



Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 2 allows you to select a group of photos to compare. At left is the new folders section, which arranges your images via folders, subfolders, and hard drives, both offline and online.



Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 2

New interface and extension of existing features mark significant improvement.

BY FRANKLIN MCMAHON

Adobe continues to improve its flagship workflow program for digital photography. Photoshop Lightroom 2 is designed to make it easy to sort, manipulate, and store thousands of images. The program features a completely different workflow and interface from the familiar Creative Suite 4 (CS4), but it works nicely and feels natural. It's very easy to get up to speed with the program in just a few minutes.

This is a good thing—the last thing you need is a steep learning curve merely to work with photos. The new version of the program is not exactly brimming with new features and modes, but it includes enough refinements and additions to make it well worth considering the upgrade.

One of the best features of Lightroom 2 is that everything is non-destructible. Changes such as touch-ups are stored merely as metadata instructions; the original files are never touched or saved over. Another advantage is the program merely points to the images to build the galleries, so you don't have to copy them over to another database. This is especially handy if you have a lot of images on external drives

or in multiple locations. Enhancing that effort, Adobe has improved drive management for Lightroom 2. The program now lists the images by their drive locations.

Also new: Lightroom 2 caches high-resolution previews, so even if one of your hard drives is offline, you can still sort and manage the images that live on another drive.

When you import digital image files into Lightroom 2, you can set them up in folders, and in subfolders for even more fine-grain management. All the advancements I've listed so far sound simple, but they offer a lot of power. After all, you'll often want to figure out quickly the specific location of any of your thousands of pictures.

Lightroom 2 can batch-process images during import. Imagine importing a whole folder of files, automatically renaming them all, sending them to specific folders, and applying preset image manipulation commands to them. Of course, batch-processing isn't just for import. Lightroom 2 can apply just about any tweak or touch-up to hundreds or thousands of files at a time. Say you shot several memory cards worth of outdoor images and the white balance was off—a little too blue. Simply tweak one of the images then apply that tweak to all the others with one click.

Lightroom 2's dual-monitor support allows the program to display the interface on one monitor and full high-res images on the other.

You can adjust the exposure, brightness, contrast, saturation, sharpness, and many other controls by using the local-adjustment brush.

Recently, I swung one monitor toward a client so he could view single images. Meanwhile, I sat behind the other, sorting through a shoot and doing basic touch-ups on the fly. You can also send multiple pictures to the second monitor now. This way a client can see the before and after or choose the best image among three contenders.

The second monitor has a very nice Loupe mode. This digital version of the classic photographer's magnifier lets you zoom into a full-screen image (by holding down the mouse button) and move the image around. Releasing the mouse button snaps it back to 100-percent view. If you don't have a second monitor, you can still use the dual-monitor feature. The program pops up the second screen as a separate window, allowing new arrangement options for viewing.

Lightroom's new local-adjustment brush expands your touch-up options. Typically you'll work with a small brush—maybe a few pixels in diameter—to dodge and burn, sharpen, brighten, etc. Now think of this brush as full-screen and resizable. For example, you may have a picture of a sunset, and use the local-adjustment brush to darken the water and brighten the sky. Rotate the brush to do the opposite—lighten the water and darken the sky. You can adjust the exposure, brightness, contrast, saturation, sharpness, and many other controls by using the local-adjustment brush. Of course you can also paint with this new tool and swipe over a mountain or landscape and make large global adjustments in a few seconds. After you're finished with the brush, a white dot sits on the image in the spot where you performed the adjustment. Hover the cursor over the dot, and slider arrows pop up, allowing you to make further adjustments.

Search is another big area of advancement for Lightroom 2. You can now rapidly search through large numbers of files via keyword and metadata, including date, camera type, lens, country of capture, captions, keywords, and labels.

Integration with Adobe Photoshop CS4 is expanded. Work with a Lightroom image in Photoshop and adjust layers, smart objects, and HDR, and all your changes are updated automatically in Lightroom 2.

Adobe has beefed up the printing options with new commands to print multiple images on one page and even adjust ink and paper type. In printing, you can also set up bleeds and strokes and PPI settings, adding a dash of high-end desktop layout commands for professional use.

Sharpening can be automated now—Lightroom 2 knows when to apply more sharpening when exporting to web galleries or sending to a printer, and you can always override these with your own settings. Speaking of the

Web, new web-gallery presets are included for exporting your photo galleries to the Internet. There are some beautiful Flash galleries that smartly prevent your images from being easily downloaded.

File support continues to expand. Lightroom 2 now supports more than 190 file formats. For more compatibility, third-party export and gallery modules are now available from various companies.

Adobe hosts the Lightroom Exchange website, where you can download many modules for free.

Comparing to Adobe Lightroom 2 to Apple Aperture 2 is difficult because the programs are getting so similar. The advance from Aperture 1 to Aperture 2 was a big deal because, frankly, Apple had a lot of catching up to do to get things right. Lightroom had the advantage of public betas, and Lightroom's first version got a lot right, so version 2 mostly represents refinement and the extension of existing features. It's still worth the upgrade price and even though the interface is far removed from that of CS4, it works beautifully and unobtrusively. (I'd even dare to say that perhaps the Creative Suites should follow the direction of Lightroom's interface decision.)

If you're dealing with merely several hundred images, or your creative projects involve photography only on occasion, the Bridge CS4 program that comes bundled with the new version of Photoshop might be robust enough. However, though Bridge does metafilter sorting, labeling, and cataloging, it does not perform touchups and non-destructive changes. If you are looking for more features or you have a mountain of images to track, Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 2 is a professional tool that's up to the task. □

▶ **bottomline**

Company: Adobe

www.adobe.com

Product: Photoshop Lightroom 2

Assets: Simple batch importing, rapid search, automated sharpening, more than 190 file formats supported.

Caveats: Not a lot of new completely new features or modes.

Demographic: Digital photography or videography professionals who work with a lot of image files.

PRICE: \$299, \$99 (UPGRADE)