

SETTING CAMERA RAW DEFAULTS

While teaching “Digital Day” workshops all around the country for the past few years, I have been continually amazed by how many people do not set up camera defaults when using Adobe Camera Raw or Lightroom. Setting these defaults saves a great deal of time and results in better-processed images, so taking the time will be to your benefit. The following explains how to set defaults for both ACR and Lightroom.

Setting the Parameters:

There are many different parameters you can save as your defaults in Adobe Camera Raw and Lightroom. Some of these parameters are necessary and others are optional, depending on the type of photography you do.

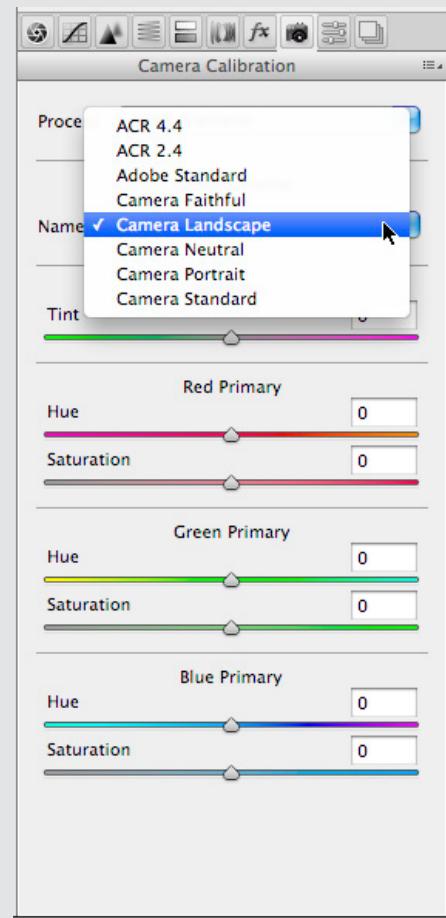
NECESSARY PARAMETERS TO SET

Step One: Set the Camera Profile

This parameter is found under the Camera Calibration tab. The default for newer versions of both programs is Adobe Standard. Go through the different camera profiles and choose the one which consistently presents the closest representation of what you want the image to look like. If you use Picture Styles on your camera, then set the camera profile to the same setting as your Picture Style.

Camera profiles were designed to make your raw image look like a jpeg, based on how your camera is set up. Those who shoot both raw and jpeg know that a “right-out-of-the-camera” jpeg almost always looks better. But if you set the correct camera calibration, the jpeg and raw images will look the same right from the start.

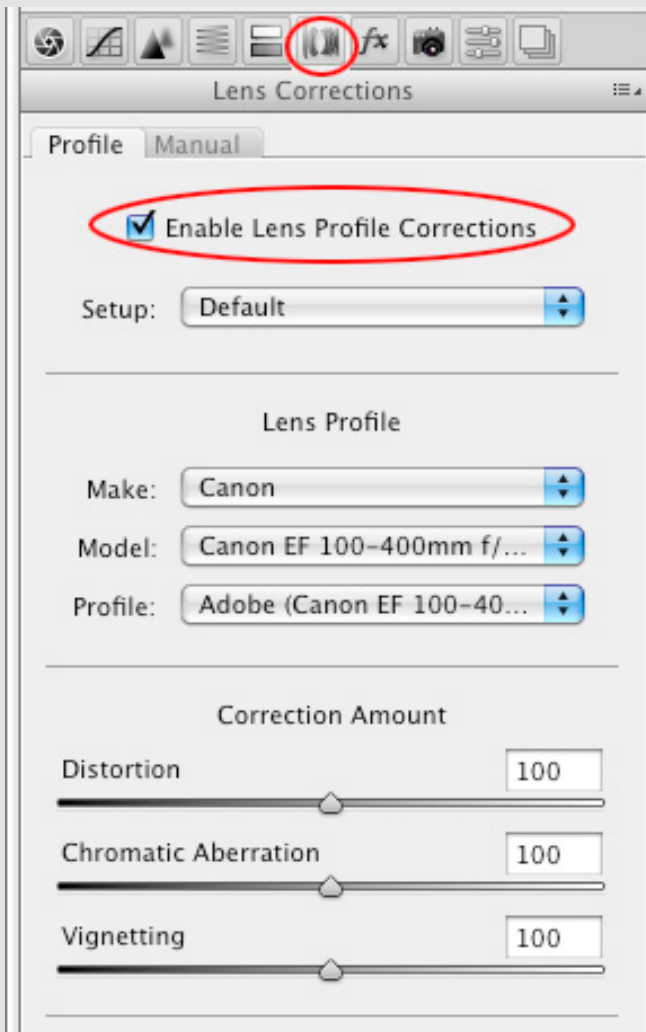
I have my camera set to the Picture Style of Landscape, because I used to shoot Velvia film, and Canon has created the landscape mode to closely resemble Velvia film. That way, right off the bat, my images are more saturated and my greens and blues more vibrant. I can make any adjustments using the tools in the raw processor, but I have fewer adjustments to make.



Camera Calibration Settings

Step Two: Change the Lens Correction.

Go to the Lens Correction tab and check the box that says “Enable Profile Corrections.” This will automatically apply geometric lens corrections as well as correct for chromatic aberration and vignetting. Adobe has included profiles for many common camera and lens combinations. It does not, however, provide a profile for every lens and camera combination. Therefore, if your combination is not listed, search online to see if someone has created a profile for it, or go to <http://labs.adobe.com/> and get the tool for creating your own profile.



Lens Corrections Settings

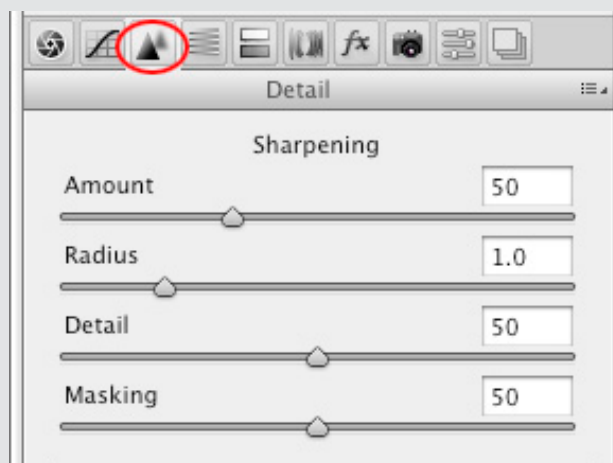
Step Three: Adjust sharpening settings in Details tab.

Since images shot in raw have no sharpening taking place, there must be some preliminary amount of sharpening applied to every image to make up for the camera sensor that usually softens the images. “Capture sharpening” helps to overcome this problem. This does not replace a final output sharpening, which is based on file size, but it is a process to take the image from the sensor to the digital file.

Note: I could write a whole article on what the four sliders in the sharpening menu do, but for now I am going to tell you the settings I use and give you a brief explanation why. Then, you can adjust these settings to suit your needs.

Suggested Settings

1. Set the Amount slider to 50. This is one-third the strength of the slider, which gives some sharpness to your image and does not add any artifacts. This will remove the softness created by the sensor design.
2. Set the Radius slider to 1. When you sharpen digitally you are actually adding contrast, making the dark edge of something darker and the light edge lighter. The radius governs how thick the line of lightness and darkness appear. If the number is too high you get halos around your edges.
3. Set the Detail slider to 50. The Detail slider will sharpen textures. Since I shoot landscapes I set this in the middle, which will give me good detail in the textures of my image. If you shoot people, keep this at zero.
4. Set the Masking slider to 50. This will make sure that you are not sharpening areas of your image where there are no lines and details. That will stop you from accentuating noise in areas of dark shadows and skies.



Detail Settings

OPTIONAL PARAMETERS TO SET

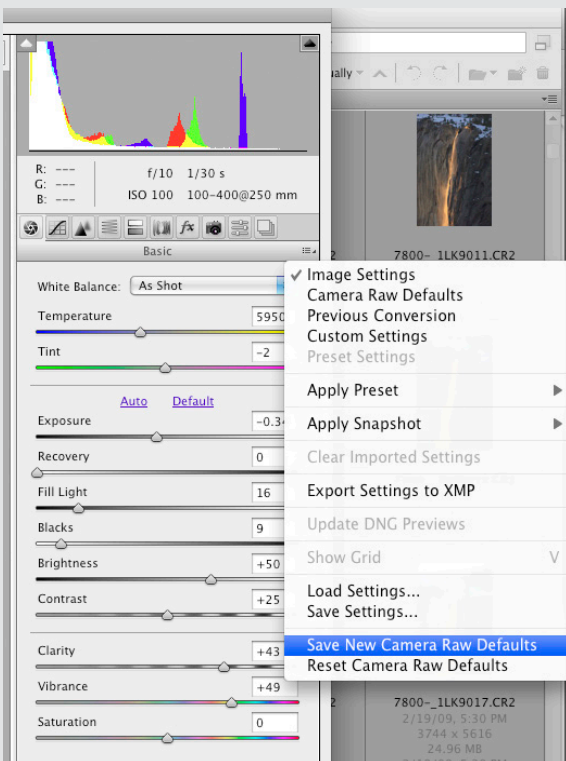
These settings depend upon your tastes and style.

Basics tab

As I mentioned, I previously shot with Velvia film, which had vibrant colors and strong contrast. To replicate those tones digitally, I use the Basic tab and set the Clarity slider to 20, which accentuates the midtone contrast and then I set the Vibrance slider to 20, which saturates colors that aren't already saturated. Those settings work best for landscape and nature images, but I would not use them if I were shooting portraits.

Once you make these changes to the settings, save them as default so that you do not have to do this for every image.

Making the changes to the sliders works the same for both Adobe Camera Raw and Lightroom. The way you save those changes as defaults differs between the two programs. In Adobe Camera Raw you use the Camera Raw Settings menu, which is found on the upper right of any adjustment panel, just to the right of the panel name. From the drop-down menu, select "Save New Camera Raw Defaults." This will save those defaults for that particular camera. You need to do this for every different model camera that you own. In Lightroom go to the Develop module and then to the menu heading Develop > Set Default Settings. Again you need to do this for every different camera model you own.



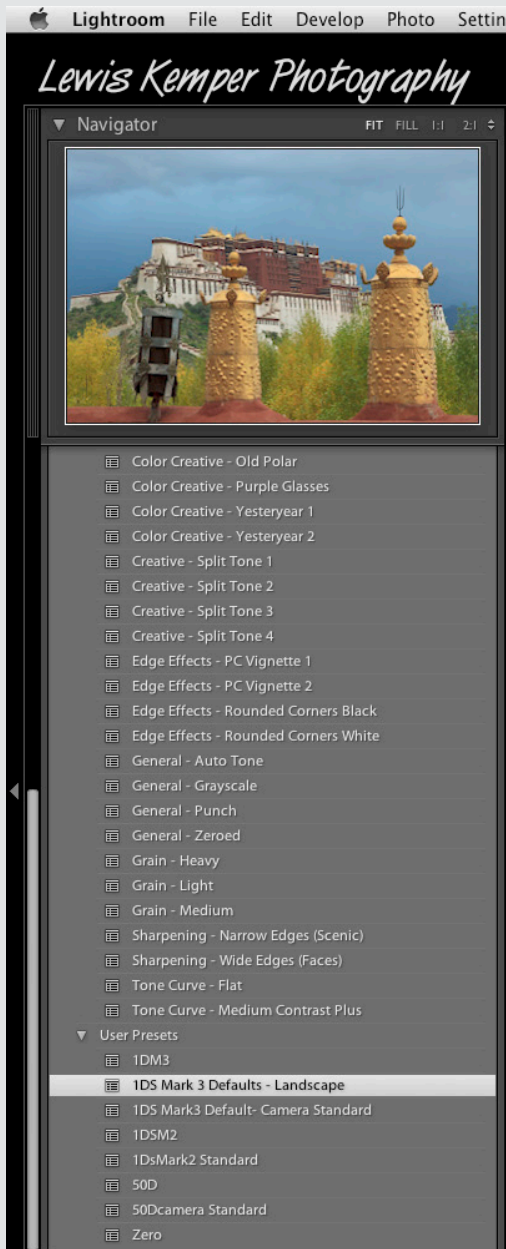
Saving defaults in Adobe Camera Raw



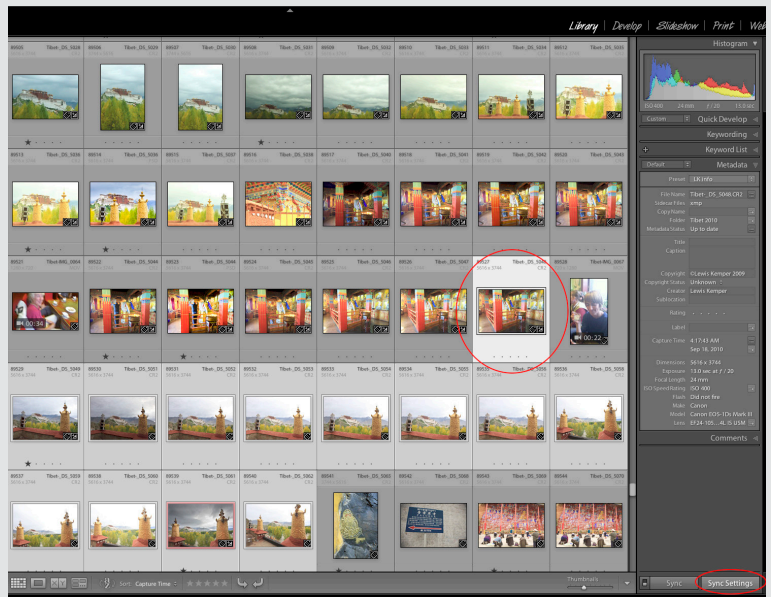
Saving defaults in Lightroom

In Adobe Camera Raw, once these defaults have been saved, then every time you open an image from that particular camera body the defaults will be preserved and the adjustments will be made automatically. From there you can fine-tune your processing.

In Lightroom, those default settings would normally be available only to images that you import after you've set the defaults. For all of your previous images you'd have to go back and adjust the sliders. But there is a faster way. After you set your defaults, import one image that will use those defaults, then go to the Develop module and find the heading "Presets" located on the left hand side under the navigation window. Click the little plus symbol, and save the Preset with that camera body name. Now when you go back to previously imported images, you just need to select one in the Develop module and click on your saved Preset, which will be under the heading "User Presets." That will apply all the changes you saved to the image instantly. Then you can go to the Grid mode in the Library module, select multiple images and click on sync settings in the lower right corner. This will apply the Preset to multiple images.



User Presets – I have two saved for my 1Ds Mark 3. One preset with the Landscape profile and one with the Camera Standard profile.



Sync Settings – I applied my Preset to the image with the circle and then selected the additional images and can apply the Preset to all of them at once by clicking on “Sync Settings”

Once you save all these defaults you will find that your processing goes much faster and is much easier because you are closer to what you see on your LCD before you even have to adjust any of the sliders in camera raw. Not only will this give you better results, but it will save you an immense amount of time. ☺

Lewis Kemper sells his Photoshop and Lightroom training DVDs through his website at <http://www.LewisKemper.com>.



© Lewis Kemper