taste, then right-click on the preset in the left column and choose "Update with current settings" instead of making a whole new preset.

Beyond these choices, there are some variables that you would not put into a master preset. These would be set up for each import, such as the folder destination and possibly some broadly applicable keywords. Using the Import preset can get you to a general folder area (e.g., "Pictures") and there you can choose a folder below or make your own new folder for each import. But don't do that step now because that same folder would be set up as a destination every time you use this Import preset.

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Create the Import preset - Once you're all set with the top and right-hand panels, including the choice of top-level Destination, you're ready to create the Import preset.

Go to the middle of the very bottom of the Import screen and at the left find the grayed-out words "Import preset," and in white at the right, the word "None." Click on the up/down arrow there and a default list will appear. Here, do not click on any other than "Save Current Settings as New Preset" or you'll lose all your work. You'll also see that you can update this preset later without starting over, as well as deleting and renaming the preset.

As before, a screen opens asking you for the preset name. Give it a name that sounds universal, such as "STD IMPORT." (You may want to include your initials if someone else will be using this catalog). That name will now appear in place of "None," and it's active for this following import.

This, unique among other LR commands you type in, is not a "sticky" choice. The next time you import, it will have been reset back to "None." So you must choose your preferred Import preset each time you import.

Try it out - Set up some files for your first try. You may have saved some originals in a folder you can select. For a good test, these should have some obvious common faults such as very high contrast, converging lines or tilted horizons, or all of these.

When you click Import at the lower left, LR will load the original camera images to the screen (only). You can enlarge these with the zoom slider at the screen's bottom and observe whether these photos are likely to need corrections.

When you're ready for the actual import (where LR registers the metadata and copies files from the card to your hard drive destination while applying the preset information) click at the lower right on the Import button. As the import progresses you'll be in Library, where you can observe images appear one by one. You can also go to Develop to see the results of these effects. The Develop sliders and blocks will show them moved or checked as you selected them in the Develop import. You can start culling and editing here while the import progresses.

If you click on the letter "F" you'll get a "full-screen" view for the best detail, and you can navigate with your left-right arrow keys. Click again on F to exit, or D to make changes in the Develop module and return with another "F."

If you choose to enter the settings suggested above, you won't be seeing the out-of-camera images again - instead you'll see those that have had your develop adjustments already made. But if you do want to start again free of these changes, in the Develop module click on "Reset" at the lower right.

Hopefully this rather long sequence will meet your expectations. Once satisfied, likely you won't have to do this again, so give it a try.

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