

Lightroom & Photoshop Do You Need Both?

Whenever I conduct workshops and the topic of workflow and image enhancement comes up, I am often asked where Lightroom fits in.

Many photography enthusiasts who use Adobe Photoshop Elements or Adobe Photoshop aren't sure if Lightroom is an alternative to Photoshop and whether they need to buy both, particularly when they hear many of their photography colleagues singing the praises of Lightroom 3. In this article, I'll briefly outline the reasons why you should use both and why Lightroom is not really an alternative to Photoshop or Photoshop Elements. Having said that, I often work primarily with Lightroom in a shoot in the field in preference to spending time in Photoshop. My workflow is outlined in the fourth instalment of my Landscape series of articles in 'Better Photography' magazine due to be published soon. Furthermore, as I'll mention later in this article, Lightroom may not be for everyone.

In its early versions Photoshop was mostly developed as a tool for graphic designers, having originally been developed for the movie industry. As each generation of Photoshop evolved, more and more tools for photographers were added. Photoshop eventually became an industry standard for photographers and the last few versions have produced some amazing tools within it. It does some things very well and others; such as Digital Asset Management (DAM), less well. For example, prior to Lightroom, if photographers wished to download a lot of images after a shoot, they would preview them in Bridge, or use third party software such as Breezebrower. If these images required enhancement or preparation for printing or if they were RAW files and enhanced in Adobe Camera Raw (ACR); then they had to go back into Photoshop from Bridge. In fact, you can work in Bridge without necessarily having Photoshop open.

Lightroom was developed from the ground up specifically as a tool for photographers and the design was carefully developed from the feedback of numerous professional photographers working in many fields. In Lightroom, all the work takes place within Lightroom itself. You can seamlessly go from downloading, to cataloguing, to enhancing (both global AND local enhancements), and to printing, to producing audio-visuals and even preparing images for the web, all within the same software and interface. If Lightroom is an alternative to anything, it is probably best to view it as an alternative to Bridge, but there are many differences as well.

Adobe was quite clever in its design as both pieces of software dovetail seamlessly with each other with each having its own strengths and

Left: Iceberg, Antarctica. Canon 5D, 24mm lens, ISO 500th @f8. This image took only about a minute or two to enhance in Lightroom 3. The basic tab was used to apply some brightness and contrast adjustment and clarity followed by the gradient tool to darken the sky a little at the top of the image. The lens correction tool was also applied; a little noise reduction and sharpening and a small amount of vignetting to finish the image off.





This digital infra-red photograph of the Petronas Towers in KL, Malaysia took about four hours to finish in Photoshop. The layers included some NIK software enhancements in Colour Efex Pro 3 and Silver Efex Pro as well as some basic contrast and tonal value adjustments. Some diffusing was done to the image using an Orton Effect action. As can be seen by the effects used in this image that what was sought as an outcome was a 'fine-art' look to the overall image and therefore, more intricate masking and several layers. To me, this is the difference in using Lightroom for quick but effective enhancements versus the more complex layers but finer control when using Photoshop.

providing a complete professional workflow that is hard to beat.

One of the major differences between Lightroom and Photoshop is that Photoshop is a pixel editor. In Photoshop, you can build up layers and layer masks (and save them) and when you have finished editing, you have affected your image at pixel level. Lightroom is not a pixel editor. Lightroom works on thumbnails (small file-size) of your original images (which are safely stored in the folders where you left them) and all the changes that are done to the thumbnails are saved in a sidecar or XMP file which is also tiny in size. All these changes are non-destructive to your original image. You can view virtual copies of the thumbnails and play around with lots of different versions of the same thumbnail. Examples can include monochrome and tinted versions as well as any of the numerous pre-sets supplied with Lightroom. If you want to turn any of the versions into pixels, you can export the version with the changes you have made in Lightroom as a Tiff, JPEG, PSD etc. If you wish, you can then fine tune the image in Photoshop using layers and masks. You can send an image for further editing directly to Photoshop from within Lightroom.

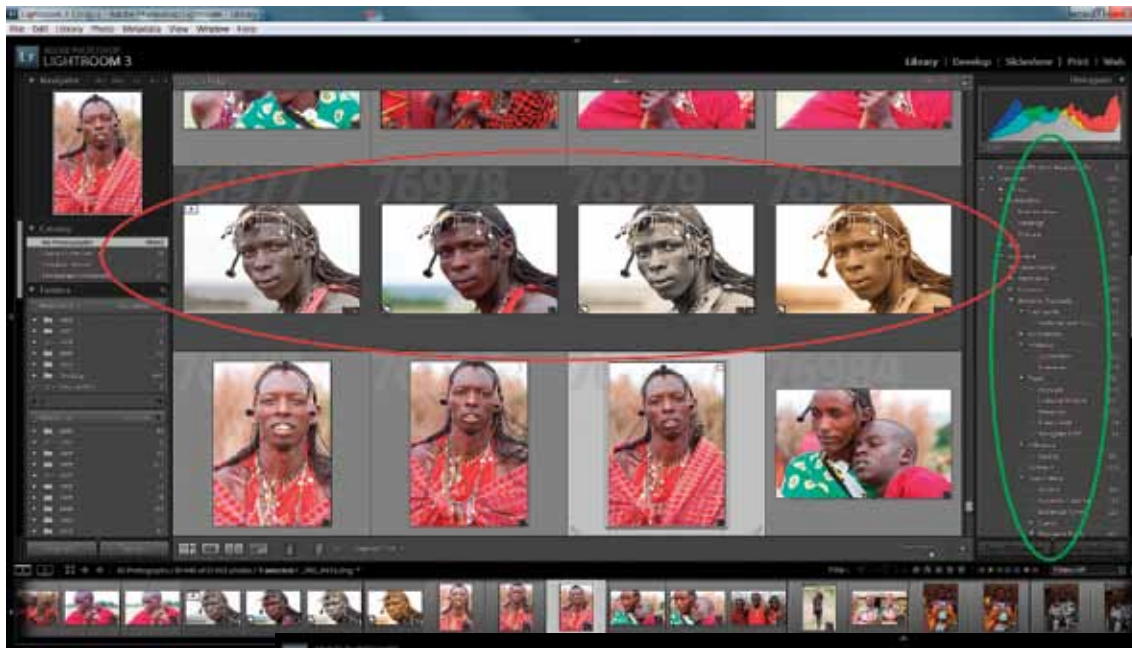
One of the big advantages of working with the thumbnails in Lightroom is that you can produce some very sophisticated changes using both local and global enhancements. You would only turn them into larger pixel files when you're ready thus saving a lot of time opening and working with large files in Photoshop. In Photoshop, you can save all the layers intact so you can re-open the file and make adjustments at a later time. Lightroom keeps a history of all the changes you make to the thumbnails which you can retrieve at anytime you view the thumbnail, and you can adjust the changes. It also allows you to take a Snapshot at anytime in the history which you can save separately. You can go back to any of the Snapshots at a later time.



This was the original Petronas Towers Infra Red image, quite different to the final outcome after applying the changes in Photoshop.

Another difference between the two softwares is that Photoshop can align and blend layers; merge panoramas and carry out HDR (High Dynamic Range) sequences – Lightroom cannot. Lightroom can, however, allow you to make changes to one thumbnail and copy and paste those changes to the rest of the thumbnails in a panorama sequence stitch. Lightroom can then take those changes straight to Photoshop from within Lightroom and allow Photoshop to stitch them. I find I often use this time-saving procedure. In fact batching changes to lots of images such as colour balance, sensor dust cleaning, contrast etc are one of Lightroom's massive strengths.

In Lightroom you can build preview images as you import them (or at a later stage) and these are stored in the catalogue. This makes it quicker for you to view and work on your images in contrast to using Bridge. You can only see images that are in the Lightroom



The interface in Lightroom is very intuitive and with a little work, it is easy to get around it. The keywords section in the Library module can be seen outlined in green. Keywords are an excellent way to import and search for images. The ability to produce virtual copies of the thumbnails within Lightroom gives you the opportunity to see several different versions of the same image using (in this case) presets supplied by Lightroom. I like the ability to make several different versions of an image without having to work on my original file or large PSD or Tiff files. The original Masai warrior image is second from left.

In finishing a version of the Masai warrior image, I tried many different sliders and controls as well as a preset called 'antique Light' for an effective faded colour look reminiscent of images from the past. I used controls in the Develop Tab as outlined in red. The History of everything I've done to the image (outlined in green) is recorded and stays with the thumbnail and is available next time I open Lightroom.



catalogue and these are managed within Lightroom. Bridge, on the other hand, shows you the contents of entire folders. When in the field, I choose the images I want to see in Lightroom and then I can use a flag, or star or colour rating for the small group of images I feel are my best ones. I can then quickly enhance a selection of these ready for printing or saving to digital files.

The ACR in Lightroom performs similar functions to the ACR in Photoshop although I tend to prefer the interface in Lightroom a little better. All the basic tools for adjusting contrast, colour balance, fill light, clarity (adjusts fine detail), vibrance, saturation etc are all there including the incredible new lens correction tool (corrects lens faults by recognising the lens used through metadata) and the vastly improved noise reduction and sharpening tools.

All the tools mentioned above are for global enhancements in the image. Lightroom also has some very neat local enhancement tools as well, including a very sophisticated Graduation tool and Adjustment Brush for dodging and burning as well as its own clone and healing tools.

One of Lightroom's strengths is the speed with which you can add keywords so you can manage, sort and catalogue your images. In the Lightroom library module you can take any images from the keyword groups and make a Collection. For example, if I catalogued some images under Santorini in the Greek Islands; I can choose "Fishing Boats" as a Collection and place fishing boat images from many other islands in the same Collection. A neat search tool uses the metadata in all files. You can search for images in a group or collection by date, or camera body or even lens used as well as other criteria. Professional photographers are finding the digital asset management tools in Lightroom are saving them a lot of time when searching for images.

Other modules in Lightroom besides the Library and Edit modules are SlideShow, Print and Web which have tools for using the thumbnails of your images either as slideshows, web pages or preparing them for printing. Certainly, similar things can be done using a combination of Bridge and Photoshop but this is where Lightroom has the edge over Photoshop. In Lightroom, the tools work better because your images are already there, organised,

open and ready to work with and the tools are very fast due to the small file sizes of the thumbnails. So can Photoshop or even Photoshop Elements do many of the things that Lightroom does? The answer is yes and Lightroom is not for everyone, but the ease, convenience and speed that Lightroom offers with its many functions all in the same interface is hard to beat.

Most people who use Lightroom (including myself) achieve significant savings in the amount of time they spend processing their images. This makes sense as all your imported images, are available immediately and you can edit them without opening or changing the original files. All the changes are saved inside the Lightroom catalogue and not to the file itself. In the field and even after shoots at home, I find I spend much less time working on images in Photoshop than I did before. I now use Photoshop for my more complex layers and masks on competition images, fine art images and some commercial work.

Many photographers can benefit from using Lightroom to manage their digital photo workflow but it's not for everybody. If you work with lots of images; if you need to apply the same enhancements to multiple images; if you need to achieve results for professional work very quickly, then Lightroom will deliver and do it well.


If on the other hand you create complex masks and fine art images or spend most of your post production time trying to

perfect only a few images, then Photoshop may be all you need. I find myself doing both and so my workflow encompasses both Lightroom and Photoshop.

In conclusion, is Lightroom an alternative to Photoshop? The answer is 'No'. What it is, is a possible alternative to using Bridge and Camera RAW although there may still be times if you are using Photoshop and Lightroom that you may still choose to use Bridge rather than Lightroom. An example may be if you want to just view the contents of a whole folder without actually importing it into a Lightroom catalogue.


Download a trial version of Lightroom from the Adobe site and see if the software is for you. If you can afford the extra \$400 (around \$130 Education version), then you may, like me, find your workflow will hopefully change for the better.

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