



# Under the Loupe

take control of your  
lightroom catalog

BY ROB SYLVAN

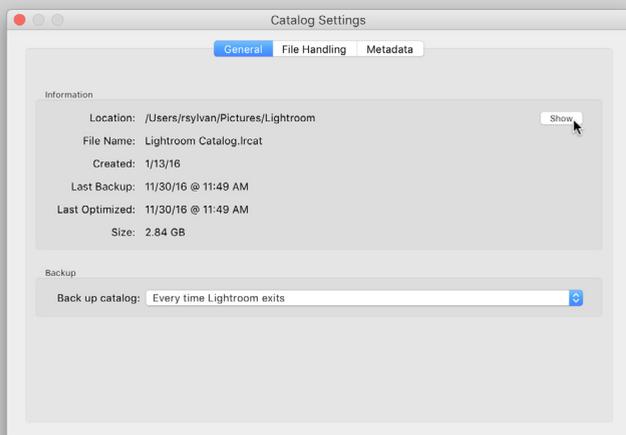
We all want to feel in control of our Lightroom catalogs, but some of the tasks just aren't very intuitive, or seem fraught with peril. Let's break it down and step through the basics.

Scott Kelby's recent class on his *Simplified Lightroom Image Management System* has a lot of members thinking about how to clean up and take control of their Lightroom catalogs. I know this because of the flood of questions that have come into the **Help Desk** asking about how to do these types of tasks. Whether you follow Scott's system or not, all Lightroom users should be in control of their Lightroom catalogs, so I'm dedicating this column to giving you the skills you need to start the new year off on the right foot.

## catalog location

The most important thing you need to know before you do anything is where your Lightroom catalog is located on your hard drive. This may seem simple, but I've worked with several people who weren't sure, or found that the catalog was not where they expected it to be. To find your catalog, simply launch Lightroom. With Lightroom open, go to Lightroom (PC: Edit)>Catalog Settings, click on the General tab, and note the name of the catalog and the path to where it's located. Is it where you expected? If so, great! If not, here's how you can move it to a new location:

**step one:** Click the Show button on the General tab of the Catalog Settings to open the folder containing your catalog in your file browser.

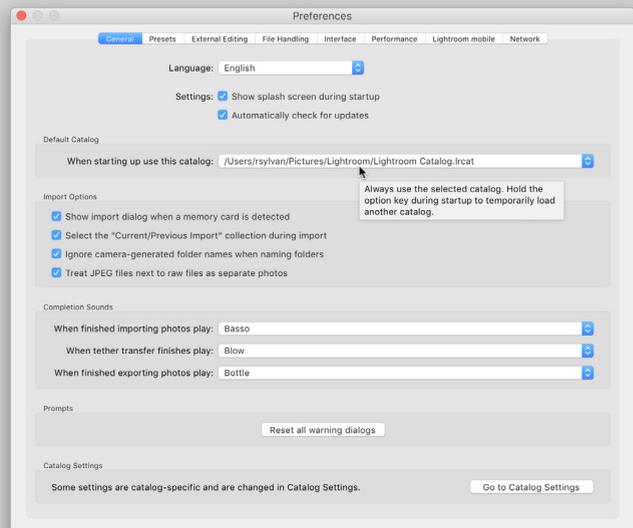


**step two:** Quit Lightroom. If prompted to back up your catalog, skip for now.

**step three:** Copy the folder containing the Lightroom catalog (.lrcat) and its associated preview caches (.lrdata) to the location where you want it to be stored.

**step four:** Once the copy operation is complete, double-click the catalog file to open it back into Lightroom.

Now, whether you moved your catalog or not, this next step is important. I highly recommend that you manually configure this catalog to be the default catalog. To do this, go to Lightroom (PC: Edit)>Preferences, click on the General tab, and set the When Starting up Use this Catalog drop-down menu to the specific catalog you just opened (don't use Load Most Recent Catalog).



Don't forget to go back and remove the original folder containing your catalog if you copied it to a new location. Having a good backup in place is a good idea too.

## renaming catalogs

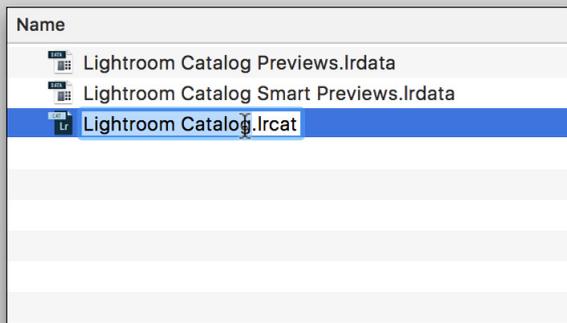
When people start taking a closer look at their catalog, they often wonder if it's possible to rename a Lightroom catalog, and it's very easy to do this. First, quit Lightroom, open the Finder (PC: Explorer), and then open the folder containing the catalog. You should see the catalog file with an .lrcat file extension and its preview caches with the .lrdata file

extensions. Using your File Browser, you can rename the catalog file, but keep the file extension the same (.lrcat). Then, rename the preview caches the same way, but retain the word “Previews” or “Smart Previews” in the name along with the original file extension. So, for example, if your catalog and preview caches were named:

- Lightroom 5 Catalog-2-2.lrcat**
- Lightroom 5 Catalog-2-2 Previews.lrdata**
- Lightroom 5 Catalog-2-2 Smart Previews.lrdata**

And you wanted to change it to “Lightroom Catalog,” you’d end up with:

- Lightroom Catalog.lrcat**
- Lightroom Catalog Previews.lrdata**
- Lightroom Catalog Smart Previews.lrdata**



Once that’s done, double-click the catalog file to open it into Lightroom and set that as the default catalog via the General tab in Preferences. The name you choose only matters to you, so don’t feel constrained to keeping the version number of Lightroom in the file name.

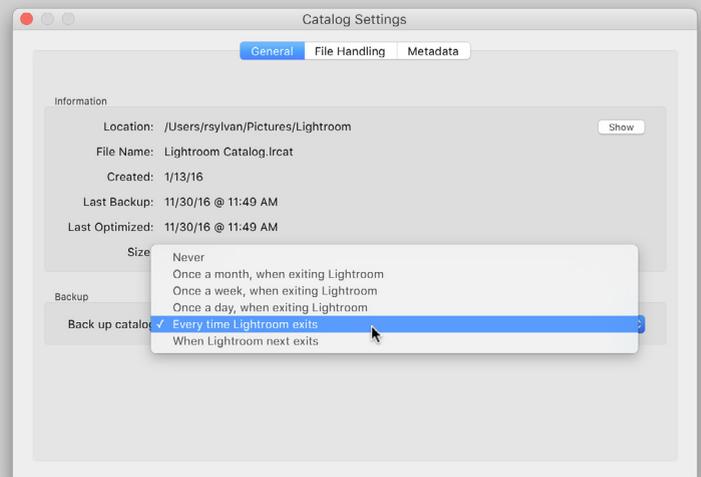
## catalog backup

Okay, you know where your catalog is located, you may have even renamed it to something more meaningful, and it’s configured as your default catalog to open every time you launch Lightroom. You’re now more in control of your catalog than a lot of other Lightroom users. You may be thinking about that catalog backup function, and how to use it. I urge you to use it no matter what other backup system

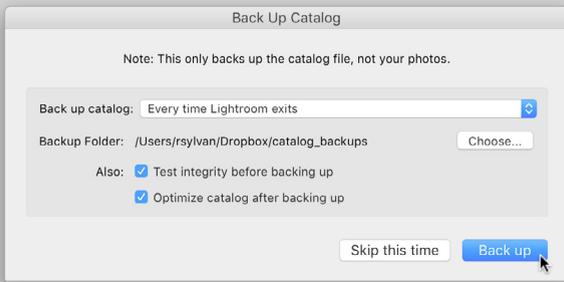
you have in place. Here’s why: It’s free, it’s built into Lightroom, and it’s automatic. You can just set it and forget it, and it may just save your bacon one day because there are some pieces of data that only exist in the Lightroom catalog (virtual copies, collection membership, flags, and individual history steps), and if your catalog ever gets corrupted, lost, stolen, etc., you’ll be so relieved that you have an exact copy of the catalog sitting in a safe place. I’ve even seen people who accidentally inflicted damage on their own catalogs (oops, I deleted a saved book collection) and were saved by having a recent backup copy of the catalog from which they could recover. Here’s how to set it up:

**step one:** Go to the General tab in Lightroom (PC: Edit)> Catalog Settings.

**step two:** Click the Back Up Catalog drop-down menu, and choose the frequency for the back up to run. I chose Every Time Lightroom Exits because I like to be reminded each time, even if I sometimes skip it.



That’s it. The next time you exit Lightroom on the chosen schedule, you’ll be prompted to run the backup process. That prompt is the only place you can configure the location of where you want the backup copy to be saved. Ideally, and to protect against drive failure, you’d choose a separate drive from the one on which your working catalog is located. I work off my laptop, which usually only has one drive attached, so I direct my backup copies to be saved into my Dropbox folder, which are then synced to my other computers and the cloud.



One final note: When this process runs, Lightroom creates an exact copy of the catalog as it exists at that moment, and then compresses that catalog into a zip file (as of Lightroom 6/CC). You'll need to periodically go into the folder containing the backup copies and delete the oldest ones. If you ever had to recover from a backup, you would only use the most recent, right? I usually only keep the most recent two or three on hand.

## migrating your photo library

With your catalog under control, you can now turn your attention to your photos, which is likely to be where the biggest mess can be found. The key to getting control over your photos is to understand the role of the Folders panel in the Library module. To that end, I urge you to read my ["Under the Loupe"](#) article in Issue 23 of *Lightroom Magazine*, which is entirely dedicated to the Folders panel. You'll learn how to move folders, rename folders, remove folders, and find where your photo folders are actually located on your drive.

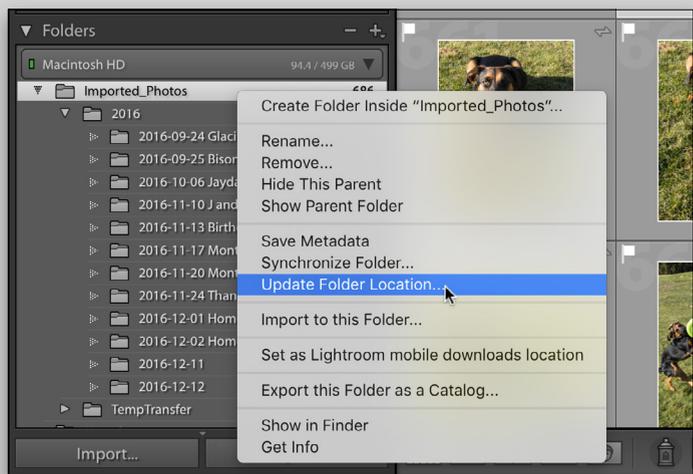
The one task I didn't get to cover in that column that every Lightroom user should know is how to migrate your entire photo library from one drive to another drive. This is useful if you want to move your photo library from an internal drive to an external drive, or if you're running out of space and want to move to a new, larger drive. The process is the same. Now, you could use Lightroom to move the folders, but I don't recommend doing that when your entire library is at stake. Using a move command is too risky, because if anything goes wrong in the middle of the transfer you could lose data. I prefer a technique that involves copying the folders to the new drive, and then later manually deleting the files from the original location. Here's how:

**step one:** Open the Finder (PC: Explorer).

**step two:** Copy the entire folder structure with your photos (as-is without changing the structure) to the other drive.

**step three:** Open Lightroom.

**step four:** Once the copy operation is complete, Right-click the topmost-level folder in the Folders panel in Lightroom and choose Update Folder Location.



**step five:** In the resulting dialog, navigate to and select that same topmost-level folder in the new drive (the one you just copied over there), and click Choose.

Lightroom will update the catalog to point to the folder in the new location (and everything inside that folder). If you have all your folders/photos in a single parent folder, then you're done, but if there are additional folders at the same level as that top folder, you just need to repeat Steps Four and Five for those folders. Give it a test run to make sure everything is as it should be before removing the originals.

Hopefully, that information will put you in a much more confident place with your Lightroom catalog and put you on the path to taking control of your photo library. If you feel that maybe the mess is just too large and you're looking for a way to start over from scratch, then tune in next issue when I devote my column to just that. In the meantime, send your Lightroom questions to the [Help Desk](#) by clicking the My Account button on the KelbyOne website, and then choosing Help Desk. ■





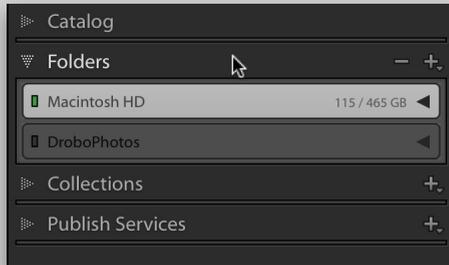
# Under the Loupe

understanding the role of  
the **folders panel**

BY ROB SYLVAN

The Folders panel may be one of the most-used panels in all of Lightroom, but it may also be one of the least understood. There's actually quite a bit of functionality in this little panel, and it puts a lot of data at your fingertips.

One of the most important distinctions to make is that the Folders panel is not a file browser. You will only see folders that have actually been through the import process. Just like the photos that reside within them, nothing appears in Lightroom unless it was introduced to the catalog first.



The Folders panel consists of two elements—Folders and the Volume Browser. Folders are exactly that, the folders on your hard drive(s) that you’ve imported into Lightroom. You can import any number of folders and subfolders, and they’ll always be sorted alphanumerically. Subfolders will nest under their parent folders, which mirror the structure you see in your file browser (i.e., Finder or Windows Explorer) when looking at your disk because they’re one and the same set of folders.

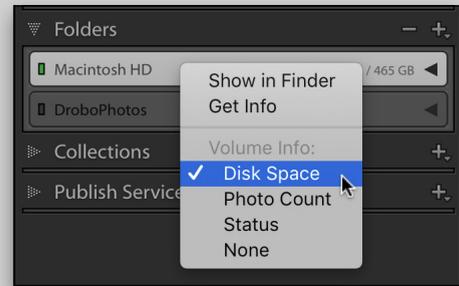
## the volume browser

I have two Volume Browsers, labeled Macintosh HD and DroboPhotos (see image above). Macintosh HD is my internal drive and DroboPhotos is an external drive. These are the names I gave these drives on my Mac. On Windows, you would see the relevant drive letter.

With a glance at the Volume Browser I can tell a few things about my drives. First, the Macintosh HD drive shows a green indicator, which means that the drive has ample free space. In fact, it shows that 115 GB out of 465 GB are free.

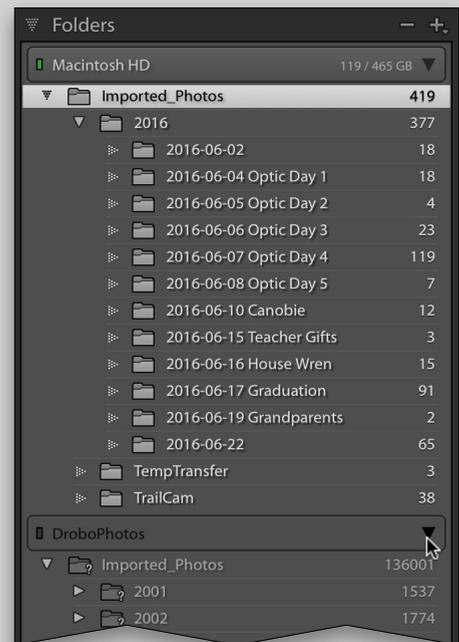
Second, I can see that DroboPhotos is offline since it displays a gray indicator and the name is faded out. Since it’s offline, Lightroom can’t display how much free space it has. Once that drive is reconnected to my computer and comes online, the Volume Browser will change from gray to green, and any question marks on folders will go away. Just so you know, the color indicator will turn yellow as free space gets down to 10 GB, orange as the free space gets down to 5 GB, then red when the disk has only 1 GB free remaining (hopefully, you won’t let your drive get that full).

Free space isn’t the only information the Volume Browser reveals. If you Right-click the Volume Browser, you can choose to display Disk Space, Photo Count, Status, or nothing at all.



In addition, you can open that disk in Windows Explorer or Finder and even access information about that disk.

Another nice aspect of the Volume Browser is that it’s collapsible, which makes the Folders panel much easier to navigate, especially if you have multiple drives with multiple folders on each. The previous screen captures showed both of my volumes collapsed, but once they’re expanded, I can see my folder structure underneath.



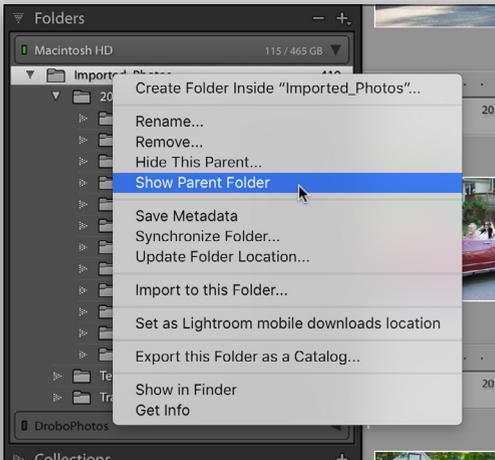
Remember, you’ll only see imported folders displayed in the Folders panel. I find it preferable to always import the top-level or parent folder that contains all the subfolders where my photos are stored. This provides the benefit of being able to collapse that group of subfolders so the list doesn’t run on forever, and it makes it much easier to move that entire tree of folders to a new drive if necessary just by dragging-and-dropping the top-level folder.

Don’t worry if you haven’t imported the parent folder containing your photo subfolders because it can be done right from the Folders panel. Just Right-click the topmost

folder in the panel and choose Show Parent Folder. The parent folder will automatically appear in the Folders panel, and all of its subfolders that were showing previously in the Folders panel will be nested underneath. For example, you can see that my top-level folder is named Imported\_Photos, but I know that folder is stored inside my Pictures parent folder. If I Right-click the Imported\_Photos folder and choose Show Parent Folder it will add the Pictures folder to

the panel, and Imported\_Photos will appear nested underneath, just like it exists on my drive.

Alternatively, if you have a top-level folder that you don't want to see displayed in Lightroom, you can Right-click that folder and choose Hide This Parent to make it go away. I don't want to see the Pictures folder showing at the top of my Folders panel, so I will hide that parent to keep Imported\_Photos at the top.



## find your folders and photos on disk

It's very important for all Lightroom users to know how to find exactly where a given folder or photo resides on their drives from inside Lightroom. There are a few ways to identify where your folders and photos exist on your drive. The easiest is the good-old Right-click contextual menu. Go ahead and Right-click any folder in the Folders panel and choose the Show in Finder (PC: Show in Explorer) menu item. This will open your file browser to that folder and show you where it exists on your drive. Similarly, you can Right-click any photo and access that same Show in menu to take you right to that photo in your file browser. You don't have to



go that far to find that information, though. If you just hover your cursor over a folder, you should see its path revealed in a tooltip pop-up. So take a moment to make sure you know exactly where all of your photos are located on your drive.

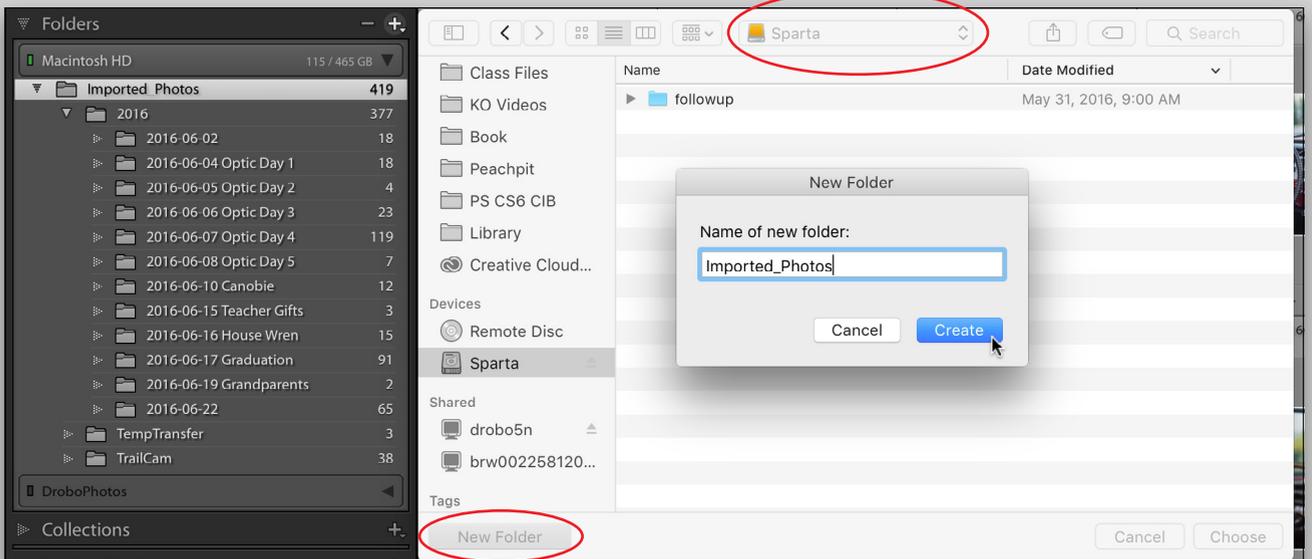
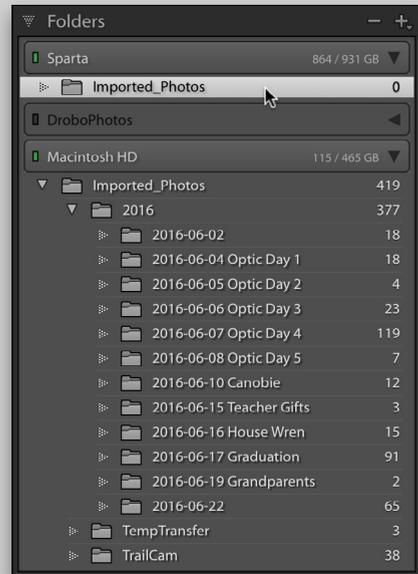


I want this folder to exist, click the New Folder button, give the new folder a name in the New Folder dialog, and click Create. I like to have a parent folder named Imported\_Photos on each drive I use to contain photos managed by Lightroom, so I'll use that name to create this folder (you can do what makes sense for your setup). The new folder will be created on that drive, and I can now click the Choose button to return to Lightroom where I'll see I've added a new drive (note the new Volume Browser) and folder to the Folders panel. Now I can use that as a destination during future imports, or I can use Lightroom to move photos and folders from other locations to that folder.

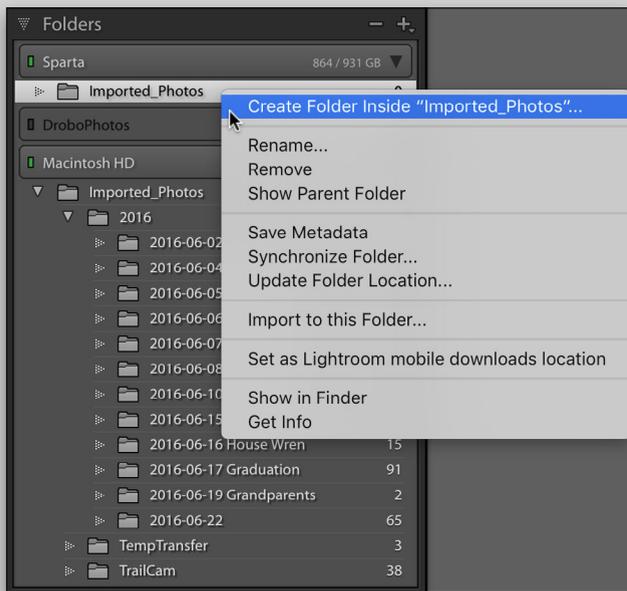
### adding new folders

In typical Lightroom fashion there are a couple of ways to create new folders. Let's imagine a common scenario where you buy a new external drive with the intention of storing photos on it because your existing drive is filling up. To start, you can go to the Library menu and choose New Folder, or click the plus sign at the top of the Folders panel and choose Add Folder to launch the Choose or Create New Folder dialog (below).

From here you can either choose an existing folder you may have created in your file browser or you can create a brand-new folder. In this example, I'll select the drive where



Another common scenario is the need to create subfolders within existing folders to help with your organizational needs. This process works in a similar fashion, but you start by selecting the parent folder within which you want to create the subfolder. In this case, I'll select the new Imported\_Photos folder I created on the drive named Sparta, Right-click to open the contextual menu, and choose Create Folder Inside "Imported\_Photos" (or whatever the name of the folder is that you Right-click). This opens a smaller Create Folder dialog where you can give the subfolder a name and click Create to complete the process. The subfolder will then appear in the Folders panel. These folders are ready to add photos and even new folders as your organizational needs demand.



## removing empty folders

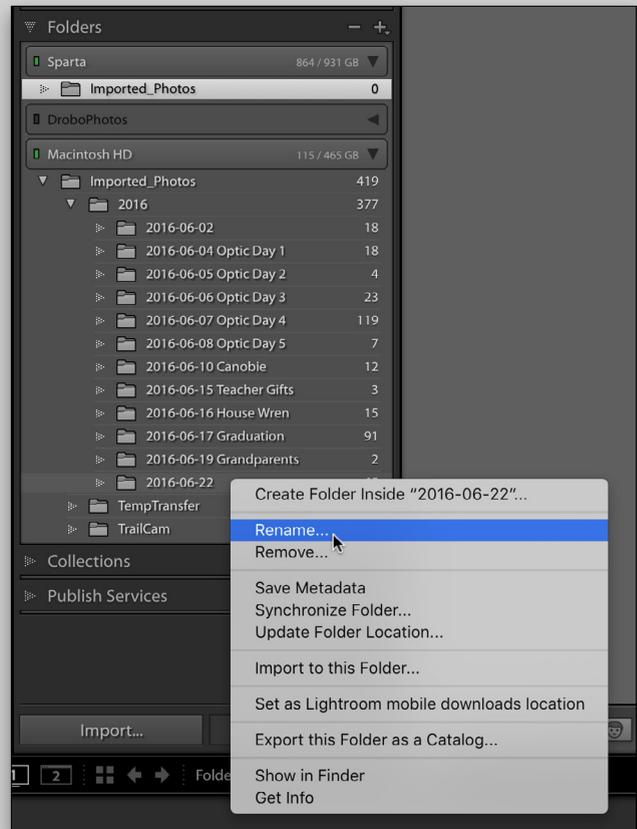
Knowing how to remove folders is important too. The most common situation for removing a folder is when you've deleted all of the photos from the folder for some reason or you've moved the photos into a different folder. In either case, there's no need to keep an empty and unused folder around. Simply Right-click on the empty folder and choose Remove. The folder will be removed from the Folders panel, and if it was empty, Lightroom will also delete the folder from your drive.

What if the folder isn't empty? Well in the case, when you Right-click a folder that has some files in it and choose Remove, the folder will only be removed from the Folders

panel (and the Lightroom catalog). In that situation, Lightroom will open a pop-up warning you that the photos will be removed from the Lightroom catalog, but the folders and files will remain on disk. This is generally not something you'd want to do because you don't want to end up with folders full of photos that aren't being managed by Lightroom and are just taking up disk space. If you want to delete the photos, you need to delete them first using Lightroom, then you can remove the empty folder as described.

## renaming folders

You'll eventually come to a situation where you need to change the name of a folder. This can be accomplished easily by Right-clicking the folder and choosing Rename from the contextual menu. From there, simply enter the new name in the Rename Folder dialog that appears and click Save to commit the change. The folder is renamed on the drive and that change is reflected in the Folders panel.



I hope these suggestions help you stay in control of your Lightroom library! ■



# Under the Loupe

## customizing preference and catalog settings

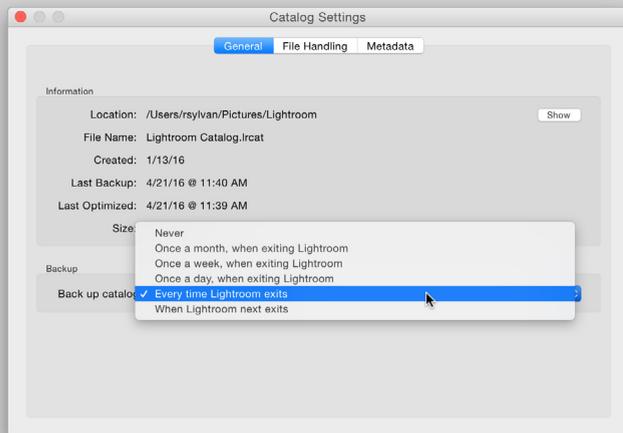
BY ROB SYLVAN

Taking control of your Lightroom experience involves becoming familiar with key Lightroom settings, and even customizing some of them to best fit your needs. In my experience, many Lightroom users can quite happily use Lightroom for a long time before ever discovering the Preferences and Catalog Settings dialogs. I think this is due to the fact that most of the default settings are well tuned for the majority of users, and that most users are more interested in their photos than noodling around in dialogs.

The moment of discovery of the Preferences often comes hand-in-hand with something going wrong, and that's usually not the best time to discover anything. So to give you a leg up, or at least give you something to file away for if (when) things go wrong, I want to share with you a few important settings that you might want to customize beyond the defaults.

## schedule a backup

One of the most important settings is how often you tell Lightroom to create a backup copy of your catalog file and where you want it to be created. You can find the first part of this setting by going to Lightroom (PC: Edit)>Catalog Settings, which opens the Catalog Settings dialog.

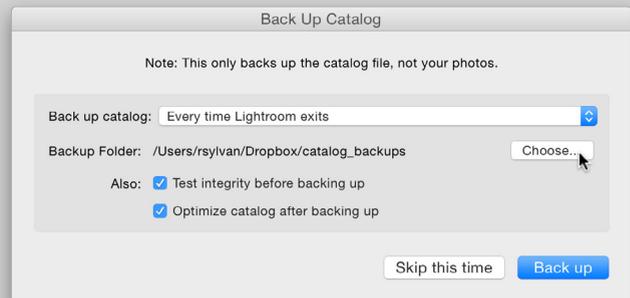


On the General tab of the Catalog Settings you'll find important information about your catalog, such as its filename and where it's stored on your hard drive (make sure you know these two important facts). At the bottom is where you'll find the option to set the schedule of how often Lightroom creates the backup. Just to be clear, Lightroom only creates a copy of the catalog file itself. This doesn't include any photos, previews, presets, or anything not contained within the catalog file. For this reason, you want to be sure that you have some kind of full-system backup process in place that includes all of your files. Lightroom simply creates a copy of the catalog file at a location of your choosing.

This may not seem like much help, but the Lightroom catalog file contains all of the work you do inside Lightroom (e.g., Develop settings, keywords, captions, titles, collection membership, flags, virtual copies, etc.), which is the most important thing after your photos. Having a backup copy created on a regular schedule can help you in case of disk failure, disk loss,

catalog file corruption, or self-inflicted injury, which happens when you inadvertently do something in your catalog (like delete a saved book collection) and don't realize it until some time down the road. In any one of those situations you'd be glad to have a recent backup copy of the catalog that was created right before the disaster.

As to the frequency of when this should run, that's something you'll need to decide for yourself. I have mine set to Every Time Lightroom Exits. Seem excessive? Well, if you've ever had to recover using a backup copy of anything, you'll know that the magnitude of relief you felt was directly proportional to how recent the backup was created. Plus, Lightroom gives you the option to pass up a backup if you just don't have the time. The backup only runs when you exit Lightroom (based on the frequency you choose), and at that time you'll be prompted to continue (or not).



As you can see on the Back Up Catalog prompt, there's a Skip this Time button that you can click anytime you're in a hurry. Just don't skip too often. I like being prompted each time I exit Lightroom so I have the option to back up, but in reality I may only create a backup once a week or right after a big work session. You might also notice the location of the backup folder is also shown on that prompt. As a matter of fact, that's the only place you can configure where you want the backup copy to be created.

By default, Lightroom puts the backup in a folder (named Backups) in the Lightroom folder inside your Pictures folder, which is also the default location of your working catalog. This isn't ideal if you want to provide some protection against drive failure, so I'd recommend directing the backup to be created on a different drive. Click the Choose button to manually navigate to and select the location you want the backup to be created. On my laptop with only one internal drive I have my backup directed to my Dropbox folder so that the backup copies are

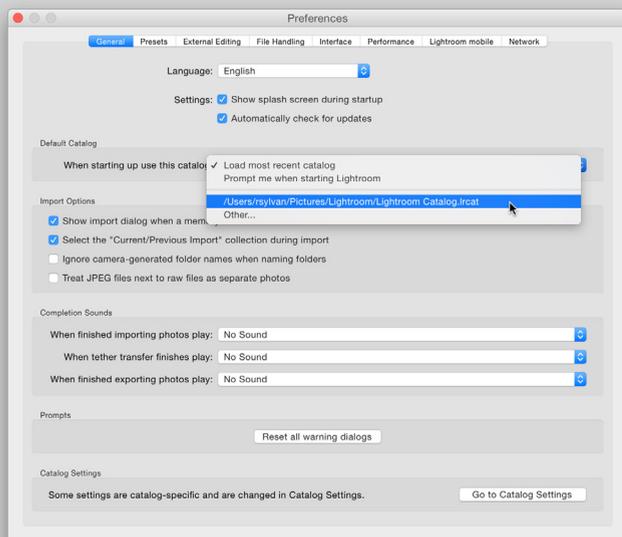
eventually uploaded to my Dropbox account and synced to my other computer.

I also recommend leaving the integrity test and optimize catalog boxes checked. It will make the process take longer, but I feel it's a good investment of time and resources. One final note, Lightroom creates a new backup copy each time the process runs, and then compresses the backup copy into a zip file (Lightroom CC/6 only) to conserve space. Lightroom leaves the job of deleting old backup copies up to you. I periodically go into my backup folder and delete all but the most recent four or five copies to prevent Lightroom from filling my drive with them.

## default catalog

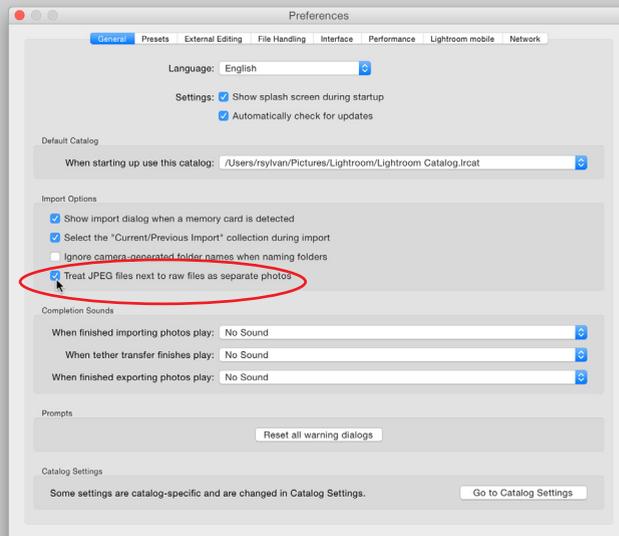
On the subject of catalogs, there's one other vital setting I want you to customize for your situation. Go to Lightroom (PC: Edit)>Preferences, click on the General tab, and note the setting for Default Catalog.

Do yourself a huge favor and change that setting from Load Most Recent Catalog to your specific catalog file. Click the drop-down menu and you'll see the path to the current catalog displayed as an option, and choose it. If you have more than one catalog that you regularly use, then choose the Prompt Me when Starting Lightroom to be given the choice of which catalog to open each time. The reason this is so important is that you (and not Lightroom) need to be in the driver's seat on the decision of which catalog to open. I can't tell you how many lost hours and lost hair I've seen over the years because the user didn't realize which catalog was opened when they launched the program. If you do nothing else, save yourself from this fate and customize that setting for your catalog.



## import options

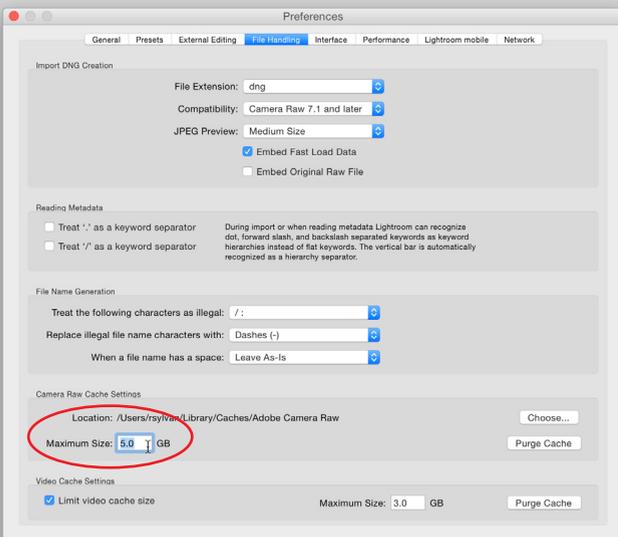
In the Import Options section of the General Preferences, there's an option to Treat JPEG Files Next to RAW Files as Separate Photos, and this is unchecked by default. My suggestion is to check that box even if you don't currently shoot RAW+JPEG.



A fairly common question I get on the [KelbyOne Advice Desk](#) is from people who start shooting RAW+JPEG and then wonder why they can't actually see the individual JPEG versions in their catalog (and why they can't delete them). When that option is unchecked, Lightroom copies the RAW and JPEG versions from your card, but it only shows you the RAW version in the catalog (and treats the JPEG like a hidden sidecar file). The thinking is that the RAW is better and that's the one you'll process in Lightroom, but most people I know who shoot RAW+JPEG need access to the JPEG too, so unless you absolutely don't ever want to see the JPEG version in your catalog, my recommendation is to check it. Configure the other options on the General tab as you wish.

## cache settings

Over on the File Handling tab there's one setting worthy of a little consideration. In the Camera Raw Cache Settings section there's a place where you can control the size of this cache folder shared by Lightroom and the Camera Raw plug-in. This cache is used to store a base rendering of your RAW photos each time you view them in the Develop module. The larger the cache the more data it can hold, which means performance can be improved when moving through a large number of RAW photos in Develop.



By default this cache is set to 1 GB, but I'd suggest increasing it anywhere from 5 to 20 GB to see if that comes with any performance improvement in Develop. Obviously, this is also dependent on how much free space you have on your drive. If you have another internal drive with more free space, you can click the Choose button and configure the cache to be created on that drive instead.

## performance

While I've seen the number of issues related to this last preference go down considerably, it's worth noting in case you should encounter it. On the Performance tab of the Preferences (only in the latest version of Lightroom), there's a single checkbox for Use Graphics Processor. When checked, and if your GPU is supported, this can improve performance while in the Develop module. If you have an older machine, however, and your GPU isn't supported, then you can experience problems. Adobe prepared a [troubleshooting document](#) to help users solve these problems, but the easiest thing to do in the short term is uncheck that option if you're having any odd performance

problems and see if that helps. I have it unchecked on my older Windows machine and have no problem.



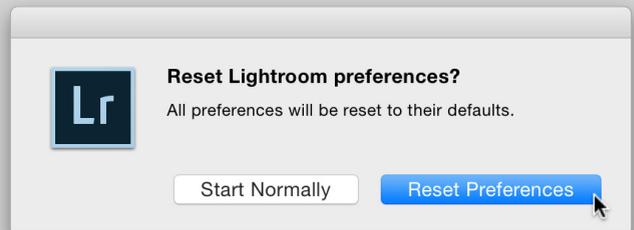
## reset

If Lightroom is ever acting really strangely on you and you can't figure out the cause, it could be worth resetting the preferences. This got a lot easier in Lightroom CC/6 because Adobe added a keyboard shortcut for just this purpose, and they separated out the part of the preferences that keeps track of the catalog you're using from the rest (that way resetting the preferences doesn't also contribute to your having trouble finding the correct catalog). Before you do this, it's worth noting any customizations you've made so that you can reconfigure them after the reset. Here's how it works:

**step one:** Quit Lightroom (if you haven't already).

**step two:** Hold down the Shift and Option keys (PC: Shift and Alt keys) while launching Lightroom (keep the keys down until you see the prompt).

**step three:** Choose Reset Preferences when prompted. Lightroom will replace the old preferences file with a new one, and hopefully solve whatever problem drove you to try this trick. Once Lightroom launches, go back and reconfigure any of your custom settings.



The rest of the default settings in Lightroom work fairly well and most users don't need to change them, but take the time to familiarize yourself with them and then customize them as you see fit. ■

RATE: ★★★★★





# Under the Loupe

## managing your catalogs for travel and more

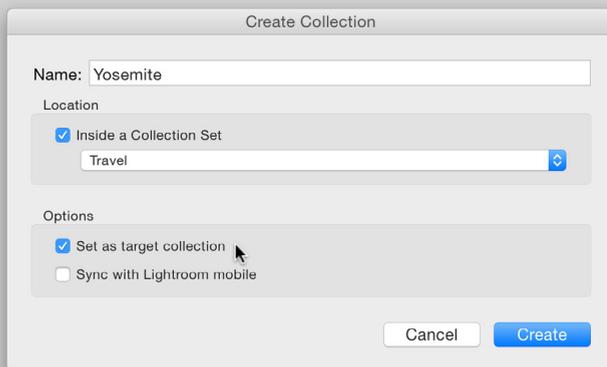
BY ROB SYLVAN

The Lightroom catalog file is where all the work you do in Lightroom is stored. There may be times when you need to create a smaller version of your main working catalog to take on a trip and continue working, or perhaps to show to a client on location, and then be able to merge that catalog back into your master catalog again. The same process can be helpful for anyone who may have created multiple catalogs for other reasons and now wishes to merge the data contained within them into a single catalog. All of these operations are possible thanks to Lightroom's catalog export and import functionality.

## exporting a smaller catalog

I have one main catalog on my desktop computer that manages all of my photos and contains all of the work I've ever done in Lightroom; however, sometimes when I travel, I take a subset of images with me on my laptop so that I can edit those photos and import new photos I create while away. Then when I return, I bring all those images back into my main catalog. Here's how I do it:

**step one:** In the main catalog, create a new collection in the Collections panel and name it something that makes sense for your purpose (you might include the name of the place you're going, the date, client name, etc.). Here's a tip: When creating the new collection, check the box to Set as Target Collection, as this will make it super easy to add photos to the collection simply by selecting the photo and pressing the B key.



**step two:** Add all the photos you want to bring with you.

**step three:** Right-click the collection and choose Export this Collection as a Catalog.

*Note:* It's not required to create a collection before exporting a catalog, as you can simply select any number of photos and go to the File>Export as Catalog menu to export a catalog; however, by creating a collection, it gives you a way to thoughtfully gather up the photos you want to bring, no matter where they may reside on your drives.



**step four:** After choosing the Export as Catalog option, you'll see the Export as Catalog dialog, where you'll need to make some choices. Let's go through the options. First, give your new catalog a meaningful name so that you know what it contains when you see it later. (I've named mine Yosemite.) Then you need to choose where on your system you want this catalog to be created. You can choose an internal drive for now and copy it to another drive later, or simply choose a location on an external drive that you can connect to your laptop and bring with you. In my case, I chose a connected external drive (Sparta).

**step five:** Now you need to decide what you want to be able to do with the photos in this catalog while you travel. Do you want the ability to export copies, send a copy to an external editor for additional processing, use Lightroom’s Photo Merge options, be able to zoom to 100% in Develop, or to print? If so, then you should check the box for Export Negative Files, which tells Lightroom to include copies of all source photos in a folder alongside the exported catalog.

**step six:** If you don’t need those types of output possibilities or need to zoom to 100% in Develop, then you can save some disk space and uncheck Export Negative Files and just use the Build/Include Smart Previews option instead. This tells Lightroom to include only smart previews for each of the source photos included in this catalog export. Smart previews allow you to use the Develop module (albeit with a potentially smaller version of the source photo) even though the catalog can’t access the original source photos. You can, of course, use all of the other functions for adding and editing metadata (keywords, flags, ratings, titles, captions, etc.) with smart previews, too.

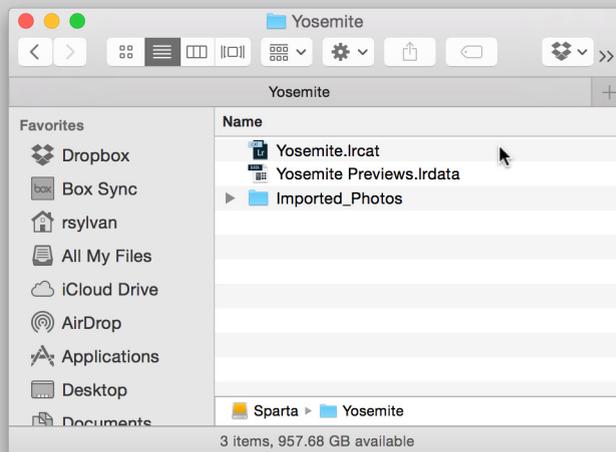
In my case, I want the ability to send to an external editor, so I chose to include negative files, but skipped smart previews. Including available previews is a good way to avoid having to re-render them later. Once the dialog is configured to your liking, click Export Catalog (PC: Save) to start the process of creating the new catalog.



## working with the exported catalog

If you exported the catalog to an external drive, you can connect that drive to your laptop (or any other computer running Lightroom) and open the exported catalog into Lightroom via the File>Open Catalog menu. All of the work you do in that catalog while you’re away—from adding metadata to processing in Develop—is stored in that catalog, and can seamlessly be transferred later back to your main catalog.

The catalog (.lrcat), the preview cache (.lrdata), and photos (if you opted to include negative files) are all stored in a folder with the same name you gave the catalog in the Export as Catalog dialog. You can move that folder to any other drive as needed to make it work for you. While on my trip, I’ll import any new photos I take into that same folder to keep things organized and easy for my return. It’s not necessary to add new photos to the collection you created earlier because when you get back you’re going to transfer all of the data back to the main catalog.



## bringing it all home

Now that I've returned from my trip, I want to bring all of the changes I made to the original group of photos into my original catalog, as well as copy all of my new photos to my primary storage location. Here are the steps:

**step one:** Connect the drive containing the exported catalog to the original computer.

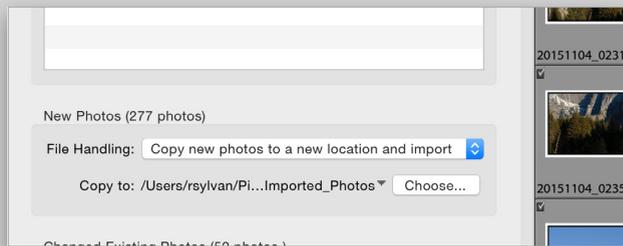
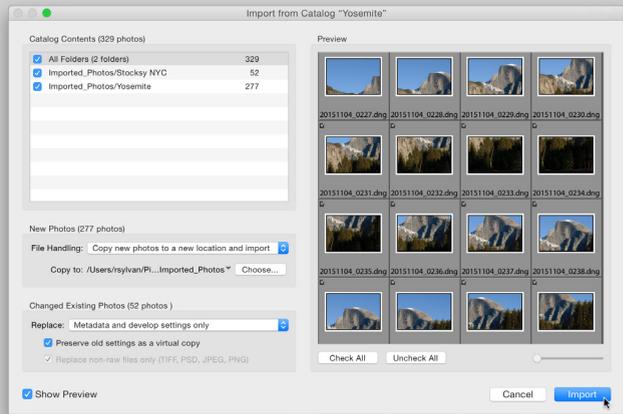
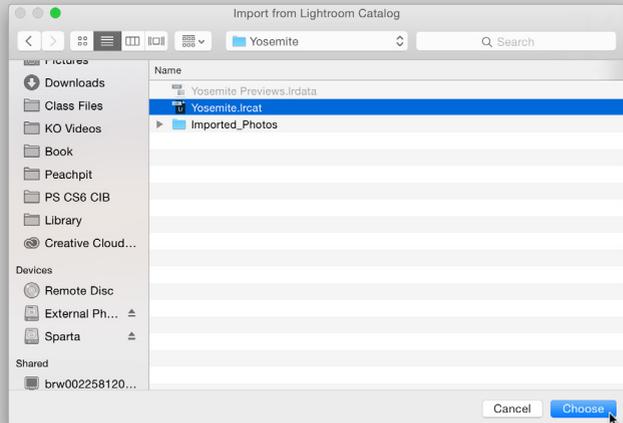
**step two:** Open your main working catalog into Lightroom.

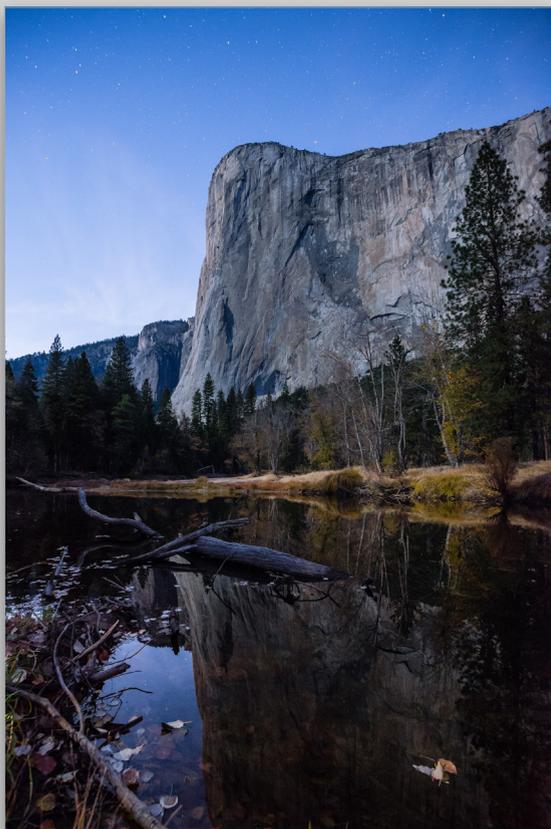
**step three:** Go to File>Import from Another Catalog, navigate to the drive containing your travel catalog, select the previously exported catalog file, and click Choose.

**step four:** In the Import from Catalog dialog, you can decide what to do with any new photos, as well as how to handle existing photos that changed since exporting the catalog.

**step five:** If you imported new photos into this catalog, they'll show up under the New Photos section. In the File Handling drop-down menu you can choose to Add New Photos to Catalog without Moving them (helpful if you want to keep the photos in their current location and add them to the catalog), Copy New Photos to a New Location and Import (most likely choice), or choose not to import them at all (unlikely). I chose to copy them to a new location and import so that they can be stored with my other photos.

**step six:** If you made any edits to the existing photos while you were away, you have some additional choices to make in the Changed Existing Photos section. You could choose to do nothing, but that seems unlikely if you went through the trouble of making the changes. The other two options are to replace Metadata and Develop Settings Only, or to replace Metadata, Develop Settings, and Negative Files. If you choose the option to replace negative files, an additional option is enabled below to limit the replacement to non-RAW files, which is really the only reason you'd need to replace negative files (such as making pixel-based changes to a PSD file in Photoshop while away).





**step seven:** I opted to replace Metadata and Develop Settings Only. When you do this, you also have the option to Preserve Old Settings as a Virtual Copy via the checkbox below the Replace menu. This is really helpful if you're not sure your new edits are better than what was there before (or you can't remember and want to play it safe), but if you know the new work was intended to replace the existing settings, then leave that option unchecked and avoid creating unwanted virtual copies. When you're happy with the settings, click Import.

## clean up

Once all of the data has been imported into your main catalog and the new photos safely copied to a new destination (and backed up), you can go back and delete the exported catalog from the external drive (and any associated files) using your file browser. That catalog was intended to serve a temporary purpose, and now that the job is done and you're home, you don't want to waste space with those files or stumble on it later and not remember what it was for. Better to clean up now and be ready for your next adventure with a clean slate (drive).

## merging multiple catalogs into one

I regularly encounter people who, for one reason or another, have created multiple catalogs when they were learning Lightroom and would like to have all of that work contained in a single catalog. The same exact process of importing the data from one catalog into another can be used to merge any number of catalogs into one; you just do it one at a time. Here's the advice I give them (along with the steps shown above):

- Be methodical in your approach.
- Outside of Lightroom, you may not know what any one catalog file contains. Open each catalog into Lightroom and make some notes about the contents of each catalog, its filename, and where it's located on your system.
- Ensure you have a good backup before you start.
- Once all data has been imported into one catalog, you've confirmed all is well, and everything is backed up, go ahead and get rid of any catalogs (and associated files) you no longer need. ■

RATE: ★★★★★



# Under the Loupe

transferring **your** lightroom **catalog**  
and **photos** to a new computer

BY ROB SYLVAN

The idea of transferring your Lightroom catalog and all of your photos to a new computer can seem daunting at first, but once you know the basics you'll find it's pretty straightforward. In addition, completing the process will make you a more confident Lightroom user.

I first wrote about this subject for *Photoshop User* magazine back in 2010, but I still get a lot of questions on this topic, so I thought it was time for an update. Within the context of transferring Lightroom to a new computer, there are essentially three components that you want to transfer from your old computer to the new machine:

1. Your photos
2. All custom presets, templates, and third-party plug-ins
3. The Lightroom catalog (and possibly its associated preview cache files).

I want to point out that there are a few ways to successfully migrate this stuff to a new computer, but I'm going to highlight one method that will get all of your data safely copied to a new computer, keep you in the driver's seat every step of the way, and ensure that you know where all your files are when the job is done. While I'm writing this with a focus on Lightroom 5, the basic steps also apply to earlier versions of Lightroom.

## before you start

While you can transfer files over a network connection, having a large capacity external drive (or multiple external drives depending on the amount of photos you have) is going to make this process much simpler and faster, and that's the method I recommend. Also, do yourself a favor and make sure you have a good, solid backup in place before you begin.

The process I'm going to share works just as well if you're transferring between two computers with the same operating system or two different operating systems. The Lightroom catalog is cross-platform compatible, which means a catalog that started on Mac can be opened in Windows, or vice versa. *Note:* If you're migrating between Mac and Windows, you'll want to use an external drive that's formatted as FAT32 because both Mac and Windows can read and write to and from a FAT32-formatted drive. An alternative is to use third-party software that lets a Mac computer read and write to a Windows NTFS-formatted drive, or that allows a Windows computer to read and write to Mac OS Extended (this is what I do).

## preparing the new computer

The main thing to do on the new computer is to install the latest version of Lightroom. You can skip the original installation disc and simply download the installer for the latest version you own by going to:

*Mac:* [www.adobe.com/support/downloads/product.jsp?product=113&platform=Macintosh](http://www.adobe.com/support/downloads/product.jsp?product=113&platform=Macintosh)

*PC:* [www.adobe.com/support/downloads/product.jsp?product=113&platform=Windows](http://www.adobe.com/support/downloads/product.jsp?product=113&platform=Windows)

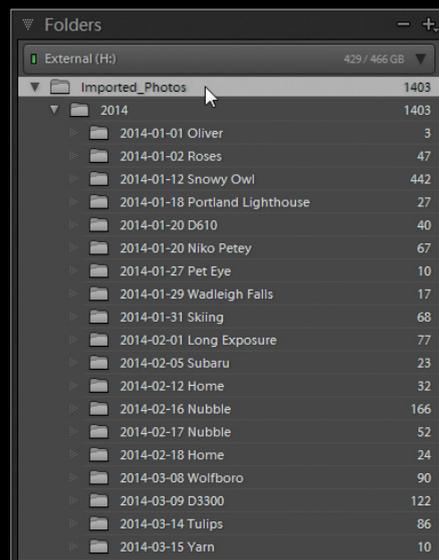
If you're a Creative Cloud subscriber, you can just log into the CC on the new computer and install Lightroom that way. The End

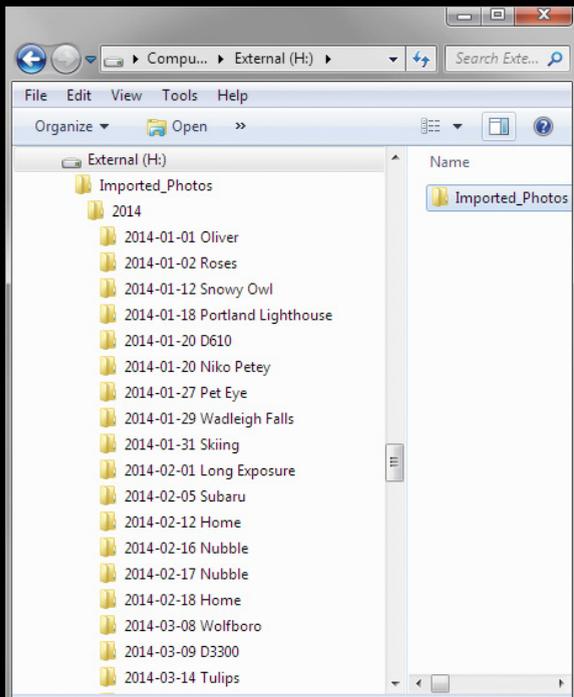
User License Agreement allows you to install a second copy of the software for your own exclusive use on another computer, provided that Lightroom isn't used on both computers at the same time. This is also true for Creative Cloud subscriptions. Lightroom is truly cross-platform, so even if you're changing operating systems (Mac to PC or PC to Mac), you can use your same serial number with both installations, and there's no activation software involved. Don't bother launching Lightroom yet on the new computer, just install the software and go back to the old computer so we can gather up all the pieces to bring over.

## migrating your photos

Stored in your Lightroom catalog is the complete path to each imported photo, from the volume name (PC: drive letter) to the filename, and every folder in between. If something in that path changes outside of Lightroom, then the path stored in the catalog becomes out of sync with your photos' actual location. In the process of migrating from one computer to another, it's likely that something in that path will change. This isn't a big deal, and the process to update the catalog at the folder level is very straightforward (we'll go over that when we get to the new computer). The moral of the story is that if all your photos are stored in a single parent folder (no matter how many subfolders are in it), when you get to the new computer, you only need to update a single folder to get every subfolder and photo up to date. I realize that there's no single right way to store photos and your photographic situation may be slightly more complicated for good reason, in which case you may need to update more than one folder.

For example, on every drive I use to store photos, I maintain a structure that starts with a single parent folder that contains multiple levels of subfolders for all the photos. This keeps things very simple for portability and backup. This parent folder is at the top of the tree in the Folders panel. If I open a Windows Explorer window to that same location, you can see the same folder structure is shown there, too (see next page).





What if you do keep all your photos in a single folder, but the top-level folder isn't showing in the Folders panel? Just Right-click on the topmost folder and choose Show Parent Folder from the contextual menu that appears. That will bring the parent folder into the Folders panel. On the flip side, if you have too many levels of parent folders showing in the Folders panel, you can hide unnecessary folders by Right-clicking on the topmost folder and choosing Hide This Parent. Typically, having one level of parent folder above the folders containing your actual photos works best.

If your photos are already on an external drive that you're moving to the new computer, then there's no need to copy your photos to yet another drive. Just be prepared to connect that drive to the new computer, and skip ahead to the next section on presets and plug-ins.

If you need to migrate your photos to an external drive, here's what to do: With Lightroom closed, *copy* (don't move) the parent folder containing your photos (and its contents as-is) to the external drive you're using to transfer the data. Remember, don't change the existing structure; just copy it to the external drive.

## presets and plug-ins

Now it's time to gather up all your custom presets, plug-ins, and templates. If you've never created custom presets or templates, and you've never installed a third-party plug-in or Web gallery, then you can skip this part of the process and we'll see you in the section on the catalog. When you install Lightroom on your new computer you'll get all the default presets and templates, so we're only concerned with all the custom bits you added.

In my experience, most people leave their presets and templates in the default central location. The simplest way to access this location is to go to Lightroom (PC: Edit)>Preferences, click on the Presets tab, and click the Show Lightroom Presets Folder button. This will open the folder, named Lightroom, containing all of your presets into Finder (PC: Windows Explorer), which is located here:

*Mac:* Users/[username]/Library/Application Support/  
Adobe/Lightroom

*PC:* Users\[username]\AppData\Roaming\Adobe\Lightroom



*Note:* Windows can hide the AppData and Application Data folders. In Windows Explorer, go to Tools>Folder Options>View, and check Show Hidden Files, Folders, and Drives. Mac does a similar thing with the Library folder. Open a new Finder window, click Go in the menu bar, and hold the Option key to make Library magically appear in the list of places to go. Choose Library, and then follow the rest of the path above.

On the Presets tab in Preferences, if you already had Store Presets with This Catalog checked, then I assume you know where all your presets are, and you can skip ahead to the catalog section. If you don't have Store Presets with This Catalog checked, then don't check it now, as it will simply create a new folder (named Lightroom Settings) alongside your catalog with only the default presets, which won't help with your custom presets.

In this Lightroom folder are all your presets, templates, third-party Web galleries (if installed), and the most common location for third-party plug-ins (the Modules folder), within their respective subfolders. Your task is to place a copy of all your custom files on the external drive destined for the new computer, and the easiest way to do that is to copy the entire Lightroom folder to the external drive. On Windows, the Lightroom preference file is also stored in the Lightroom folder in a folder named Preferences. I don't recommend bringing a copy of this file to the new computer, as I think it's wiser to start with a fresh preference file on the new computer. In addition, if you're migrating from Windows to Mac, the preferences are stored in a different location on Mac anyway, so leave the Preferences folder behind.

Regarding third-party plug-ins, I've always found it simplest to place a copy of the .lrplugin file (the file extension for Lightroom plug-ins) in the Modules folder so that the Plug-in Manager (File>Plug-in Manager) will automatically add and enable the plug-ins. However, you may have chosen to store your plug-ins in a different location and manually add them via the Plug-in Manager. There's no wrong answer, but I'll leave it to you to know where your plug-ins are stored if not in the Modules folder.

Lightroom plug-ins are typically cross-platform, but some may have special requirements for each operating system, so be sure to check the website of the plug-in author for all compatibility concerns. If you have installed plug-ins that are more like external editors, such as those from Nik Software or onOne Software that you access via the Photo>Edit In menu, then you'll want to go to the developer's website and download the installers for those plug-ins to the new computer and install them like new software at the end of the transfer process. Now that you have all your photos, presets, and plug-ins copied to your external drive, let's turn our attention to the Lightroom catalog.

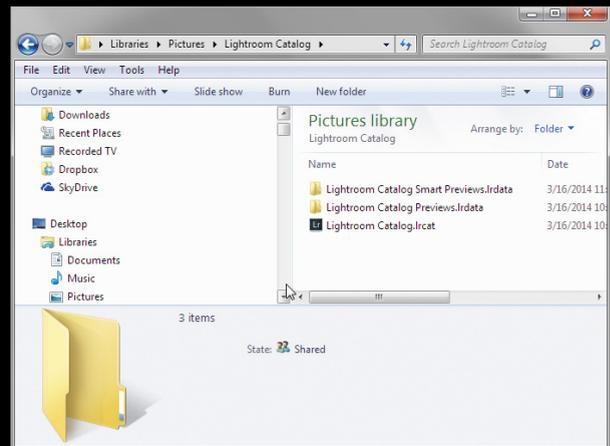
*Tip:* While you have Lightroom open, take note of your preference settings so that you can reconfigure them on the new computer.

## copying the catalog

When it comes to migrating the actual Lightroom catalog, I advocate creating a copy of your working catalog to transfer to

the new computer because there's no other way to transfer the Publish Services connections you previously set up in the Library module, as they're not included in a catalog export. In addition, a catalog export only includes keywords that are applied to exported photos, which may leave out parts of your entire keyword hierarchy that have not yet been applied to photos (though it's possible to export a keyword list and import it into a new catalog).

To find your catalog, go to Lightroom (PC: Edit)>Catalog Settings, click on the General tab, and click the Show button to reveal its location. The default location of the catalog is in the Pictures folder, but the Lightroom catalog can exist at another location of your choosing.



In the folder containing the catalog are two (possibly three if you use smart previews) important files: the catalog itself with the .lrcat file extension and the associated preview cache with the .lrdata file extension. If you see a .lock or .journal file, then close Lightroom and they will go away, as they are temporary files that assist the catalog. If you created smart previews at some point, you'll also see a Smart Previews.lrdata file. If you've never changed the default location of the catalog backups, then you might see a Backups folder, as well, but we can leave that folder behind. With Lightroom closed, copy (not move) the .lrcat and .lrdata files to a folder on the external drive. If you can fit them on the same drive holding your photos, then go for it. If you need to use a separate drive, that's fine, too.

You should now have a copy of your photos, presets, and catalog on the external drive. Safely disconnect the external drive from the old computer and connect it to the new computer.

## transferring to the new computer

Launch your file browser on the new computer and view the contents of the external drive. For illustration purposes, I'm transferring my catalog from a Windows machine to a Mac. First, copy the folder containing the Lightroom catalog (and preview cache) to a location of your choosing on the new computer. Then, copy your photos' folder structure to a new location of your choosing (or leave them on the external drive if that's your plan). When

those copy operations are complete, navigate to the catalog in its new home and double-click the .lrcat file to open it in Lightroom.



Don't panic if you see question marks on your folders and photos, you just need to update the catalog to point to their new location. This is when having a single parent folder showing in the Folders panel comes in handy. To point the folders to the new location, follow these steps:



**step one:** Right-click the top-level parent folder and choose Find Missing Folder.

**step two:** Navigate to and select that exact folder in its new location and click Choose (PC: OK).

Lightroom will then go through the process of updating the catalog to reference that folder (and everything inside of it) at this new location. Repeat the process for any folders not contained in that parent folder, if you have any.

Next, go to Lightroom (PC: Edit)>Preferences and reconfigure your settings. I suggest that you configure the Default Catalog in the General tab to reference this catalog specifically instead of loading the most recent catalog. Once configured, go to the Presets tab and click the Show Lightroom Presets Folder button to open it in your file browser. Copy all your custom presets, templates, plug-ins, and Web galleries from the external drive to their respective folders on the new computer. Restart Lightroom when the copy operation is complete to see your custom bits in Lightroom.

Go to File>Plug-in Manager and make sure all your plug-ins are installed and running. If you haven't already, this is a good time to make sure you're running the latest version of each one. You'll need to reregister any third-party plug-ins you had running on the old computer.

## a word about publish services connections

Connections that were set up on the old computer to online sources such as SmugMug or Flickr should still work, but give them a test drive to make sure. However, existing hard drive connections will display any photos they contain, but may no longer function due to the change in drives. The export location of an existing connection cannot be changed after the connection is created, and it will have to be rebuilt by making a new hard drive connection on the new computer. Once you create the new hard drive connection, you can repopulate its contents to match the old connection and you'll be back in business.

Give your catalog a thorough walk through to make sure there are no lingering question marks on any files, that all your presets are accounted for, and everything is functioning as it should. If you're satisfied that all is well, you can close Lightroom and install any additional third-party plug-ins (such as the kind from onOne Software) if you have them. Congratulations on the successful migration! ■



ALL IMAGES BY ROB SYLVAN