Brush FIRE

by GENE McCULLAGH

"WITH THE BRUSH WE MERELY TINT, WHILE THE IMAGINATION ALONE PRODUCES COLOUR."

—*Théodore Géricault*

Lightroom 3 Adjustment Brush panel

Lightroom 4 Adjustment Brush panel

Lightroom 4 has quite a list of new features, including the Map and Book modules. In addition to new features, many areas of Lightroom have received significant enhancements. One of the most significant changes is the new process version—PV2012. The new process version is almost a paradigm shift in how Lightroom brings your images to life. The new sliders make more logical sense and are more consistent in how they react with the image and each other. Out of the box, this process version makes your images sing.

One of the quiet treasures in Lightroom 4, however, is what has happened to the Adjustment Brush. Lightroom 2 took a great leap forward when it introduced localized adjustments, and Lightroom 3 brought even further enhancements to the Adjustment Brush. But when you open the Adjustment Brush in Lightroom 4, it's a whole new ballgame. Now this is an Adjustment Brush!

Nearly every slider available in the Basic panel is now available on your Adjustment Brush, so you'll have to be careful to keep track of when you have the Adjustment Brush active or when you're just in the Basic panel. This new level of control may seem like a small thing but think about it: As Lightroom has progressed, you've probably found yourself doing more and more in Lightroom and exiting it for those final touches less and less. Well, that external editor will get a few more cobwebs because of these new brush features. So let's take a look at a few of the things you can do with the Adjustment Brush in Lightroom 4.

UN-MIXING LIGHTS

First up is Temp and Tint. It's white balance on a brush! Now when you have mixed lighting situations or bright sun versus deep shade issues, you don't have to round trip to Photoshop (or another external image editor) to fix the problem. Consider the situation where some people are in sunlight and some in shade. A white shirt in the shade will be bluer (or cooler) than a white shirt in direct sunlight. No problem. Paint in a bit of warmth.

In this street scene on the left, the warm lighting in the background distracts from the foreground. I want to focus the viewer on the foreground and draw them into the warm glow of the streetlight. In Lightroom 3, I would need to bring this into Photoshop or another external editor. Now I merely pull out my Adjustment Brush (click on the brush in the Toolbox or press K), adjust the temperature to the left or cooler end of the slider, and then paint the temperature change on the warm lighting in the background. Now the street scene on the right is more like how I envisioned it.

LAYOUT DESIGN BY EDUARDO LOWE + ALL IMAGES BY GENE McCULLAGH

The cooler temperature recedes into the background and the warmer foreground pulls the viewer in. Cool! (Pun intended!) As with any of the Adjustment Brush sliders, you can fine-tune the temperature and tint after you've applied the brush.

This is also very useful in portrait work. The before shot on the left was shot in open shade. I like the overall coolness in the image but the skin tone is too cool and could benefit from a little warming up. Using the new Temp and Tint capabilities of the Adjustment Brush, I can do this without leaving Lightroom. As in the street scene, I simply paint over the areas I want to change (in this case the face and neck) and apply a small adjustment to the Temp slider to warm up the skin tone. The after shot on the right shows a warmer skin tone without impacting the overall coolness of the rest of the image. I really like this new feature and I think you'll find it will save you a lot of time and drive space.

BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE! OR SHOULD I SAY, "THERE'S MOIRÉ"?

You may not be familiar with moiré (pronounced mwah-ray, not more-eh) by name but you've probably seen it in some of your images. It's that strange colored pattern that seems to appear in digital images of fabrics. It can also pop up along fence lines and buildings with parallel architectural features. Moiré looks almost like chromatic aberration but it has a different origin. Chromatic aberration is caused by the different angles of refraction in your lens (usually wide angle) that causes different frequencies of light to hit your sensor in different places. This results in odd color fringing in some areas of the image. (By the way, Lightroom 4 does a superb job correcting this problem with a simple checkbox.) But moiré is caused when lines in the image don't fall evenly along RGB photo sensors. The image sensor will compensate for those parts of the line that fall between pixels. The more of these repeating pattern elements you have, the more compensation the camera makes. The extrapolated pixels form a pattern on the image. Sometimes this is an obvious problem; sometimes it's far subtler (but just as annoying). Take a look at this before and after shot.

There are moiré pattern issues throughout the shot on the left. The circled areas are three examples. Before Lightroom 4, correcting this was a chore. Now, however, just grab the Adjustment Brush and move the Moiré slider to the right. Paint over the problem areas and the moiré pattern magically disappears! Compare the circled areas in the image on the right. The small cyan, blue, and green shifts are easily corrected now. This is great for all photographers who find this annoying pattern cropping up. But if you spend a lot of your time photographing fashion or textiles, this is a fantastic boost for your workflow.

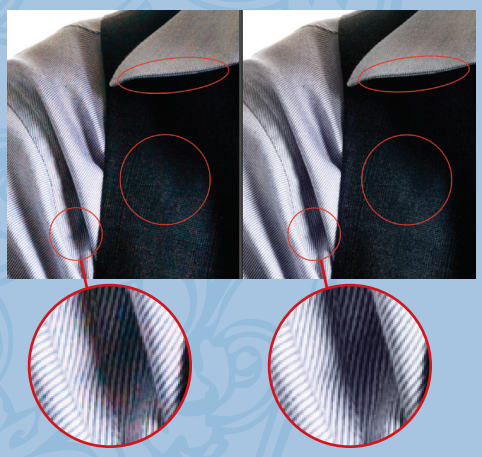
KEYBOARD SHORTCUTS

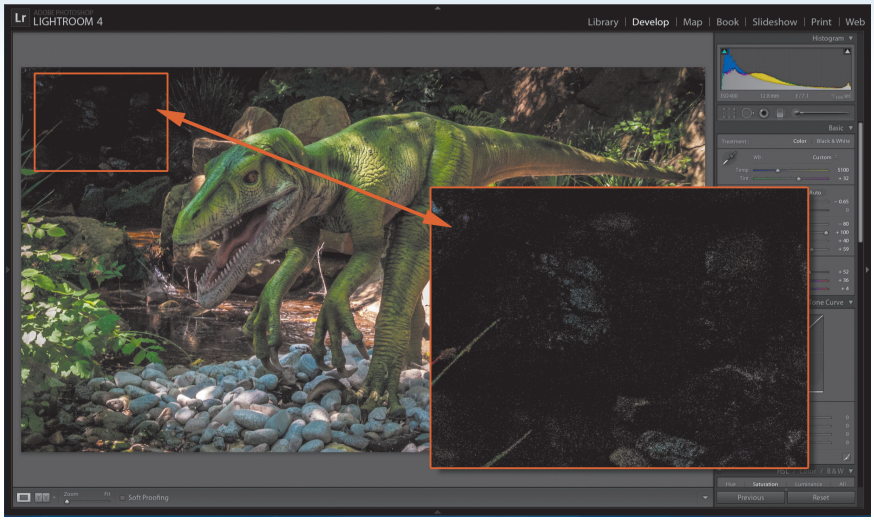
All of the familiar controls and shortcuts for the Adjustment Brush are still available in Lightroom 4. You can press O (that's the letter O) to show or hide the overlay mask so you can see where you're applying your brushstrokes. Shift-O will cycle the color overlay between red, green, white, and gray.

Flow can be set from the keyboard, which allows you to adjust it on the fly while keeping your brush on the image. Press 1 for 10, 2 for 20, and so on. Zero gives you 100. If you press two number keys rapidly in succession, you'll get that setting; for example, 1 then 5 gives you 15. But don't wait long between the keystrokes or 1 and 5 will give you 50 (1 for 10, then 5 for 50). If you want a value below 10, press 0 first. So if you want 5, press 0 then 5.

The Auto Mask function can be toggled on and off by pressing A. When working with either brush A or B, press the Forward Slash key (/) to switch between the two. Holding down the Option (PC: Alt) key will present the Erase brush. Let go and you're back to the previous brush you were using.

Use the Left and Right Bracket keys ([and]) to decrease and increase the brush Size, respectively. Add the Shift key to adjust the Feather on the brush (Shift-[for less feathering and Shift-] for more). Learn to use keyboard shortcuts and you'll find your workflow will become more flexible and fluid.





HIDING IN THE SHADOWS

Since PV2010, the noise-handling capabilities in Lightroom have been excellent. As good as the noise reduction was, it remained a global adjustment. Too often we find noise hiding in the shadows. To clear that noise up we either had to apply noise reduction to the entire image and sacrifice some sharpness or take the image out to Photoshop and correct the problem areas, leaving the rest of the image how we wanted it. Neither was an optimal solution.

Lightroom 4 fixes this by adding noise reduction to the Adjustment Brush! Now we can selectively reduce noise in the shadows (or wherever it may appear) and leave the crisp parts of the image crisp. Let's look at how this is done.

After adjusting this image of a dinosaur (yes, it's a real dinosaur—well, a real replica of a dinosaur), I was able to bring out some detail in the shadows. But when you look closer (see the enlarged callout) you can see a lot of noise hiding there. Previously, this would have been a problem to correct. With Lightroom 4, I just reach for my Adjustment Brush and paint in some noise reduction.

The overlay is turned on so you can easily see that I can apply this adjustment only to the shadow areas where the noise is showing up. There are different ways to approach this adjustment. You could apply it with a 100% Flow and Density (as I did here) and then adjust the Noise reduction slider to taste, or you could set the Noise reduction slider where you think it should be and slowly build up the noise reduction using a lower Flow and Density setting. This lets you paint more or less noise correction as needed. Of course, you can still adjust the Noise slider after the fact. These different approaches apply to all of the Adjustment Brush adjustments, and you'll find that you'll settle into different approaches for different adjustments.

Comparing the before and after results in the problem shadow area of this image, we see the excellent noise-reduction powers of Lightroom at work.

Now when we look at the finished image, we've brushed away the noise in the troublesome shadow areas but left the rest of the image sharp.

CONTENT AWARE

All of the new enhancements brought by the new process version (PV2012) apply to the sliders on the Adjustment Brush, as well. One of those enhancements is that Clarity has been reworked. Pushing Clarity to its extremes no longer results in those ugly artifacts and halos. So go ahead and brush in Clarity where you need it.

If you've explored the new Highlights and Shadows features, you already know that these are somewhat "content aware" in their application. Unlike the Fill Light adjustment in the previous process version (PV2010), Highlights restricts itself to the highlights in the image with little or no impact on the shadows. Putting that content aware highlighting on your Adjustment Brush, you have more flexibility in how you apply that adjustment. It's almost like blend modes in Photoshop. Shadows work the same way and restrict the adjustment to the shadow areas with little impact on highlights. Of course, as you push these adjustments to their extremes they'll begin to affect other pixels, but that's the beauty of having these on an Adjustment Brush. You can selectively apply them where you like.

In this before and after example, I've brushed in a decrease in Highlights in order to regain the image outside the window. For this illustration, the entire area shown in the after shot has had the brushstroke applied. Notice that although the Highlights slider is far to the left, there's little impact on the darker portions of the image (look at the wood on the left of the windowsill, the flower pot, or the leather chair). Lightroom has targeted the highlights only. So even if I'm not careful, I can get away with a less-than-accurate brushstroke.

I'm really excited about all of the new features in Lightroom 4. There's so much here that it will take some time to explore and implement everything. The changes to the Adjustment Brush, though, are the real hidden gems in this release. And don't forget that the Graduated Filter tool shares the same set of sliders. All of these new features are just as easily applied across wide areas of an image with the Graduated Filter tool.

Dive into Lightroom 4 and ignite your own artistic brush fire! Remember, it's all nondestructive, so have a blast and see what you can do. ■