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# UNDER THE HOOD
HDR Workflow for Travel Photographers

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For photographers who travel, it may not be feasible to bring your entire photo library and Lightroom catalog with you. This is doubly true if you shoot a lot of bracketed images that you intend to tone map for HDR photos. In those situations, your photo count can easily double, triple, quadruple, etc., depending on how much you shoot.

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For me, it's important to start the image cataloging, review, and editing processes as quickly as possible, even if I'm on the road. Usually, this means curling up on the hotel bed at whatever odd hour with my CF cards, a solid USB 3 card reader, and a frosty beverage by my side. The key is to have a workflow routine. As long as you follow a routine that works for you, Lightroom makes it easy to take a batch of new images and coalesce them into your permanent photo library when you return home. The following is the workflow I use when traveling. Feel free to adopt it as a whole or cherry-pick pieces that you feel are a good fit within your existing workflow.

IMPORTING, KEYWORDING, AND STAGING
I've spoken to a lot of photographers who look at the import process as a basic ingestion of new photos into their Lightroom catalog. While that's the core action you're executing, there's so much that you can do during this process to save time down the road. The first obvious steps are to select the Source location from the left-side panel area and the destination for the photos that you want to import from the Destination panel on the right side, along with selecting the actual photos themselves. That's the straightforward part, but there are so many more things that you can do right here.
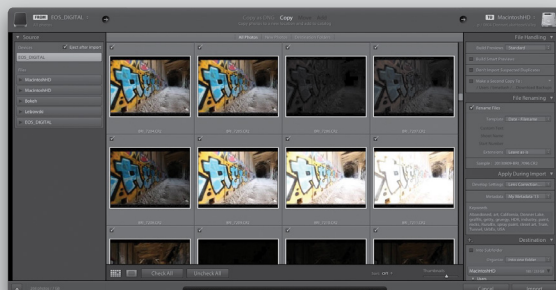
The first thing I do is ensure that I'm using the same filename convention that I do at home. I've always used the stock convention of Date – Filename in the File Renaming panel. It gives me all of the information that I'd typically care about when looking at a filename. (*Note:* If you're won-

dering why my filename syntax begins with BRI_, it's because my Canon EOS 5D Mark III allows me to specify a custom value.)

The next three import options are overlooked by more photographers than I care to admit, but they're important. In the Apply During Import panel, the Develop Settings drop-down allows you to apply any preset that you have loaded in Lightroom. Traditionally, my presets are based on stylization treatments but there's one common task that I want to apply to every image on import, and that is Lens Correction. By saving the lens correction as its own preset, I can apply it to every image that I import. The one exception is with photos taken with my Canon 15mm Fisheye lens— I never want to correct that distortion.

The second and third options are the Metadata and Keywords fields, and they should be taken seriously. Applying my metadata ensures that key identifiable information that's relevant to me is added to each image, and keywording makes it easy to do custom searches and speed up the process of upload-

ing photos to stock websites. In the case of keywording my recent shoot around Donner Lake in Northern California, I added terms that were both generic enough to apply to all of the images, as well as specific geographic terms.
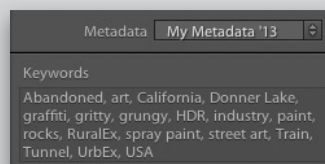
STACKING AND STARRING
The first thought that usually comes to mind after I finish importing photos from an HDR shoot is, "Oh man, what have I done?" My anxiety usually stems from being presented with a seemingly never-ending stream of repeating images that vary from dark to light. At first glance, the unruliness of this album can be off-putting, and that's why immediate organization is critical (see next page, top left).

Before I even think about doing anything to my images, including rating them, I first group each set of bracketed photos into individual sets. I do this by highlighting the series of images in that bracket set (in this case, my Canon EOS 5D
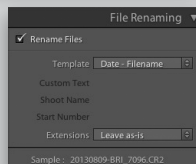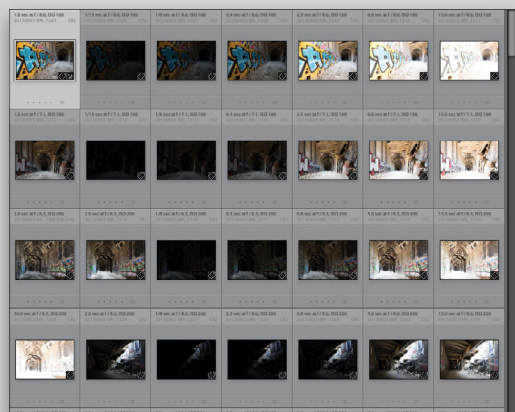
Mark III takes 7 exposures per set). Next, I want to select which image of those seven will be ranked as the top image in the stack. To do so, I just click inside the actual image thumbnail to make it the most selected photo (you'll know because the entire thumbnail will be a bit brighter than the rest of the selections).
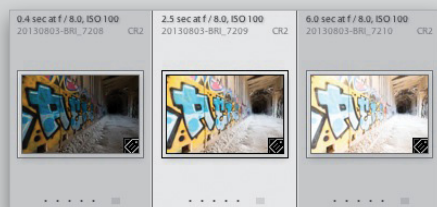
Then Right-click on any photo in the selection and choose Stacking>Group into Stack. The photo you chose to represent the stack will appear with a number in a box at the top left of the thumbnail. This represents the number of photos in the stack. I repeat this process again for every set of bracketed images in the new album.

This is critical because it makes identifying which images you should prioritize much easier. With the stacking done, I'm presented with a much cleaner view of the individual images that I took, and going through them is a breeze. My rating system is pretty straightforward for HDR images. I start by applying a 1-star rating to bracket sets (stacks) that I want to tone map and work on (click on the set then press 1 to assign a 1-star rating). I also press X on sets that
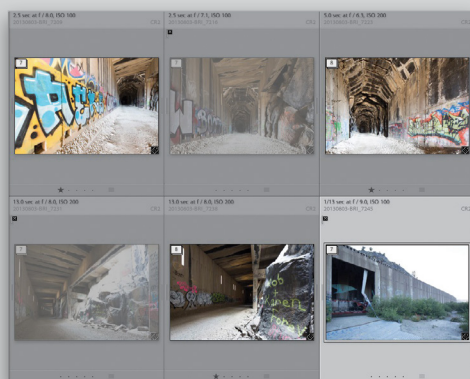

I know I'll never touch again to flag them as rejected. These stacks have a black flag at the top left.

TONE MAPPING AND STYLIZATION

Now that I've identified the top photos from my shoot that I want to edit, it's much easier to kick through and send the brackets off for tone mapping. I switch between Photomatix Pro by HDRSoft and HDR Efex Pro 2 by the Nik Collection by Google, depending on the nature of the image and the particular looks I'm going for. When the tone mapping is complete, I apply a 2-star rating to the photo so that I can quickly find all of my tone-mapped results before stylization occurs.

Stylization is easily my favorite part of the digital photo workflow process. There's no shortage of editing products out there, and my recommendation is to try them all (most companies offer 15–30 day free trials) to find which fit your own style sensibilities and budget. I spend most of my time in the Lightroom Develop module, as well as in the Nik Collection by Google and onOne Software's Perfect Photo Suite. When the stylization is complete, I apply a 3-star rating to the finalized photo, indicating that it's ready to share online.
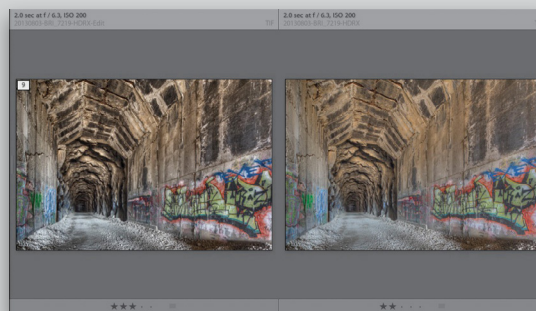
EXPORT FOR SHARING

I'm a firm believer that the goal of any photo that you're proud of is to share it with the world. It's the essence of photography, especially in the way that it's tightly woven into the fabric of social media. To that end, I have a pretty straightforward export preset that outputs a full resolution JPEG image at 90% quality and 72 ppi, using the sRGB color space, to a "hot folder" located on my Google Drive account. I do this because it gives me access to create a post using any of my finalized images no matter where I am, which is really important if you travel a lot.

To create an export preset, choose File>Export. In the Export dialog, set up your file parameters, click the Add button near the bottom left, give your preset a name, and click Create.

So there you have it. Once you put your own routine into practice a few times, the whole process will truly become second nature and you'll find yourself with way more time to focus on the images that really matter to you. ■