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It's never been easier to reproduce vintage, toned styles using the Split Toning panel

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UNDER THE HOOD
Demystifying Split Toning

▼ Brian Matiash

Have you noticed a trend the past few years where more and more images are leaning toward that retro look? Whether it's applying your favorite one-click effect using an app on your mobile phone or working on multiple layers to get that precise look, more and more photographers are going gaga over retro, and it's not hard to see why.

In Lightroom, it has never been easier to reproduce these vintage, toned styles using an oft-overlooked section of the Develop module called the Split Toning panel. At its root, split toning allows you to tint the bright (Highlights) and dark (Shadows) areas of your image by selecting their respective colors. Experimentation is key and as you become more comfortable with how split toning affects the look of your images, the faster you'll develop your own signature look.
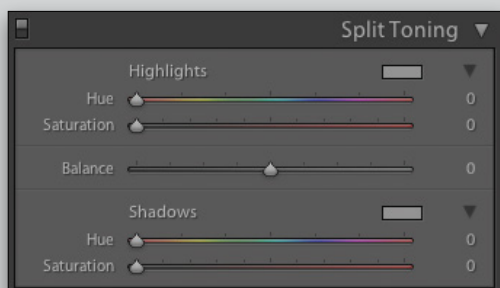
ABOUT THE PANEL

The Split Toning panel is very straightforward when you get used to it. Think of it as two identical tinting tools: one for the Highlights and one for the Shadows. With the implementation of split toning in Lightroom, there are two ways for you to apply your tints. The first way is using the Hue and Saturation sliders. The Hue slider is used to choose a particular hue color (makes sense, right?) in either the Highlights or the Shadows, depending on which section you're working on.

Here's a hint: Don't get worried if you start dragging the Hue slider up and down without seeing any changes to your image. This has to do with the default state of the Saturation slider, which is 0 (zero), whereby no color will be shown. As you drag the Saturation slider to its maximum state of 100, you'll quickly see whatever hue color you have selected come through. Once you have your Hue and Saturation selected for the Highlights and Shadows, you can bias it toward one or the other using the Balance slider. Dragging to the left biases toward the Shadows color, and dragging to the right biases toward the Highlights color.

Tip: If you press-and-hold the Option (PC: Alt) key while dragging the Hue slider, you'll see a preview of the hue color

range using a boosted saturation preview, even if the Saturation slider is set to 0, as in the example shown here.
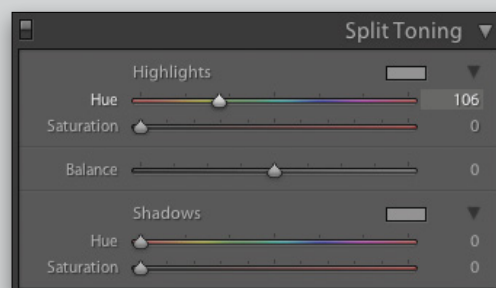
ANOTHER METHOD

The second way to select the color hue and saturation of the Highlights and Shadows is to click on the color swatch on the top right of the respective sections, bringing up the color picker. From here, you can click or drag on any color on the color ramp. You can also use a scrubby slider on the "H" at the bottom left of the picker to select your hue color, and use the Saturation slider, represented by the "S," on the lower right of the picker to select the strength.

One of the cool things about working in this mode is that you can also save up to five of your favorite colors for quick access down the road. To do so, first select a color that you want to save and then either press-and-hold the Option (PC: Alt) key while clicking on the desired preset slot at the top, or click-and-hold on the desired preset slot for about a second to save the color. If you use a short click on

a preset slot, it will actually load that color instead of saving it, so be aware. *Note:* Adjusting the Hue and Saturation in one mode will adjust it the exact same way in the other. These are just two different ways to do the same thing with split toning.
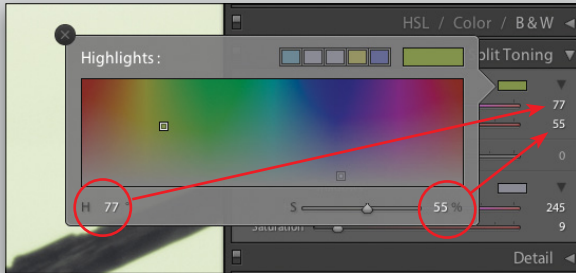
SPLIT TONE FROM BLACK AND WHITE

To pay homage to the holy analog darkroom, I'm going to start by applying a split tone to a black-and-white image. To get an idea of how I want to tint my Highlights, I'll use the first method we discussed, adjusting the sliders. I press-and-hold the Option (PC: Alt) key and drag the Hue slider until I see a representative color that I like, stopping at blue. Next, I slowly drag the Saturation slider until I reach an intensity that I'm happy with.

Now it's time to tint the shadows. This time, I'll use the color picker method. I start by clicking on the swatch to the right of the Shadows header, which brings up the color picker. Next, I drag the dropper around the color ramp until I find a color that I like. Because this is an aquatic image, I opt to go with a cooler blue for the shadow tint. And because I really dig this particular blue, I click-and-hold on one of the preset slots for one second to save it.
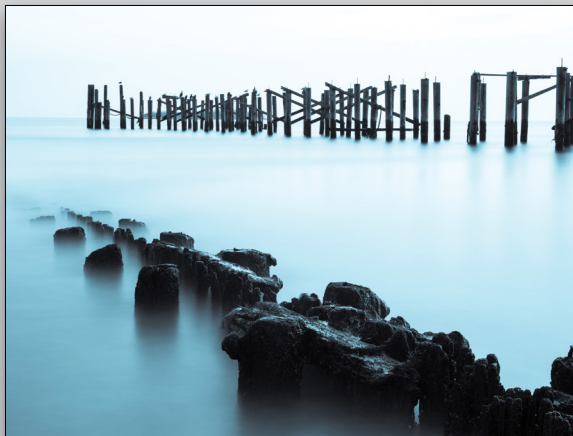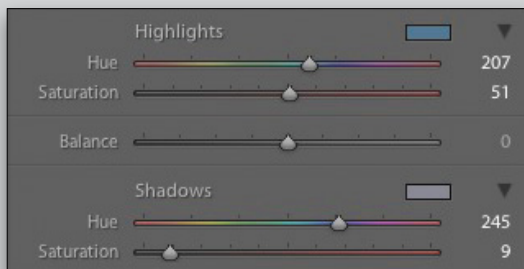

SPLIT TONE FROM COLOR

We've been talking about how split toning can be wonderful for black-and-white images, but it can also have quite an impact with color images. Take this portrait of my sister, Greta, for example. I want to give this image a specific retro look, almost as if it faded or tinted over time. I start by selecting a Highlights color somewhere between orange and yellow. I want to complement that by using the opposing side of the color wheel, so I select a darker blue for the Shadows. The result is a beautiful tinted treatment that instantly boosts the look of the image.

Before

After
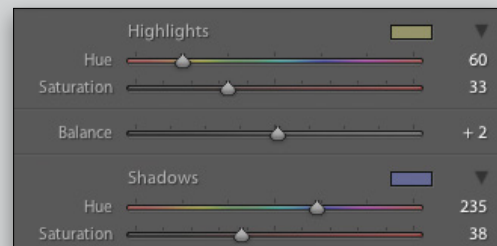
Be sure to experiment with the multitude of color combinations across all of your images. If a result doesn't float your boat on a landscape shot, try it on a portrait or an urban scene. You get the picture. ∎