Digital …

A monthly column by Harry

This month is for more advanced photographers and focuses on Adobe Photoshop Lightroom. Send questions for future columns to **harry.iris@usa.net**.

What does Lightroom do?

Adobe Photoshop Lightroom (LR) simplifies a photographer's life. Some parts of LR overlap with other Photoshop programs and others are unique. The value of LR is that it is very focused on the needs of photographers. LR is new, compared with the other two Photoshop programs, which means that LR lets you do things in any order at any time and is inherently non-destructive. LR works seamlessly with RAW files and JPEGs and other formats; no switching in and out of Adobe Camera Raw (ACR). LR has its keyboard "SS', secret shortcuts, but it is much less dependent on them than CS, making the learning curve much shorter and easier.

By now, you probably think I'm a paid LR consultant (I wish!). Let's get down to specifics. LR has five task areas: Library, Develop, Slideshow, Print, and Web.

The Library is where LR collects and stores information about your images. The images themselves may be on a local hard drive, or an external storage device. Unlike Bridge, once you have imported an image to LR you can locate it and work with it (to some extent) even if it is on an optical disc in a remote location. LR does have a limitation in that the database slows down when it has more than 50,000 images, forcing the user to create multiple catalogues to handle large numbers of images. Searching for images within a catalogue is a dream but searching across catalogues is horrible.

The Library is very well-designed for organizing and categorizing images. It works with any filing system you may already have. I find that a little time spent entering keywords and captions and assigning stars pays great dividends later in quickly finding images. LR makes it quick and easy to categorize groups of images, speeding up the process (a key issue for professionals and amateurs alike). Virtual copies and Collections are huge time-savers.

"Develop" adjusts colour, exposure, sharpness and so on. ACR (Adobe Camera Raw) and CS4 will produce the same results, but LR is faster and easier. In "Develop", LR is non-destructive; you *cannot* change the original data. No worries about "non-destructive workflow"; it's a non-issue.

Want to make a Curves correction? Just scroll down the right-hand panel until the "tone curve" appears and start dragging it around. No creating layers, opening panels, filling in dialog boxes. Just get right down to working with the image immediately. LR version 2 allows localized corrections. Just paint them in; no layer masks, no smart objects.

LR does not do everything (that's part of its strength), so it integrates with the other Photoshop programs. For example, you can select a group of images in LR's Library,

right-click and choose to export to HDR in Photoshop CS4, or to panoramas and so on. It is pretty seamless.

LR is available on 30-day free trial from Adobe.com. If you work with many images and/or want to simplify and speed up image processing, give LR a try.