

AUGUST 27, 2010, 10:50 AM

## Ten Photo-Editing Tips From a Pro

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Tyler Stableford A series of small adjustments in Photoshop Lightroom can result in big improvements to images. I was tweaking a photo for a friend's antiques store Web site the other day, experimenting with [Adobe Photoshop Lightroom](#) to adjust the color and add a subtle vignette. I like Lightroom because it doesn't have the arduous learning curve that Photoshop does, and it's designed specifically for photographers and photographs.

But I don't have many tricks in my Lightroom photo-doctoring bag. In fact, everything I was doing I had learned from a brief demonstration by [Tyler Stableford](#), an outdoor sports and adventure photographer who uses Lightroom to make his photos just a bit more dazzling.

So I called Mr. Stableford and asked him for his best (and easiest) tips to make small adjustments that result in big improvements to images. He gave me the following 10 tips that photographers of every skill level will appreciate. (Note that these adjustments are described for RAW images; settings for JPEGs will vary somewhat.)

1. Boost blacks to +5 points or so (in the Basics panel, under Color). Deepening blacks will add richness to the image.
2. Add a vignette to the image (in the Effects panel, Post-Crop Vignetting). Take the vignetting down to -15 to darken the corners of the photo and guide the viewer's eye to the center (assuming that's where you want the eye to land). Alternatively, you can apply a +15 vignette to lighten the corners in a fall foliage shot or a wedding photo. This technique will add a bright, airy feeling.
3. Use a graduated filter to add weight to the lower portion of a photo. Select the Graduated Filter tool, and set the exposure to, say, -33, then click on the bottom of your photo and drag the tool up through the bottom half. This will subtly add a natural foundation and ground the image with a bit of density.
4. Adjust the shadows in the Tone Curve panel. Set shadows to -10 and the darks to +10. This will boost richness, as well as add subtle contrast to the overall image.
5. You can tone down a too-bright blue sky by adjusting luminance. Click the HSL panel, then luminance. Next, click the Adjust tool at the left of the panel (it looks like a bulls-eye) and position it at the top of the sky and drag downward. This will give you a natural-looking, rich blue sky.
6. Black-and-white images have lost a bit of character in the digital age. While Lightroom has a one-click button to transform color images to monochrome, you can get a subtle and more interesting effect by adjusting vibrance and saturation. In the Basic panel, set vibrance and saturation to -75. The resulting image will look like it's monochrome but will retain just a hint of color, which adds an unexpected wink of life. Black-and-white images often benefit from additional contrast, so try boosting clarity to 50 or 75.

7. Use clarity (in the Basic panel) to adjust skin tones in portraits. To add a bit of masculine roughness, increase clarity. To soften skin tones, decrease clarity.
8. You can add grain to give your image, a pre-digital texture that counters the “plastic” look that many digital cameras create. Under the Effects panel, bump the grain slider to 5 or 10 points.
9. If you want a very rich image but don’t want your children in the photo to have sunburned pumpkin skin, remember that it’s effective to increase vibrance more than saturation. That’s because vibrance, in general, works with cooler tones like blues and greens, while saturation is more effective with warmer tones like reds and yellows. If you increase saturation too much it will wreak havoc on skin tones. So crank up the vibrance two or three times more than saturation. For instance, you might push vibrance to 20 or 30, while boosting saturation to 10.
10. For portraits, use the Spot Removal tool (in the top panel, second tool from the left) to soften blemishes. Set the brush to the Healing Tool (rather than Clone) for a speedier, cleaner result. And consider using 80 percent opacity (rather than 100 percent) to leave a suggestion of the blemish for a more realistic effect.