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Counterbalanced Adjustment Presets

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In this lesson, I'm going to talk about a technique I've been using a lot lately that I'm calling Counterbalanced Adjustments, which means that I'm moving similar adjustment sliders in opposite directions to get a certain effect.

There are certain adjustments that can be found in Lightroom's Develop that are similar to each other, yet work slightly differently. For example, Vibrance and Saturation can both make your image more or less colorful, but they do so in slightly different ways.

I find that if you move these two sliders in opposite directions, it will change the way your colors look. The problem is that it's not fun to do that manually because it's hard to judge how far to move each of the sliders. It's easier to create a series of presets, with the two sliders set in various ways, that you can hover your cursor over to quickly preview what the image would look like with the different settings.

The two counterbalanced adjustment slider pairs we're going to focus on are:

- Vibrance and Saturation
- Contrast and Dehaze

Vibrance & Saturation

Let's first look at how we can use the Vibrance and Saturation sliders in conjunction with each other to create some interesting color effects. In making a counterbalanced adjustment, one of the sliders will be moving to the right and one will be moving to the left. I created an entire set of presets (called Ben's Vibrance & Saturation) for adjusting the Vibrance and Saturation sliders, most of them creating counterbalanced adjustments, moving the two sliders to various degrees.

Note that I have included these presets in the class files and will include instructions on how to install them at the end of this pdf. The letters at the end



Here, we are hovering over various develop presets to preview them in the Navigator panel.

of each preset name indicate which sliders were used to create the preset. For example, if the preset ends with (V), it means that only the Vibrance slider was used. If the preset name ends with (VS), it means that both the Vibrance and Saturation sliders were used. If you see the letters appear in lowercase (vs), it means the sliders are at their default settings.

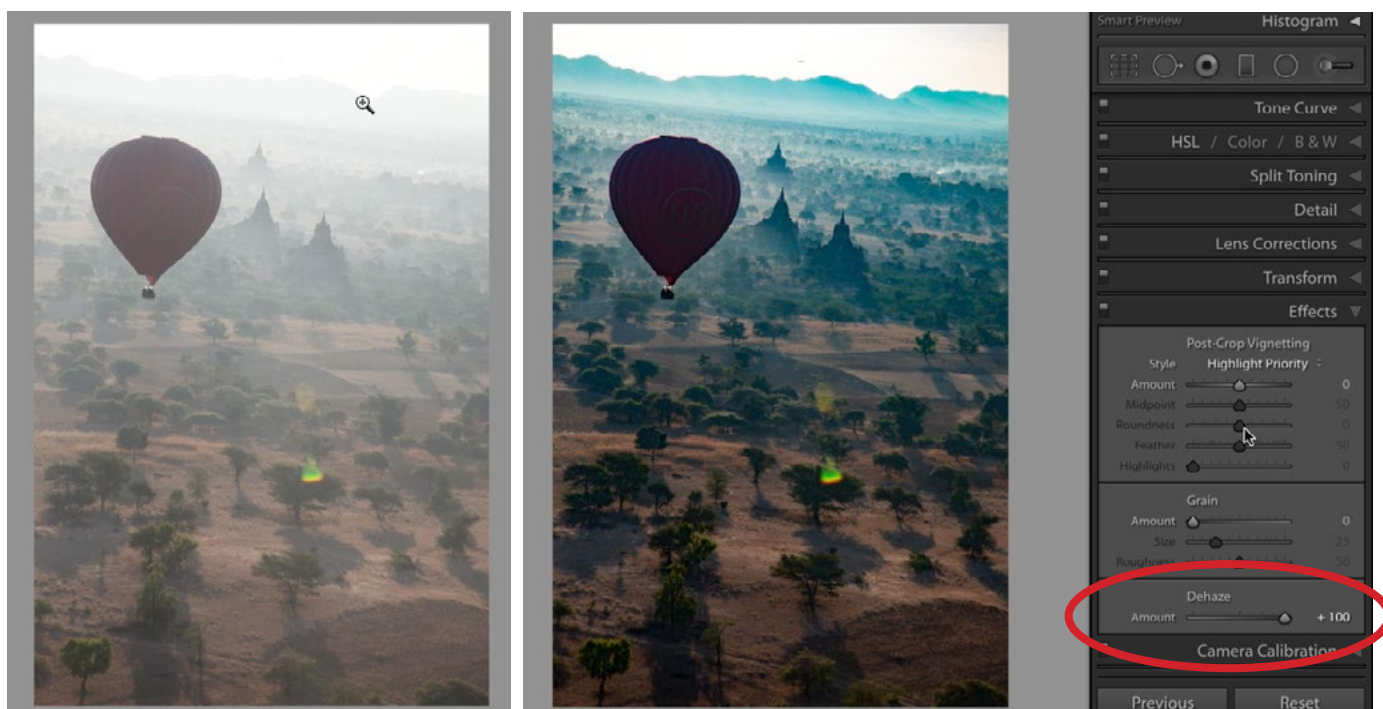
As you hover your cursor over various Develop Presets (in the panel on the left side of the Develop Module), the Navigator window will show you a preview of what your image would look like with the presets applied. When you like the result that you see in the Navigator window, click on the name of the preset to apply the settings to your image.



Contrast & Dehaze

The next pair of sliders we're going to create counterbalanced adjustments with are the Contrast slider (found in the Basic panel) and the Dehaze slider (found in the Effects panel). Note that you will only find the Dehaze slider in the version of Lightroom that comes with the Creative Cloud subscription. It is not yet available in the stand-alone version.

The Dehaze adjustment is designed to fix an image that is hazy or foggy. It looks at the darkest portion of the really hazy area and makes it even darker. Then, as



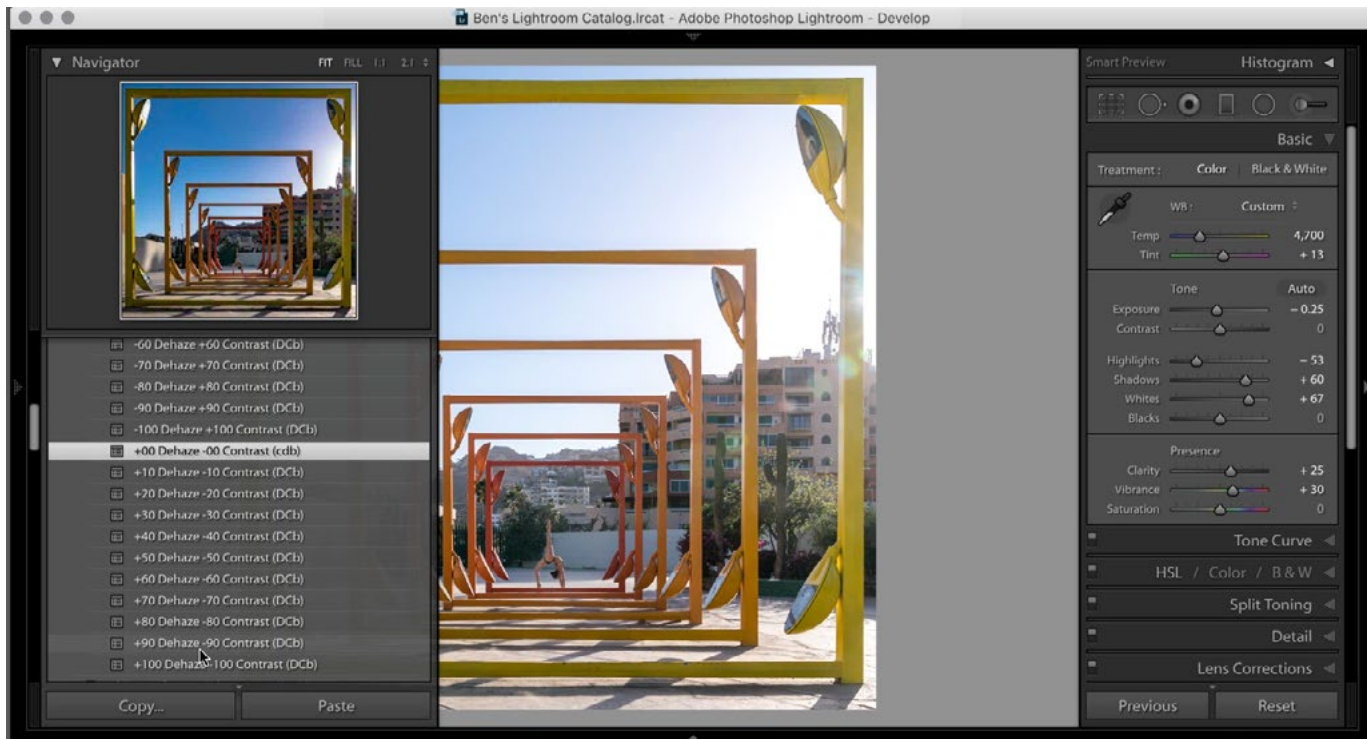
In the version of the image at left, the Dehaze slider is set to 0. In the version of the image at right, the Dehaze slider is set to 100.

it gets into areas that are less and less hazy, it applies the correction less and less. One thing you'll find with the Dehaze slider is that if you have any white balance issues in the image, this setting will exaggerate them. For example, if the shadows are overly blue, moving this slider up will make them even more so. You may have to adjust the white balance with the Temp and Tint sliders after making a Dehaze adjustment. If you max out the Dehaze slider and wish you could go further, you can increase the Contrast slider as well.

Just like with the Vibrance and Saturation sliders, the Dehaze and Contrast sliders both do similar things, but in different ways. I have found that counterbalancing them by moving them in opposite directions will create an interesting effect on my images. In order to quickly preview many different combinations of settings with the two sliders, I have designed a preset bundle called "Ben's Contrast & Dehaze (Basic + Effects)." The letters at the end of each preset name



Some of my Contrast & Dehaze presets.



Here, I am hovering over the different Contrast & Dehaze presets to preview what they would look like in the Navigator window at left.

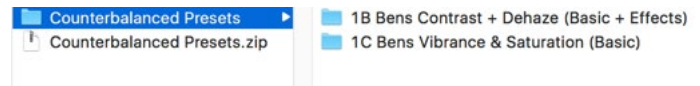
again indicate which sliders are being used in the preset. For example, a preset ending in (DCB) uses the Dehaze, Contrast and Blacks sliders. Hover your cursor over the different preset names to quickly view a preview in the Navigator window and when you find one you like, simply click on it to apply it to your image.

If you accidentally apply a preset, you can undo it by using the keyboard shortcut Command+Z (Ctrl+Z on Win). To re-apply something you've undone, use the keyboard shortcut Shift+Command+Z (Shift+Ctrl+Z on Win).

After experimenting with the counterbalanced Vibrance/Saturation and Dehaze/Contrast adjustments, I encourage you to play with your own counterbalanced adjustments in Lightroom. If you want to create your own develop preset, first set up the adjustment sliders the way you want and then click the little plus icon (+) next to the Presets panel title in the Develop Module. You'll be prompted to choose which adjustments you want to be included in the preset and give your new preset a name.

Installing presets that come with this lesson

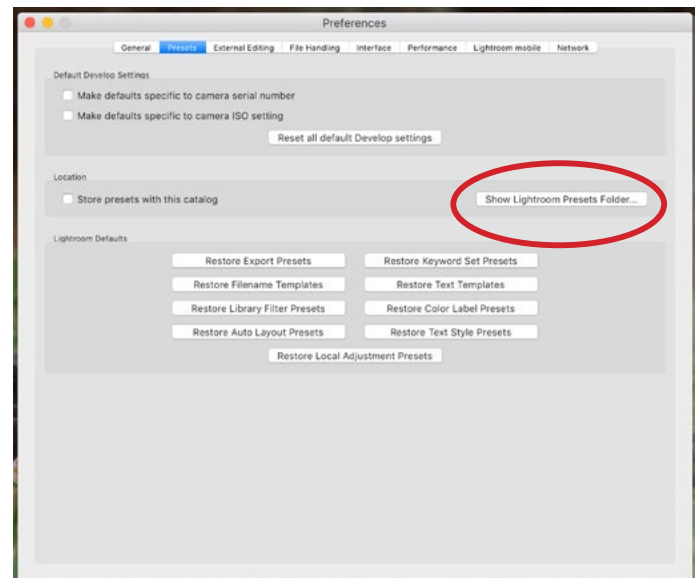
When you download the presets included with this lesson, they will be compressed into a single .zip file. Before you install the presets, you'll need to “unzip” the file by double-clicking on it to reveal its contents. Once you've done that, you can discard the original .zip file since you have already extracted its contents and therefore no longer need the .zip file. If you look at the contents of the resulting folder, you should find two folders inside. Those two folders are what we need to install in order to be able to access the presets from within Lightroom.



This is what you should see once you unzip the presets file included with this lesson.

In Lightroom, go to the menu at the top your screen and choose Lightroom > Preferences on the Mac, or Edit > Preferences on a PC. Next, click on the Presets tab and then click on the “Show Lightroom Presets Folder...” button.

Next, locate the Develop Presets folder and drag the two folders that you extracted from the .zip file so they end up inside that folder. It's important that a) you move the two folders and not the base folder that contains them, and b) they end up inside Develop Presets folder and not the Lightroom folder that it resides within.



In Lightroom's Preferences dialog box, click on the “Show Lightroom Presets Folder” button to open up the correct folder on your hard drive.

Now, return to Lightroom, quit and then relaunch the program to cause it to utilize the newly installed presets. When Lightroom re-opens, you can confirm they've been installed properly by inspecting the Presets panel, which is found on the left sidebar of the Develop module.

You might find that the preview functionality of the Navigator panel doesn't work on some images. That's usually because the image has been adjusted with a much older version of Lightroom, which featured different adjustment sliders than the current version. Since the preset requires the adjustment sliders that are offered in the current version of Lightroom, it is in essence disabled for that particular image. To see if that is the case, look at the Histogram that is found above all the adjustment sliders on the right sidebar of the Develop module. If you see a small lightning bolt icon beneath the histogram in Lightroom, then the image was adjusted with an older version and needs to be updated (by clicking on the icon) in order to be compatible with the preset. That should cause the Navigator preview to work again on that image.

A Note About Adobe Camera Raw

In Camera Raw, there is no Navigator panel for previewing what your image would look like with a preset applied. For this reason, I don't find the techniques in this lesson to be applicable inside of ACR. There is also no way of converting the preset files for ACR, so the techniques in this video are best enjoyed in Lightroom.