



Processing Mindset

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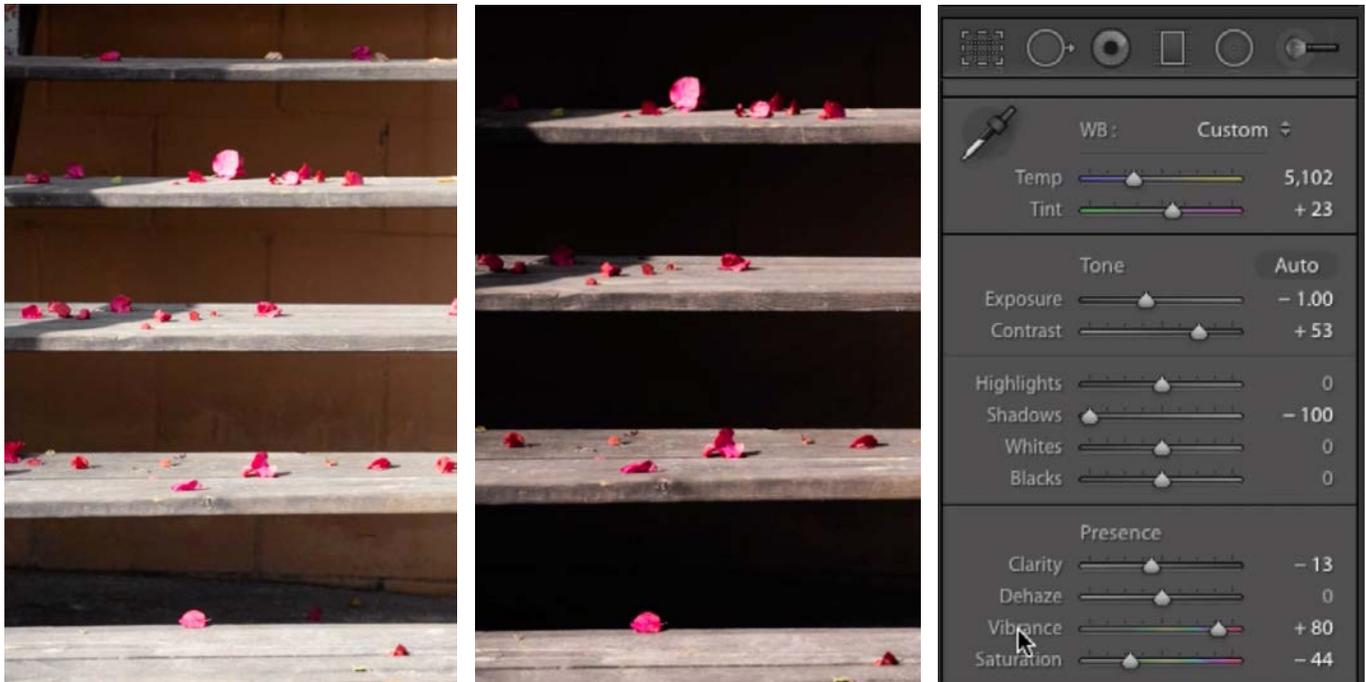
In this lesson, I'm going to talk about my general mindset when creating unique images and when putting together a series of images that feel like they belong together.

When I'm reviewing my images and I see what appears to be a normal capture, I feel that the image is begging for me to interpret it and give it my own personal touch. For me, that's not about reproducing what I saw. It's about reproducing what I envisioned or it's about transforming what may seem like a boring scene into something more special. Let's look at some examples.

Staircase Image

In the image of a set of steps with flower petals on them, what drew me to the scene was the areas in the light. This included the tops of the steps and the flower petals. The bricks in the background detracted from the scene (to me). With this image, my mindset was that if everything interesting was in the brightest part of the picture, I'll darken the image as much as I could get away with while still retaining detail in the highlights. As a result, all you can see in the photo are the steps and petals. Everything in the background was purposefully pushed to black. The final image is dramatic and that's because I wasn't afraid to push the adjustment sliders to their extremes. The Shadows slider was moved all the way to the left and the Exposure slider was lowered a bit to darken things even further. The Contrast was increased significantly and the Vibrance and Saturation sliders were adjusted to make the color pop out more.

Tip: Shadows/Highlights The first thing that I did to this image was drag the Shadows slider all the way to the left. This did a good job of darkening that background, but it wasn't quite enough to get the background completely black, which is the way I wanted it. If you ever push the Shadows or Highlights slider all the way to their extremes but find that it isn't enough, here is a trick to get that little extra darkening or lightening. In this case, the Shadows slider was all the

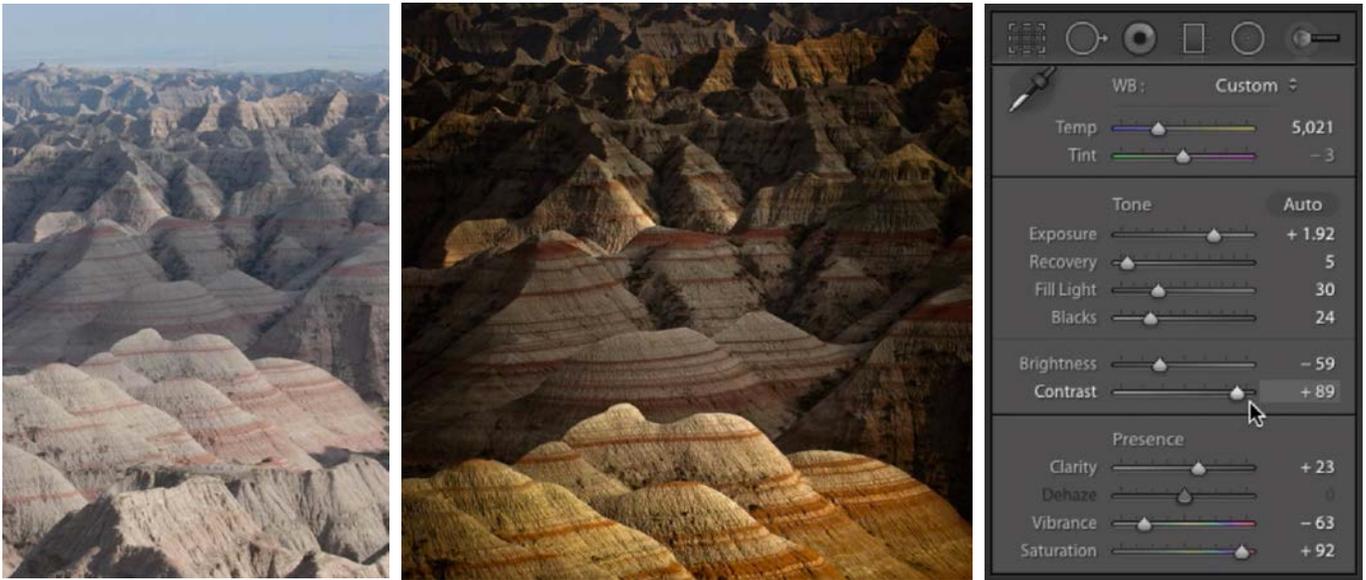


You can see the before and after versions of this image as well as a view of the adjustment sliders in Lightroom's Develop Module. Some sliders were pushed to their extremes.

way to the left but I needed the shadows to be darker. To achieve this, I moved the Exposure slider in the same direction (to the left) until the dark areas were exactly how I wanted them. Of course, lowering the Exposure slider darkened the entire image (not just the shadows), so I needed to re-lighten the brighter areas. I did this by increasing the Highlights slider to compensate for the darkening. The same could be done if I had pushed the Highlights slider to an extreme. I would simply use the Exposure slider to take the effect further and then use the Shadows slider to compensate for the change to the darker areas.

Badlands Image

In this image of the Badlands of South Dakota, the initial capture looked ok, but I wanted to interpret the image by putting my own personality into it. To create the dramatic look that I wanted, I had to push some of their sliders to their extremes.



Some dramatic adjustments were made to get the original image (left) to transform into the final version (middle). The adjustment sliders are shown at right. This is an older image that was adjusted using an older process version of Lightroom and that is why the sliders you see here are different from the ones in the current version.

The Contrast slider was pushed almost all the way up. The Recovery slider (equivalent to the Highlights slider in the current version of Lightroom) was pushed far to the left and the Exposure slider was moved up dramatically.

In this image, I also applied a split-toning effect by using the settings in the Split-Toning panel. These are settings that I will use whenever I want to make an image feel warm or cool. This could be achieved by adjusting the white balance, but if I used the white balance settings, it would change the look of the entire picture. If, on the other hand, I only want the bright areas or the dark areas to get that change, then I will use the settings in the Split-Toning panel. In this image, I only wanted to apply a warm cast to the dark areas, so I used the Shadows sliders to introduce a warm hue into the darker areas of the image.

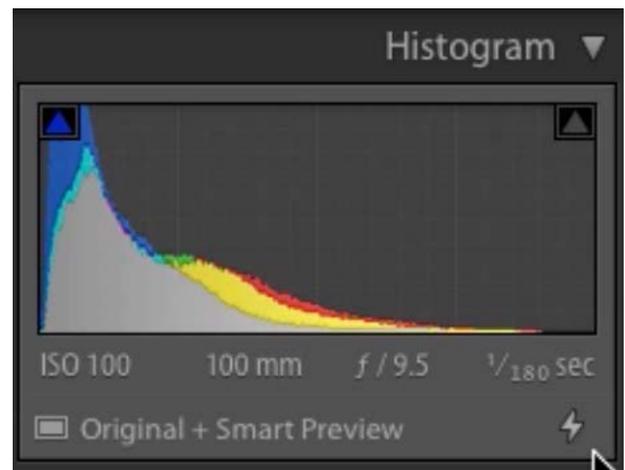


The Split Toning settings were used to introduce a warm hue into the shadow areas. The views at right show the image before and after the split toning.

In general, I'm not afraid to move the adjustment sliders to their extremes. In doing so, I can often create an image that is quite different from the original. One thing to be careful of, however, are elements in the image that should have a specific color, like skin tones. When it comes to skin tones, you can't push the colors too far without them starting to look unnatural. If I do push the colors in an image that contains skin tones, I will go back and selectively correct the faces by using either the Adjustment Brush or the HSL sliders.

Tip: Images processed with an older version of Lightroom If you ever open an image in Lightroom's Develop Module and find that the adjustment sliders are different, it's probably because the image was last processed in an older version of Lightroom, where the settings were different. You can tell if an image was edited with an older process version because a little lightning bolt icon will appear in the bottom right corner of the Histogram panel (in the Develop Module). You can click this icon to update the image to the current process version (so you get all the current sliders) but know that it may slightly change the visual appearance of the image.

If you would ever like to revert to an older process version of Lightroom for a particular image, you can do so by expanding the Calibration panel and using the "Process" menu located at the top of the panel. Here, you will have the option to choose between all of the older process versions.

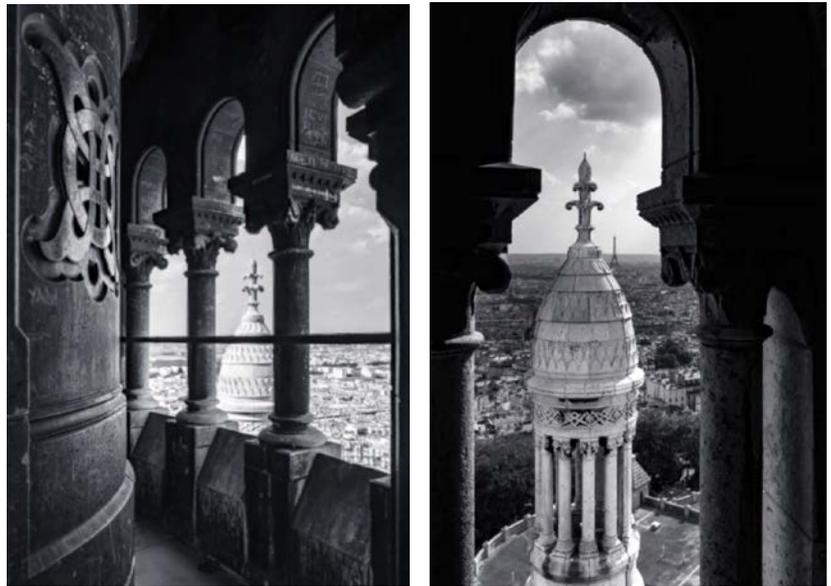


If the lightning bolt icon appears below the Histogram, it means that the image was originally processed using an older version of Lightroom. Click on the icon to update the image to the current process version.

Paris Images

There are times when I'll process an image and, when I'm done, I'll still find it to be a little boring. In cases like this, I'll consider converting the image to black and white. When you convert something to black and white, you're taking away an element of reality because you don't see the world in black and white with your own eyes. When I do this, I find that I can push things to more of an extreme than I can get away with in a normal photo.

In the case of this set of images I shot in Paris, I gave them all the same treatment so that they would look like a cohesive body of work. I converted all of them to black and white and then gave them the same tinting treatment using the split toning settings in Lightroom's Develop Module. I also used a counterbalanced adjustment to take the effect further by lowering the Contrast slider and increasing the Dehaze slider. Lowering the contrast made the image a little flat and then adding the dehaze setting made the image pop. I moved the Dehaze slider to the right until parts of the image became solid black. In doing this, it made the image look a lot more extreme.



These images were given a dramatic black and white treatment so that they look like they belong together.

Tip: Sync settings When creating a series of images that all have the same treatment, there is a way to sync the settings so that you don't need to apply them to each image individually. I'll look through the images and choose the "master" image. This is the one I'll use as my basis for what I want the rest of the images to look like. I want to be able to view this image at the same time as I am adjusting the other ones. Here's how you can do that. Click on the image you want to adjust so that you're viewing it in the Develop Module. Then, click on the little "R|A" icon below the image window. This will place the image on the right side of the screen, in the "active" window. Now, you can drag the "master image" you've selected into the window on the left, which is the "Reference" window. When you move the adjustment sliders, it will only affect the image on the right, but you can compare it to the image on the left. Then, you can use the left and right arrow keys on your keyboard to switch between images in the folder or collection. When you do this, only the active image will change. The Reference photo will stay the same.



The R|A view (Reference/Active) is being used to adjust the image on the right while comparing it to the reference image on the left.

Vintage trailer images

With this set of images, I created a series of photos that all look like they belong together by using the same subject matter and by photographing them all using the same technique. All of these images feature vintage trailers and they were captured using a technique called light painting. I also made all of these images on nights with a full moon so that I had a brightness in the sky that wouldn't otherwise be there.



These images look like they belong together because they all feature the same subject matter and were created using the same light painting technique.



HDR Vintage America Images

Here is another group of images that feel like they belong together because of the way they were shot AND processed. In this case, the images were all shot by bracketing to include the entire brightness range and then merged together into an HDR image.

The images feature old cars and buildings, and additional processing was done after I merged the individual frames into HDR images. I applied a tinted black and white effect, but masked the effect in certain areas so that the full color could show through in the areas where I wanted to draw the most attention.

I also worked a lot with the brightness of the images by using the dodging and burning technique. This allows me to brighten and darken areas selectively in order to draw the viewer's eye to those areas and make the images feel like they have more dimension.



These images were all shot using the HDR technique and given a selective tinting treatment.

In the image featuring the green truck, I brightened (dodged) the parts of the truck that are closer to the camera and darkened (burned) the parts of the truck that were further from the camera. This gave the image more dimension. If I wanted to make a certain feature jump out, I would lighten that feature while darkening its surroundings.



Dodging and burning techniques were used to give the truck in this image more dimension.

Africa Safari Images

Here is another series of images that look like they belong together because of both the subject matter and the treatment in post processing. I, again, used a tinted black and white look, using a brown hue to tint the images. I also added the same border/frame to each of the images. As a result, the images look like a unified body of work that would look appropriate when hung on a wall next to each other.



These images were given the same brown tint and the same styled border/frame.

There are several techniques you can use to unify a series of images to make them look like they belong together. We already discussed the idea of using a similar tint treatment. Images can also be unified by shooting the same subject matter or using a similar aspect ratio like a square. The options are really endless.