

Camera Raw for Lightroom Users

When Adobe releases new updates for all its products the Camera Raw plug-in for Photoshop often leads the way with exciting new features and tech previews. While these features do tend to end up in Lightroom Classic and Lightroom eventually, you don't need to wait! In this class Rob will explore why having access to Camera Raw is useful for all Lightroom users, and steps through the ways you can roundtrip your photos from Lightroom into Camera Raw and have the final edited version back in Lightroom.

Adobe Camera Raw for Lightroom Classic Users

Before there was Lightroom Classic (LrC), we had Photoshop, Bridge, and the Adobe Camera Raw plug-in that formed the foundation to many photographer's digital imaging workflow. In the years since Lightroom's debut I think it is safe to say that many of those photographers have made the migration over to LrC or Lightroom (Lr). So much so that it is far more common to see articles, videos, and tutorials about LrC/Lr than about ACR. That said, there are still people using ACR because that's what fits their needs. I'm not here to convince anyone to change the software they are using, but rather to provide a look into what is the same, what is different, and how to decode whether a given LrC resource applies to ACR, and vice versa.

Origins

LrC was created as a way to take the powerful editing capabilities in the ACR plug-in and build a more efficient workflow around it, from capture to output, aimed specifically at digital photographers. As a result, LrC's Develop module (as does the editing capability in all Lightroom cloud apps) shares the same editing and rendering capabilities as the ACR plug-in, but in a different wrapper that includes features and functions for importing, organizing, and output that don't exist in Camera Raw itself. Due to this common origin, LrC and Camera Raw have evolved as separate products, but they continue to be developed and updated in parallel to retain that consistent editing and rendering capability.

Because of this, the conventional wisdom is that everything in LrC's Develop module is also in ACR, and everything in ACR is also in the Develop module. But in actual use, I think the answer is a good bit more nuanced than that, and that is what I want to explore.

Differences

So much is the same between the two programs that I just want to focus on the differences to help you navigate between the two programs. Now, if you are LrC or Lr user you might be wondering why this would be helpful, but there are a few scenarios where a Lightroom user might encounter the ACR plug-in:

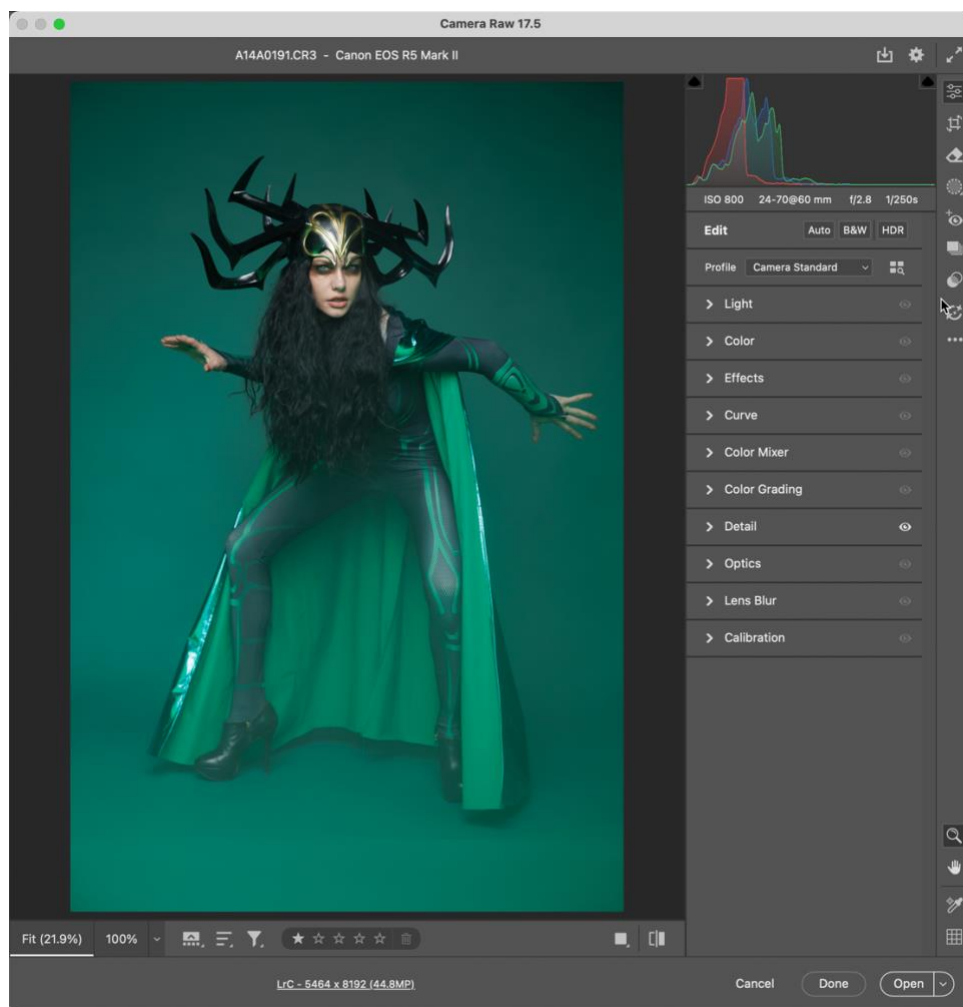
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- You use the Photo > Edit in > Open as Smart Object workflow.
- You use the Filter > Camera Raw Filter menu in Photoshop.
- You have some reason to open a raw photo into ACR from Bridge or Photoshop (uncommon, but not unheard of).

Considering all that, I think there is value in Lightroom users knowing their way around ACR too.

The Interface

The biggest cause of disorientation for anyone opening one program or the other at first is the difference in where things are located. Thanks to a recent interface update in ACR it looks a whole lot more like LrC than it ever did before (and has even more in common with Lr). That said, let's get oriented. In LrC, all the editing tools are located within the group of panels on the right side of the Develop module. In ACR, it now has similarly arranged panels on the right side of the Develop module. In ACR, it now has similarly arranged panels on the right side along with a toolbar down the right edge.



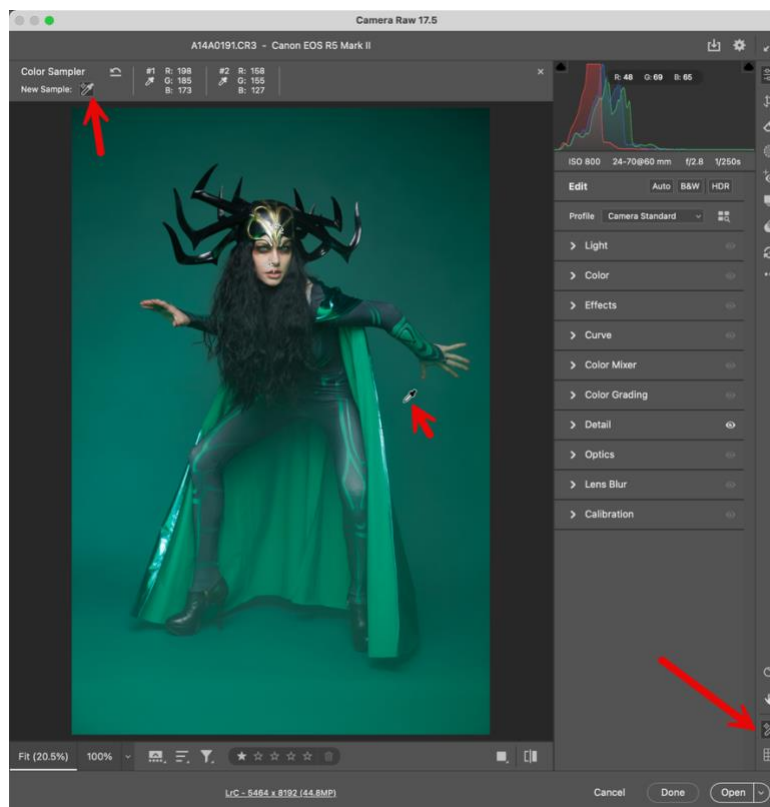
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In LrC, Lr, and ACR, if you are unsure of what a given icon represents you can place your cursor over the icon to see a tooltip appear displaying the name of the tool and its keyboard shortcut. I highly recommend any new user spending the time to become familiar with the icons this way. Note, keyboard shortcuts are not consistent between the applications, so be prepared to use your mouse a lot more in the program you are less familiar with.

A few quirky differences in the interfaces to be aware of are as follows:

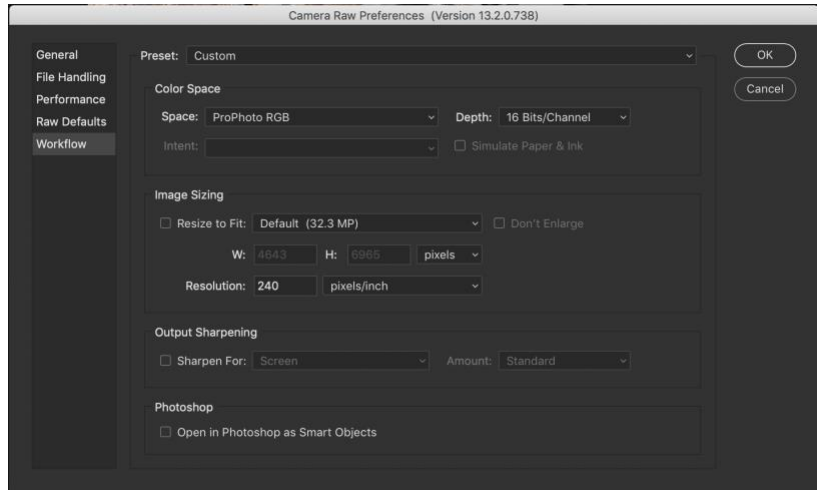
- The tools that appear under the Histogram in LrC appear down the right-edge in ACR.
- The Lens Corrections panel in LrC is called Optics in ACR.
- The Transform panel in LrC is called Geometry in ACR (and is in the Crop tool).
- The icons for accessing Snapshots and Presets appear along with the tools down the right-edge in ACR.

There is one tool that can be found in ACR that does not exist in LrC, and that's the Color Sampler Tool (near the bottom on the right-edge of the interface). This tool allows you to drop up to 9 color sample points on the photo so that you can monitor the RGB values at those points while you edit. I'd love to see this added to LrC, but it has not yet come to pass.



Workflow Options in ACR

Somewhat related to the topic of color sampling is the fact that you can change the color space used by the Histogram and Color Sampler in ACR via the Workflow Options dialog (accessible by clicking the link at the bottom of the window). LrC's color space cannot be changed in a similar way (unless you are soft proofing).



It is in this Workflow Options dialog that you can configure ACR to open a copy of the edited photo as a smart object in Photoshop if desired. In LrC or Lr you would go through the Open as smart object menu to do the same.

You'll also find an option to change the pixel dimensions of the photo opening in Photoshop from ACR this dialog. Most people leave this at the recommended Default setting that uses the native pixel dimensions (minus any cropping), but Lightroom doesn't have any way to change the pixel dimensions of the copies sent to Photoshop for editing (aside from cropping). If you need to resize the photo as part of your edit in Photoshop workflow from LrC you'd have to either resize it in Photoshop after it opens or go through LrC's Export dialog, then open the exported copy in Photoshop. In both programs the ideal is to stick to the largest color space and highest resolution (pixel dimensions) possible for editing the master version of the photo.

In LrC, the closest parallel to the Workflow Options dialog in ACR is found in the Lightroom > Preferences > External Editing (PC: Edit > Preferences > External Editing) panel. Here you can configure the color space, bit depth, and file type of copies sent to Photoshop with Lightroom adjustments. The default settings are recommended. Changing these settings has no effect on what you see in the Develop module.

Early Access Features

From time to time Adobe releases experimental (beta) new features in just ACR before they evolve and get added to LrC/Lr, and I wanted to walk through how you might be able to explore these Early Access features (as they are called) when they appear (features may start as Early Access before being promoted to just regular features). At this moment in time there is a new AI-powered Dust removal feature that is pretty neat. Here's how a Lightroom Classic user can give it a test drive.

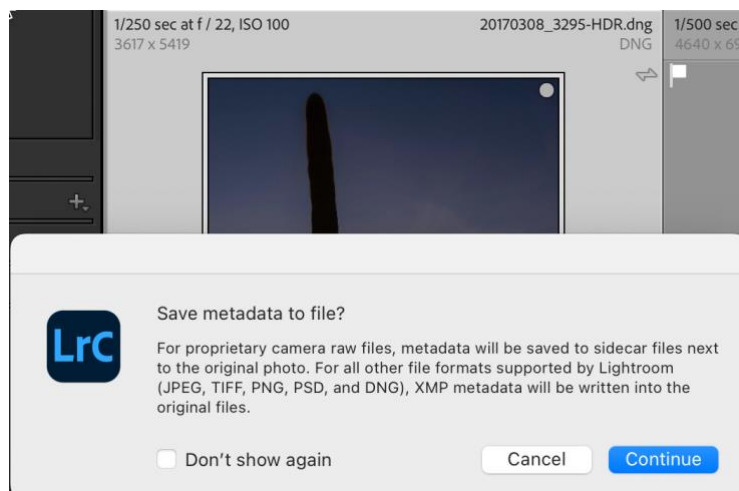
Open Directly in Camera Raw

The most obvious way to do this is simply open a raw photo from Bridge into Camera Raw or use the File > Open menu in Photoshop to do the same. However, as a LrC user you may not be used to navigating through Bridge or your operating system's file browser to find where a given photo is stored to open it into ACR. Additionally, you may have made some edits in LrC that you want to keep and bring into ACR, and once the edits are done you probably want all the edits back in LrC. So, here's a bit of a non-typical workflow that will keep your LrC edits with the source raw photo, allow you to play with that new feature in ACR, and then have all new edits show up in LrC when you are done.

Starting and Ending in LrC

OK, let's say we have a raw photo in a collection in LrC (which can make it harder to know where it is stored on drive), and we've done some basic edits, flag state, and other metadata in LrC that we want to retain.

Step One: Select the photo in the Library module and go to Metadata > Save Metadata to File. You can also press CMD+S (PC: Ctrl+S) to do the same. You may see a warning prompt designed to inform you about what will happen and allow you to cancel if you did it by accident. Click Continue to well, continue.



All that is happening is LrC is writing all the data it stored in the catalog about that photo to the XMP metadata of the selected photo. Now, not everything stored in a catalog can be written to XMP, such as virtual copies, so you need to have the source photo selected (not a virtual copy) to make this work. The purpose of this step is to be able to see any LrC edits previously applied when we open in ACR (as well as preserve any metadata we added to the photo).

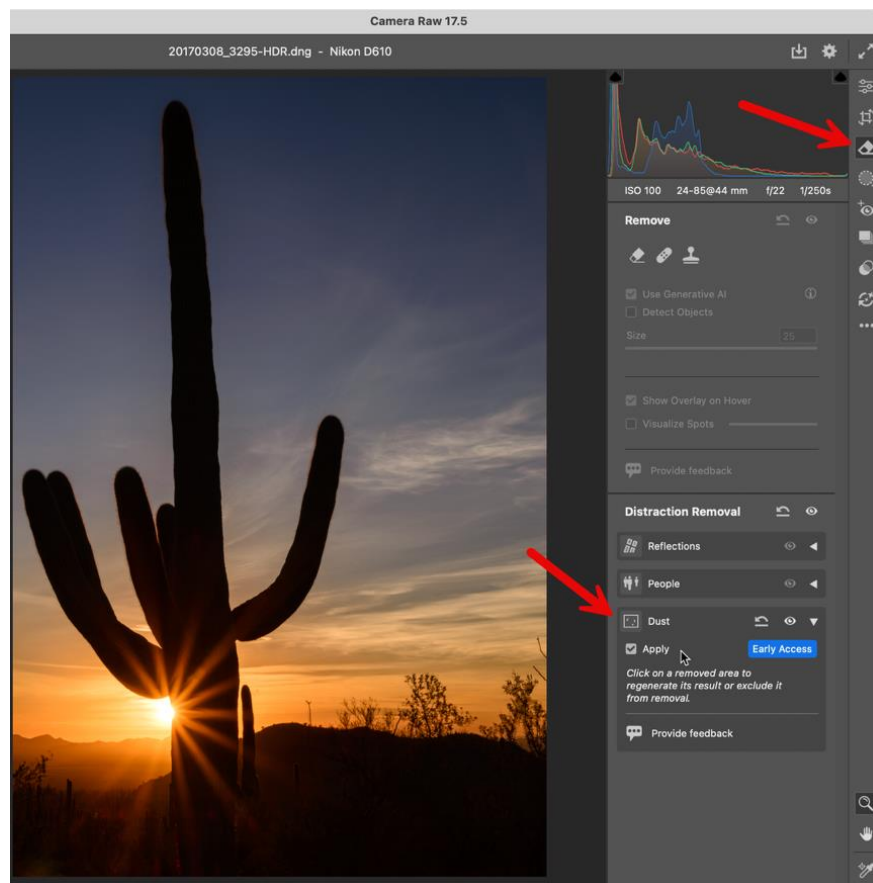
Step Two: Press CMD+R (PC: Ctrl+R) to open your operating system's file browser (Finder or Explorer) with that photo already selected. This is just a fast way to find that photo so it can be opened directly into ACR.

Step Three: Double-click the photo (assuming Photoshop is the default program for raw photos) to open it into Photoshop via ACR. Alternatively, right-click the photo and use the Open in contextual menu to open it in Photoshop. When you open a raw photo into Photoshop it goes right into ACR.

Because we wrote from LrC to the photos metadata, any edits you made in LrC should be visible and editable in ACR.

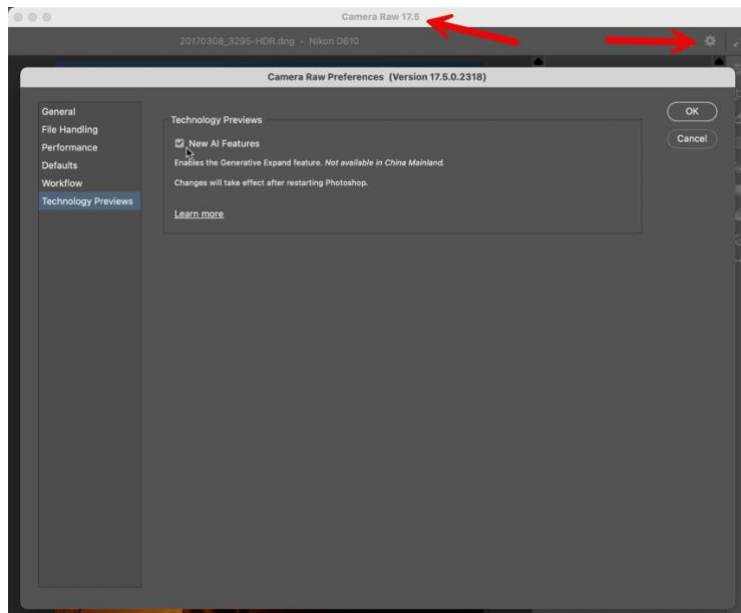
Step Four: Click the Remove tool icon to open into its options and look down in the Distraction Removal section. Reflections and People removal started out as Early Access features in ACR and then were later added to LrC and Lr. Recently, Dust was added as an Early Access feature to ACR only, and we're going to use that on this photo (you'd only use it on a photo with a lot of sensor dust spots).

Check the box next to Apply to have the feature automatically find and remove all sensor dust from the photo. That's all there is to it!



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If you don't see Dust as an option, first look at the top bar of the ACR interface and make sure it shows version 17.5 (or later if you are reading this way in the future). If yes, then click the little Gear icon in the upper-right corner to access ACR preferences. Go to the Technology Previews preference and check the New AI Features checkbox. Click OK, and you should now have all the Early Access features.



Step Five: To finish in ACR without opening in Photoshop, click the Done button. This will write all edits to the photos XMP metadata and close ACR.

Step Six: Switch back over to LrC, and make sure the original photo is still selected (if not, select it). Go to Metadata > Read Metadata from File. You will see another prompt informing you of what you are doing. Click Read to continue. This tells LrC to update the info in its catalog with the info from the photo's XMP metadata, and since we started this by writing from LrC to the metadata we won't lose anything in the process. In fact, we gain all the edits we made in ACR. Once the process is done you should see the preview update in LrC (if not, switch to Develop and it should update there).



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Even though we cannot edit the dust removal made in ACR we can see the correction in LrC. I can't wait for that feature to be added to LrC/Lr, but until then, we can use it. In fact, this is a feature that can also be accessed and used when using Camera Raw as a filter in Photoshop. So, if you didn't need/want to work on the original raw photo, you could send a copy with adjustments from Lightroom Classic or Lightroom to Photoshop and apply Camera Raw as a filter via the Filter menu. Or, use the Open as smart object in Photoshop option, and double-click the smart object icon on the layer in Photoshop to open that into Camera Raw. So, there are a few ways you can access and leverage this feature, pick the route that makes the most sense for your workflow (not necessarily a wrong answer).

Camera Raw as a Filter

Let's look at an example using ACR as a filter. Start in LrC or Lr and use the normal method for sending a copy with adjustments to Photoshop (Edit in Photoshop menu). Once the copy opens in Photoshop, go to Filter > Convert for smart filter menu to embed a copy of the open layer in a smart object. This allows for what are called smart filters, which means you can go back into the filter and change settings as needed.

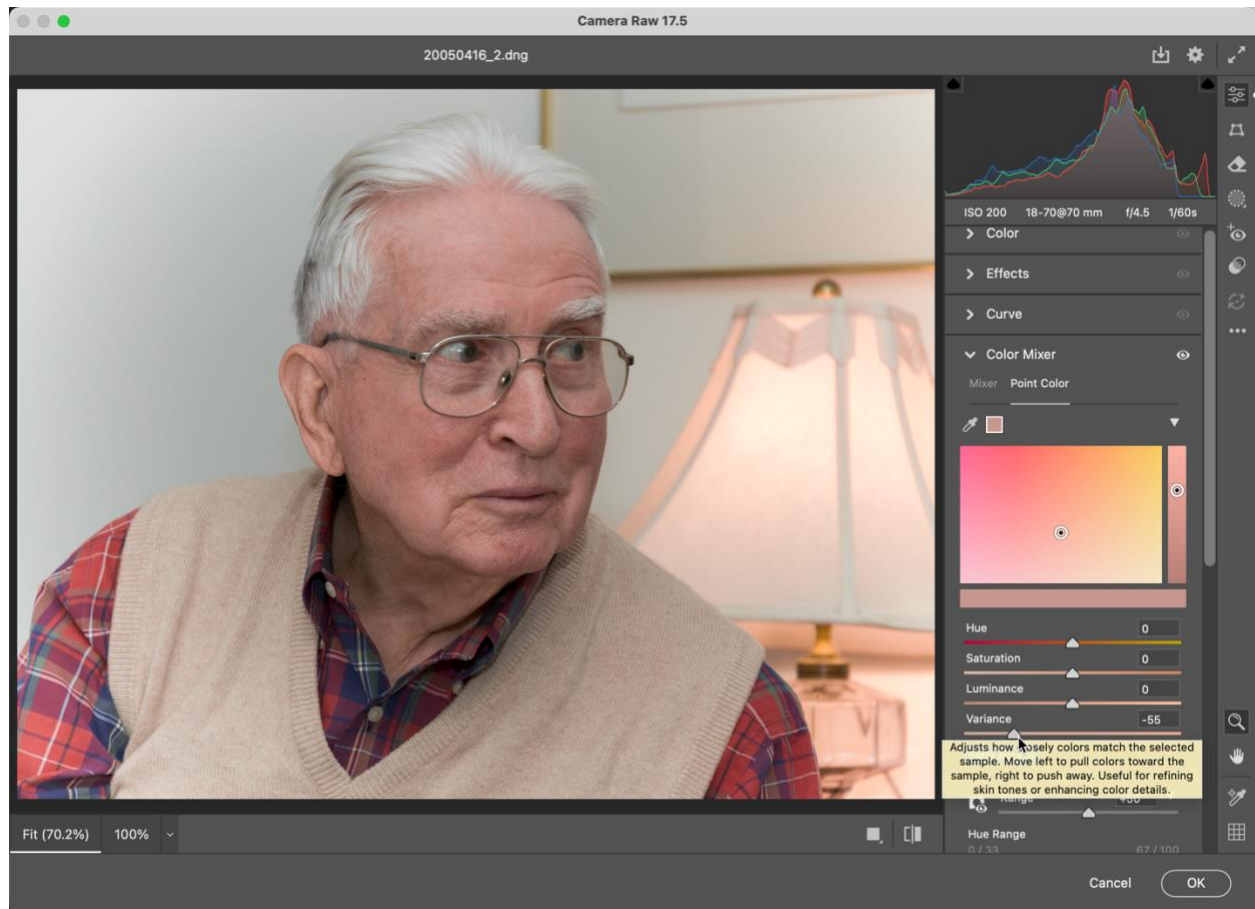
Then, go to the Filter > Camera Raw filter menu to apply ACR as a filter. This will open the ACR interface with your photo displayed.



In this example we'll explore another Early Access feature called Variance, found within the Color Mixer panel, under Point Color. Point Color and its controls are not new, but there is a new slider within Point Color called Variance. First you sample a color as you normally do

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for Point Color, then along with the other sliders, you can use Variance to shift sampled colors to be more similar (less variance) by sliding to the left, or to be less similar (have more variance) by sliding to the right. In this case I will sample one of the less saturated red tones in his skin and then move the Variance slider to the left to make other red tones more like the sampled color to reduce the more saturated reds and even out his skin tone.



I sampled a more neutral skin tone on his nose, then reduced Variance until his overall skin tone looked more even. Unfortunately when using Point Color globally like this I also affected the reds in his shirt. To avoid affecting colors outside of his skin I'll undo this adjustment and click on the Masking icon to apply a mask. To undo the Variance adjustment I just right-clicked on the color swatch that appears next to the eye dropper tool in the Point Color panel, and chose Delete swatch, which removed that adjustment.

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Within Masking I chose to create a mask of just his facial skin with the People mask. Then, within the masking tool adjustment panels you'll find the Point Color panel, and can apply the same adjustment, but now constrained to just the area within the mask.



With that adjustment complete, click Ok to close the filter and return to Photoshop. In Photoshop, use the File > Save, then File > Close commands to save your work, then return to LrC to see the new edited copy. The process would be the same if you started in Lightroom for desktop.

So, don't be afraid to leverage ACR in your workflow no matter which route you take to get your photos into ACR. There's a lot of power in that plug-in, and Adobe just keeps adding new features. Be sure to update the Camera Raw plug-in every time you update Lightroom Classic and Lightroom to keep them on the equivalent version.

In Closing

I hope you've found this session and these notes helpful. Thanks for being a part of Photoshop World! Please don't hesitate to reach out to me with any questions. You can find me at any of the following locations:

Twitter: @Lightroomers

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Instagram: @Sylvanworks

Web: Lightroomers.com or RobSylvan.com

I've also just updated my book, *Lightroom Classic for Dummies* if you want dig even deeper, which you can find anywhere books are sold.

