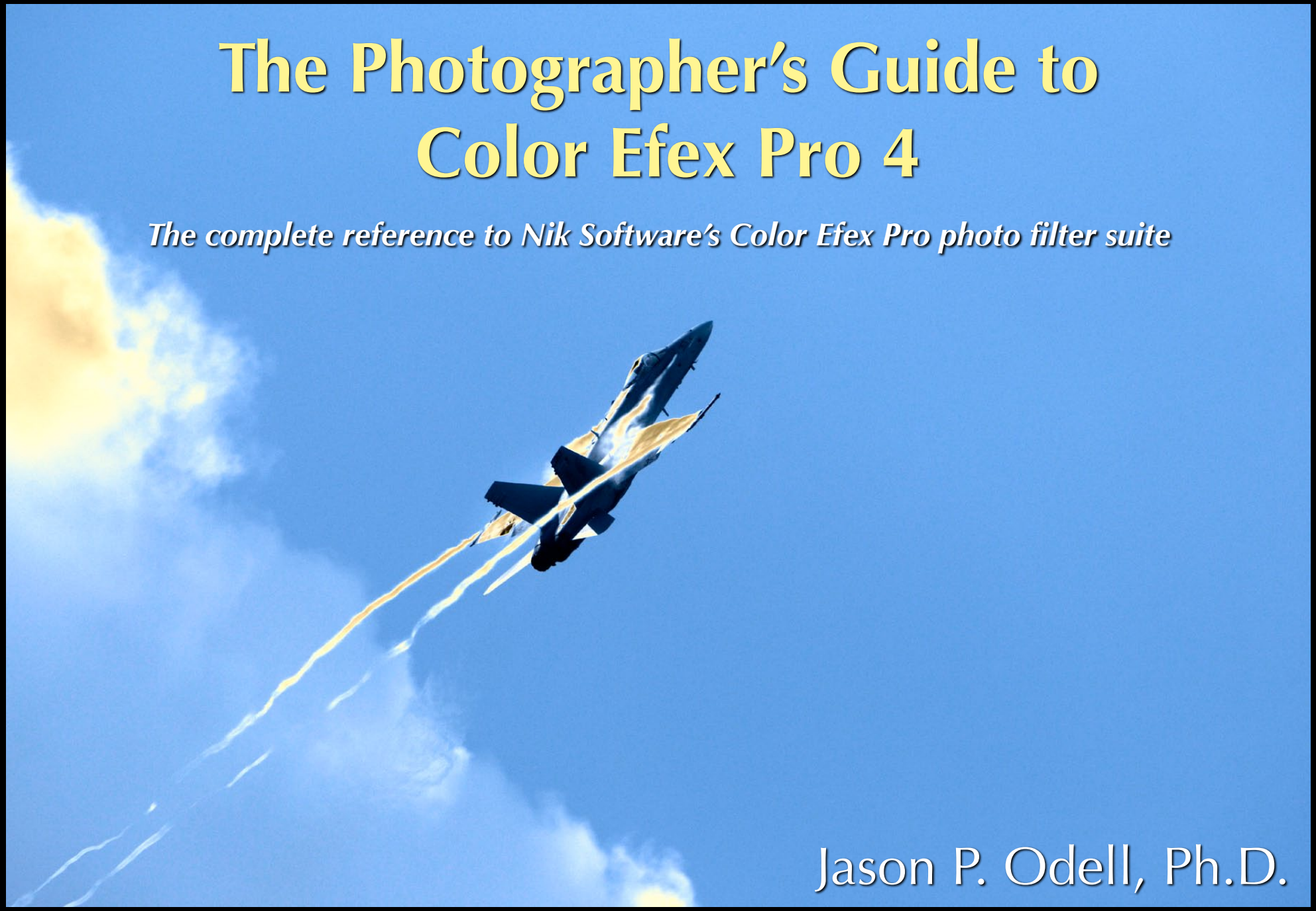
Luminescence of Nature Press

The Photographer's Guide to Color Efex Pro 4

The complete reference to Nik Software's Color Efex Pro photo filter suite



Jason P. Odell, Ph.D.

www.luminescentphoto.com

To all the photographers who have helped me explore my creativity

The Photographer's Guide to Color Efex Pro 4

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About this Book

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Beyond those two reasons, the electronic book format has some significant advantages over its printed counterparts. First of all, this book contains bookmarks in the table of contents (TOC). Clicking a TOC entry will take you directly to that page. Additionally, I've created bookmarks from the Index pages; clicking on a page number in the Index will take you to that entry in the book.

I've incorporated "live" hyperlinks in this book, which are visible in **bold blue text**. Clicking these links will take you either to a page in this book, or to a website on the Internet. This added level of interaction is something I hope makes this book easy to use. The Table of Contents and Index are also hyperlinked; click a page number to be taken directly to that page.

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If you are having problems with installing or operating the Color Efex Pro 4 application, please contact **Nik Software technical support**.

Introduction

Rock formations, Garden of the Gods, CO.

Nik Software's Color Efex Pro 4 is a collection of over 50 effects filters that can be used to enhance nearly any digital image. The effects range from basic color and contrast adjustments to extreme stylized effects, like faded film. Frankly, the sheer number of filters makes writing about Color Efex Pro a daunting task, as there are numerous variants within each filter. The number of effects permutations is not something I wish to calculate; let's just say you won't run out of options using this plug-in.

Why Use Filters?

In my experience as a digital photographer, I've found two main reasons to consider filter effects as an alternative to traditional processing tools. First, filters can serve to make otherwise obtuse adjustments (luminosity contrast) straightforward and easy to use, especially if you're not a Photoshop guru.

Second, and more importantly, filters often deliver functionality and looks that would be impossible (or nearly so) to easily replicate with traditional editing tools. Filters make it possible to create images that look better, faster and with less confusion than trying to work with the on-board tools of most editing packages.

Color Efex Pro 4 offers an extensive suite of filters that produce an incredible array of photographic effects. Some of the filters are fundamental contrast & color tools that can replace traditional levels and curves adjustments in your image editor. Other filters replicate traditional photographic techniques, like soft focus and diffusion. You can also use Color Efex Pro 4 to add film-like qualities to your images, like grain or black & white conversion. Unlike single effects filters, which are traditionally applied as a final step, you can combine filters in Color Efex Pro 4 to build an entire image editing workflow. In fact, some of the adjustment tools are so good that you might not want to work on your images with your traditional editor!

Objective of This Book

My goal for this book is to do my best to explain the use of Color Efex Pro 4 (CEP4) is as much context as possible. In that regard, I will focus on the practical use of filters and filter combinations that work well for me. As with any set of filter effects of this magnitude, you'll probably find filters that you like to use more than others. I will do my best to give an overview of each filter and describe what it does in a practical context.

When you combine the multitude of variations within each filter effect with the ability to stack multiple filters, it's no wonder that Color Efex Pro 4 is one of the most powerful creative tools available to digital photographers. What I hope to accomplish is to not only show you what each filter can do, but also put you at ease with working with Color Efex Pro 4 as part of a complete digital workflow.

Getting Started

Gas can, Park County, CO.

First Steps

Host Environments

Color Efex Pro 4 works as a plug-in to Photoshop, Elements, Aperture, and Photoshop Lightroom. Regardless of what environment you choose to use, the interface and tools are exactly the same across hosts. The real difference between host environments is that with Photoshop and Elements, you can apply filter effects in layers and make composite images via layers. With the Lightroom (LR) and Aperture versions of Color Efex Pro, the final image is saved as a flattened TIFF or JPEG image, and there are no brush tools.

Photoshop CS users can also choose to apply Color Efex Pro as a Smart Filter on Smart Object layers ***(page 42)***. Doing so enables Photoshop users to save their filter effects in a non-destructive environment.

Launching the Plug-In

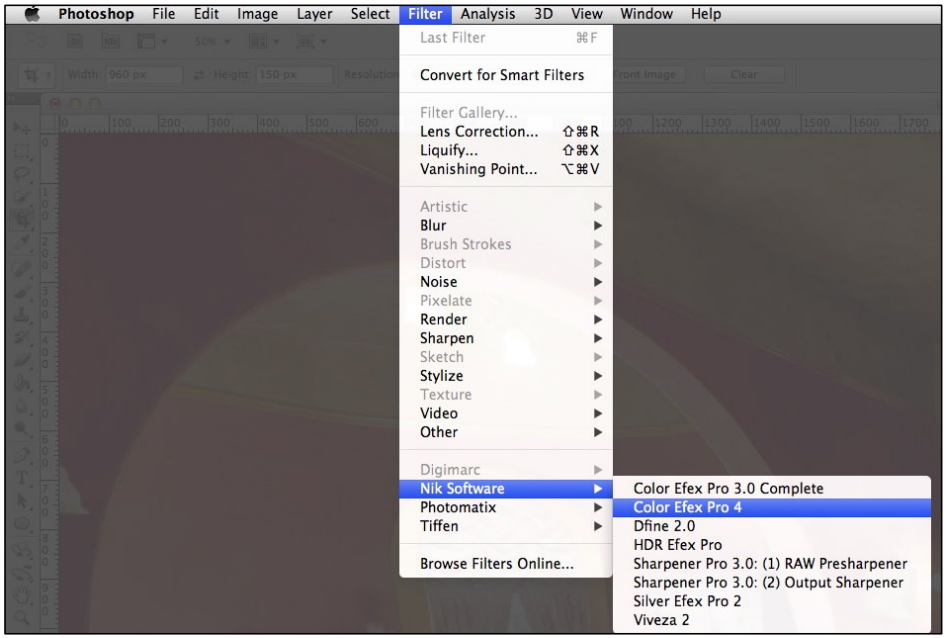
Photoshop Creative Suite

To launch Color Efex Pro from Adobe Photoshop, first open an image file. Make sure the image layer is selected (highlighted) in the Layers palette. Next, choose ***Filter--> Nik Software--> Color Efex Pro 4***.

Alternatively, you can launch Color Efex Pro using the Nik Selective Tool. Make sure the Nik Selective Tool Palette is open by choosing ***File--> Automate--> Nik Selective Tool***. Then, either click "Color Efex Pro 4" or one of the Filter/Recipe favorites from the list to launch the plug-in.

Adobe Photoshop Elements

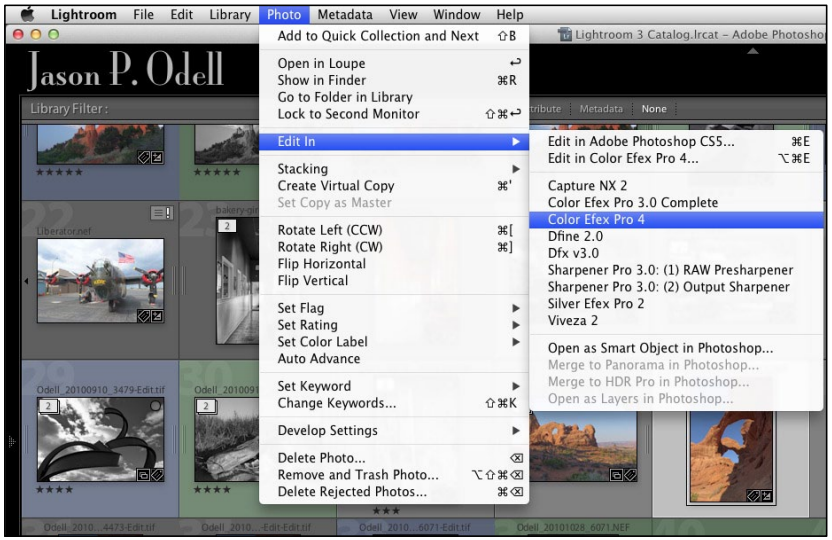
The process for launching Color Efex Pro from Adobe Photoshop Elements is essentially the same as for Photoshop. With an image open in the editor, choose ***File--> Nik Software--> Color Efex Pro 4.*** Alternatively, you can launch the Nik Selective Tool by choosing ***File--> Automation Tools--> Nik Selective Tool*** and then selecting Color Efex Pro 4 or one of the individual favorite filters or recipes from the list.



To launch Color Efex Pro from Photoshop, choose Filter--> Nik Software--> Color Efex Pro 4.

Photoshop Lightroom

From within your Lightroom Catalog, select the image you wish to edit in Color Efex Pro 4. Next, choose ***Photo--> Edit In--> Color Efex Pro 4.*** You'll get a dialog box with file processing options. Depending on the image file format, you can choose to edit a copy of the file, with or without Lightroom adjustments applied, or the original file. If you are using a RAW image, a converted copy (TIFF or JPEG) will be sent to the editor. You can specify the file type in the Lightroom's External Editing preferences dialog. When you send



To launch Color Efex Pro from Adobe Photoshop Lightroom, choose Photo--> Edit In--> Color Efex Pro 4.

To launch Color Efex Pro from Apple Aperture, choose Photos--> Edit with Plug-in--> Color Efex Pro 4.

your image to Color Efex Pro, you'll get the option to re-import it to your Lightroom Catalog and stack it with the original image file. When you are done editing the image, click Save to return to the Lightroom Catalog.

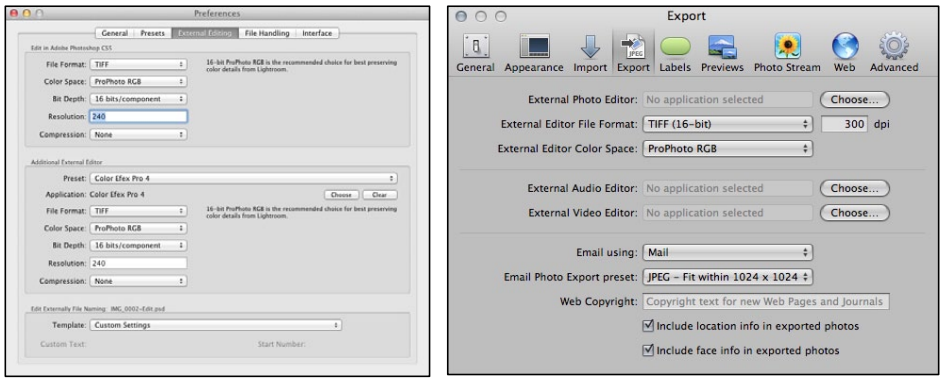
If you wish to use a combination of Lightroom and Photoshop, you can send the image from Lightroom to Photoshop, and then use Photoshop to launch the plug-in. This method is useful if you wish to use RAW Smart Objects in Photoshop with Color Efex Pro.

Apple Aperture

Aperture will send a RGB (TIFF/JPEG) image to Color Efex Pro 4 as an external editing application. Select an image from your Aperture Library and choose ***Photos--> Edit with Plug-in--> Color Efex Pro 4.*** The image will be converted to TIFF or JPEG (you can specify the output settings in the Export Preferences) and the editor will launch. When you've completed editing the image, click Save to return to the Aperture Library.

File Export Preferences (Aperture & Lightroom)

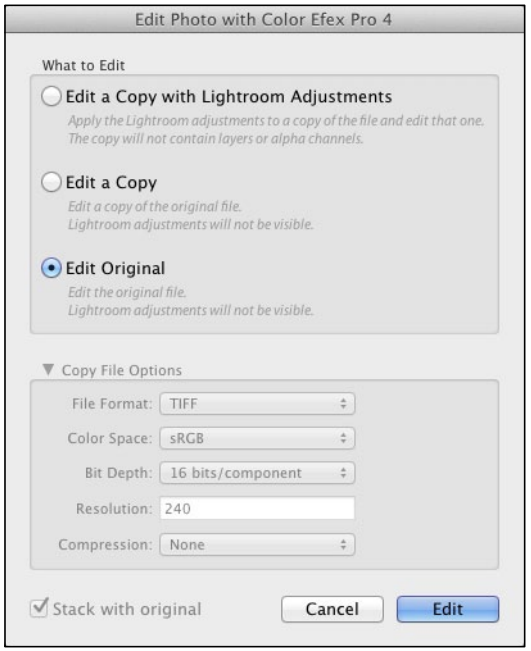
Color Efex Pro does not work on RAW images natively. If you are starting from a RAW image with either Aperture or Lightroom, the application will generate a rasterized (RGB) image from your original RAW file and send it to Color Efex Pro. You can use the Preferences for Aperture and Lightroom to choose the file type, color profile, and resolution of exported images. I recommend using TIFF format, 16-bit color, and Pro Photo RGB color space for the best quality.



Use the External Editor preferences in Lightroom (left) or the Export preferences in Aperture (right) to set the file type and quality of images sent to Color Efex Pro.

Sending Images to Adobe Photoshop

Lightroom and Aperture users can send their images to Photoshop instead of opening them directly in Color Efex Pro. If you use Lightroom and wish to send the photos to Photoshop for editing, you have the choice of sending either a TIFF copy or a RAW Smart Object. RAW Smart Objects contain the original RAW file, and can be edited in Photoshop with Adobe Camera Raw. Aperture users can also send images to Photoshop for editing in Color Efex Pro, but the RAW Smart Object option is not supported.



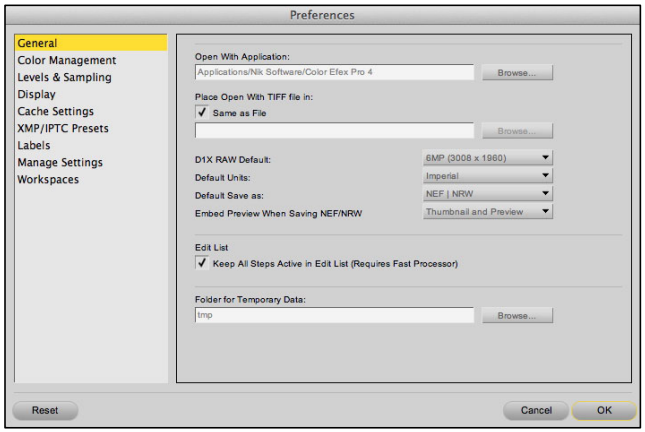
If you use Adobe Photoshop Lightroom, you'll be prompted to choose which version of the image you'd like to edit. For RAW files, a TIFF or JPEG copy is always created first, unless you send the image to Photoshop.

Advanced: Using Color Efex Pro as a Stand-alone Application

The Lightroom version of Color Efex Pro 4 can be used as a stand-alone image editor, with certain caveats. When you install the Lightroom version of Color Efex Pro, the executable application file is placed in a Nik Software folder in your Applications or Program Files directory. You can then load images into the application by using a helper application.

Helper applications are programs that can send files to an external editing application. Examples of helper applications include Nikon's Capture NX2 (Open with Function), Photo Mechanic, and other browsers or RAW converters that support external editors. In order for Color Efex Pro to be able to edit your image file, it must be in TIFF or JPEG format; RAW images are not natively supported.

Stand-alone operation is not officially supported by Nik Software. If you plan on using this mode, please try it out on the trial software before you commit to purchasing the program.

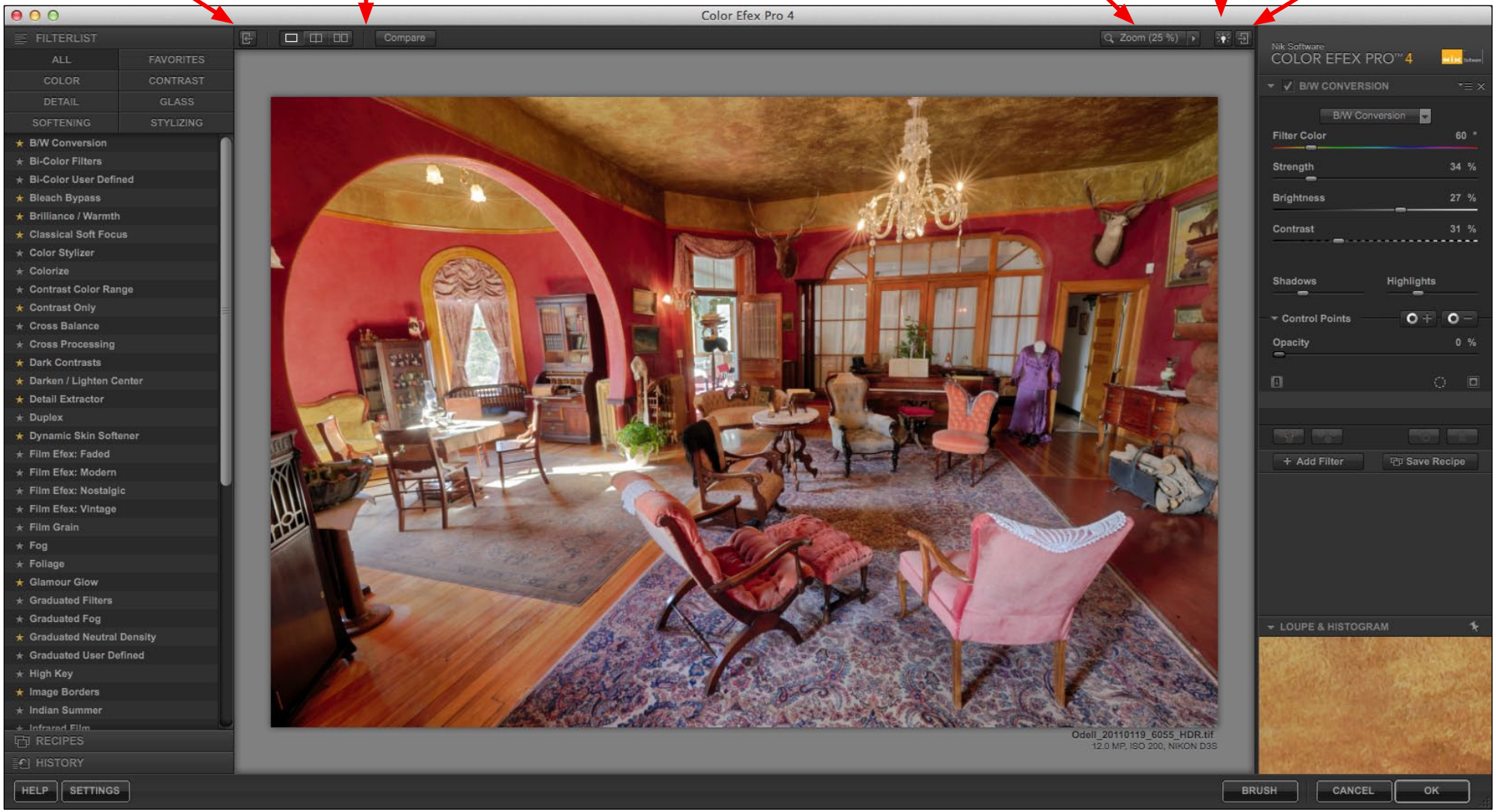


Nikon Capture NX2 users can set Color Efex Pro 4 for Lightroom as their "Open With" application and use it as a stand-alone TIFF editor.

Interface & Controls

In this section, we'll examine the details of the Color Efex Pro interface and controls. The Color Efex Pro interface can be broken down into three main areas: A central Preview window displays your image, and Left and Right Panels contain controls and filter presets. Each panel serves a different function, and some serve multiple functions. There are also controls along the top and bottom of the interface. Let's start by taking a look at the overall interface window.

Hide Panel Button *Compare Tools* *Zoom Button* *Background Color Button* *Hide Panel Button*



Left Panel (showing Filter List)

Preview Window

Right Panel

Preview Window

At the center of the interface is the Preview Window, where your image is displayed. You can use the Compare Tools to preview your image in a variety of before/after states, and the Zoom Tools change the image magnification. You can use the background color editor to toggle between three different background options: black, gray, or white.

Zoom Tool

When you click the Zoom toggle button, you'll access a drop-down menu that allows you to change the image magnification in the Preview Window. The default zoom state is "fit to window." Choose from any of the pre-defined zoom views for a more accurate rendering of your image. Once you've chosen a magnification state, the Zoom tool serves to toggle between it and the fit to window view.

Navigator Window

When you magnify the image to the point where it does not fit into the Preview Window, you'll see a small Navigator window appear inside the Preview Window. In it, you'll see a thumbnail of your entire image. Drag the square to reposition the image in the Preview Window.

You can move the Navigator Window to different corners of the Preview Window by clicking and dragging it.

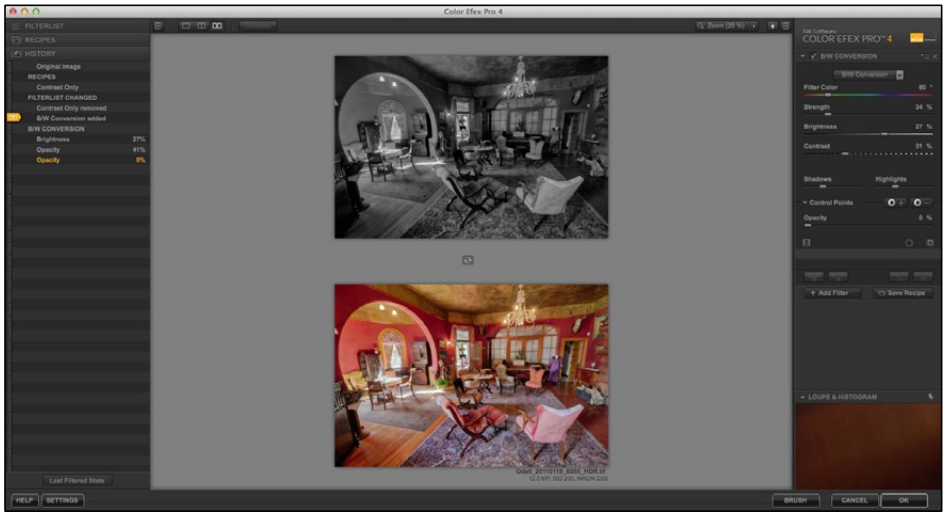
Background Color

Use the Background Color button to change the color of the Preview Window to gray, black or white. I normally choose the neutral gray background, but you can use black or white backgrounds for reference points or for presentations.

Compare Tools

There are three options for comparing images before and after editing them. The Compare button toggles the single image view to show before/after states, especially when using the History Panel ***(page 21)***. The Split-Image Preview shows before/after states in a split view in the Preview Window. You can choose between a vertical or horizontal split view by clicking the arrow on the end of the split line. The Side by-Side Preview shows two images next to each other. You can toggle between top/bottom and left-right views by clicking the arrow at the center of the window. In Side by-Side view, you can also reposition the split line by clicking and dragging it with your mouse.

The Navigator window (inset at top right) appears in the Preview Window any time the screen view does not fit in it entirely, as is the case when you are zoomed in to high magnifications.



You can hide the side panels to show only the Preview Window. Use the Tab key to hide both side panels simultaneously.

Use the side by-side (top) or split-image views (bottom) with the History Browser to compare before/after states of your image.

Hiding the Side Panels

You can show and hide the Left and Right Panels using the show/hide buttons on either side of the interface window. Use this option to make the Preview Window larger, or to view images in a presentation mode before saving them. Press the Tab key on your keyboard to hide both panels simultaneously.

Left Panel

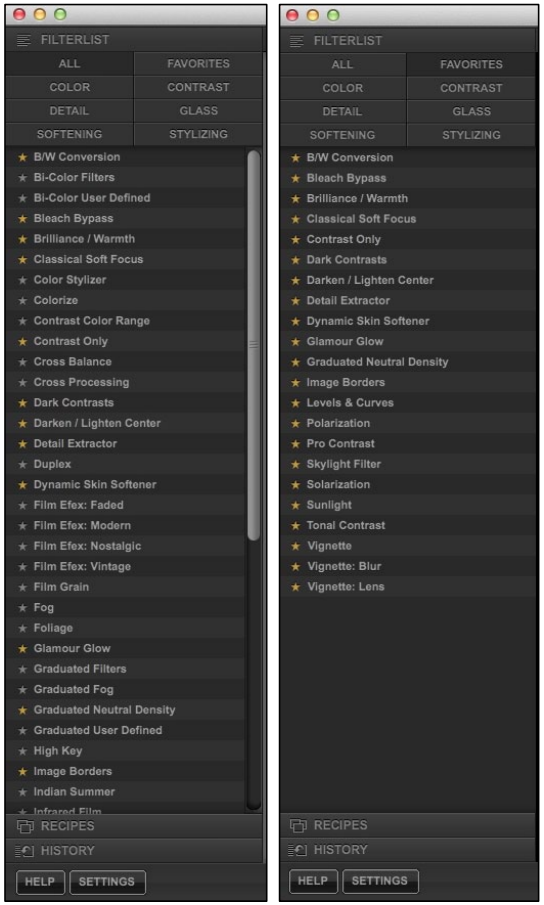
The Left Panel can be configured to show three different sets of tools: The Filter List, Recipes Panel, and History Browser. To switch between panels, use the tabs on the bottom of the Left Panel.

Filter List

The Filter List is shown by default in the Left Panel, and contains every filter option. Use the Filter List to add effects to your images. The list of effects can be filtered to show specific filter groupings using the tabs at the top of the panel.

Marking Filters as Favorites

Next to each filter in the list is a gray star icon. By clicking this icon, you mark a filter as a Favorite, and the star turns orange. The "Favorites" tab contains filters that you've marked with an orange star. You can unmark favorites at any time by clicking the orange star to turn it gray.



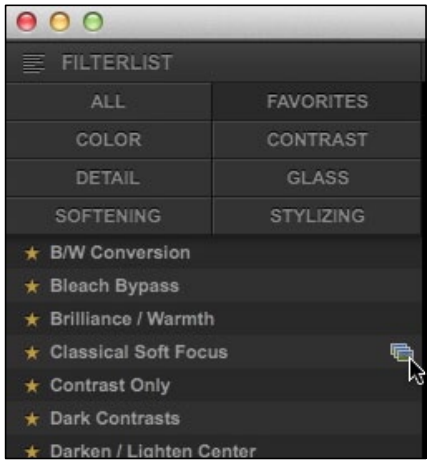
The Filter List is used to add effects to your images. When you use the Favorites tab (right), only filters marked with an orange star are shown.

Filter Presets

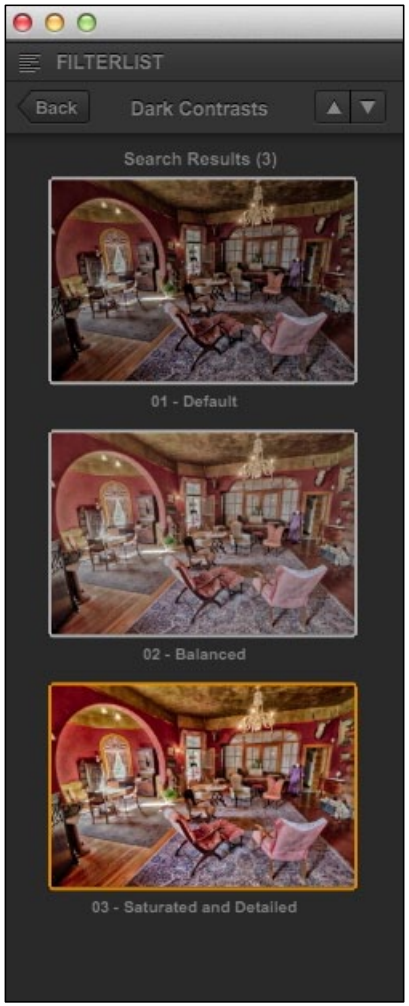
If you hover the mouse over a filter in the list, you will see a small thumbnail icon appear. Click this icon to expand the presets for this filter. Presets are saved settings that were created by the Nik Software team. Each preset is represented by a small thumbnail image that previews its effect.

Recipes Panel

The Recipes panel shows saved filter combinations and settings which you can apply directly to your



Click the Preset icon next to any filter name to open the presets menu (right). Each preset is displayed as a thumbnail of your image.

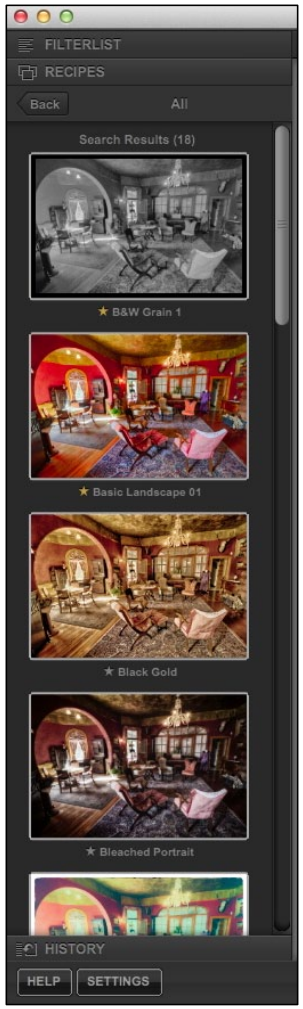


images. Color Efex Pro includes a set of pre-defined recipes, and you can also create and share your own custom recipes, as we'll see a bit later.

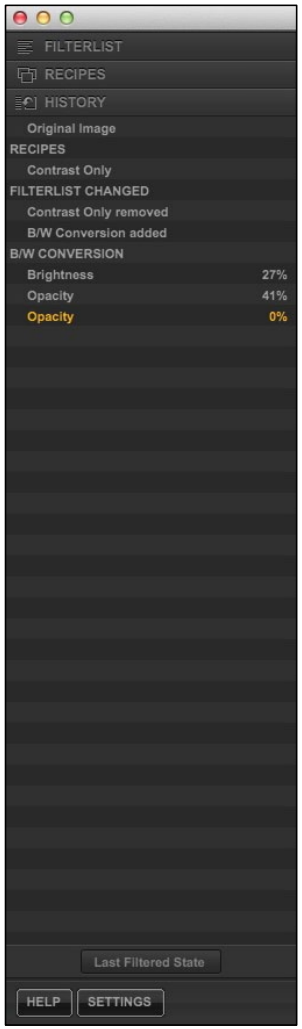
History Panel

The History Panel shows a listing of each change made to the image. You can use the History Panel as an "undo" tool to go back to a previous state, or as a comparison tool to show before/after states in the Preview window. Click any item in the History Panel to return to that image state. If you make any adjustments to the image after going to an earlier history step, all of the steps after the selected state will be lost.

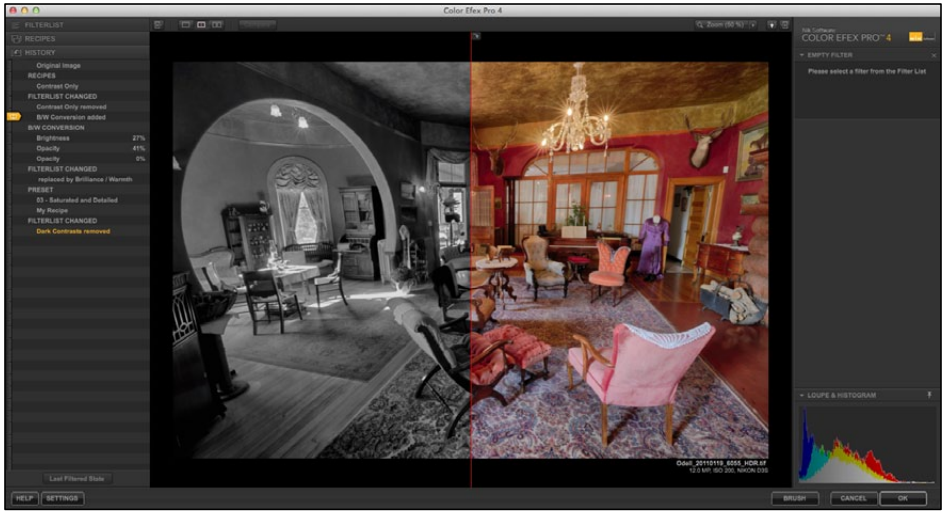
If you want to use the History Panel as a comparison tool, select one of the compare views (split-image or side by-side) in the Preview Window, or click the Compare button. You'll see an orange arrow slider appear at the left side of the History Panel. Move this slider to set the "before" state. Next, click on any adjustment to highlight it in orange text. This is the "after" state. If you've chosen one of the comparison views, you'll see both the before and after states in the Preview Window. If you are using Single Image view, press the Compare button to toggle the before/after view.



The Recipes menu (left) shows the list of Recipe presets. Many Recipes are included with Color Efex Pro, and you can also create your own.



The History Browser shows a complete list of every change made to your image within Color Efex Pro. You can use it as a sophisticated "undo" menu, or use it with the Compare Tools.

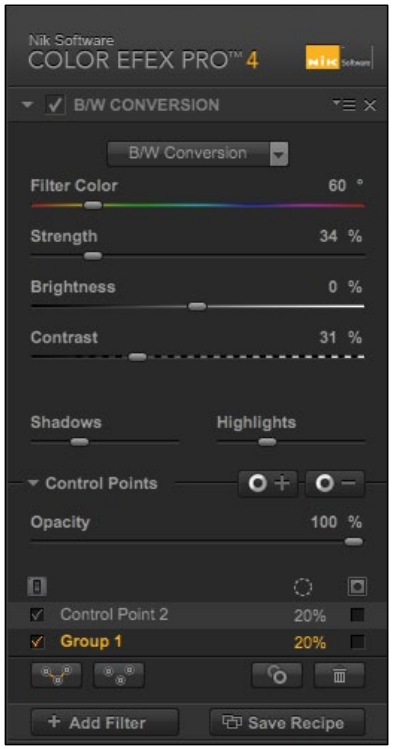


The History browser can be used to compare any two states of your image. Use the orange slider to choose the "before" state, and click the step to set as the "after" state. Use the Compare Tools to show the before/after states.

Right Panel

Filter Controls

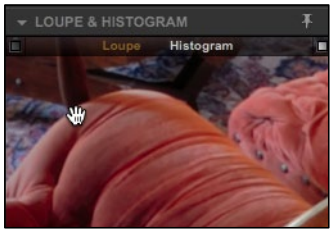
The right side of the interface is where you'll find the controls for the individual filter effects that you've added to your image. The specific controls will vary with each filter.



The Filter Panel contains all of the control sliders for the active filter.

Loupe & Histogram

At the bottom of the Right Panel you'll find the Loupe & Histogram panel, which serves two functions. The Loupe View shows a 100% magnification (actual pixels) of the image at the position of the mouse cursor. The Histogram shows the distribution of tone values in your image, including RGB and luminosity channels. Change between the Loupe and Histogram views by clicking on their names in the window.



The Loupe tool (top) follows your mouse around the Preview Window and displays a 100% magnification. Use the pin tool (bottom) to lock the position of the Loupe. When the Loupe is locked, you can scroll its position with the hand tool.

Pinning the Loupe

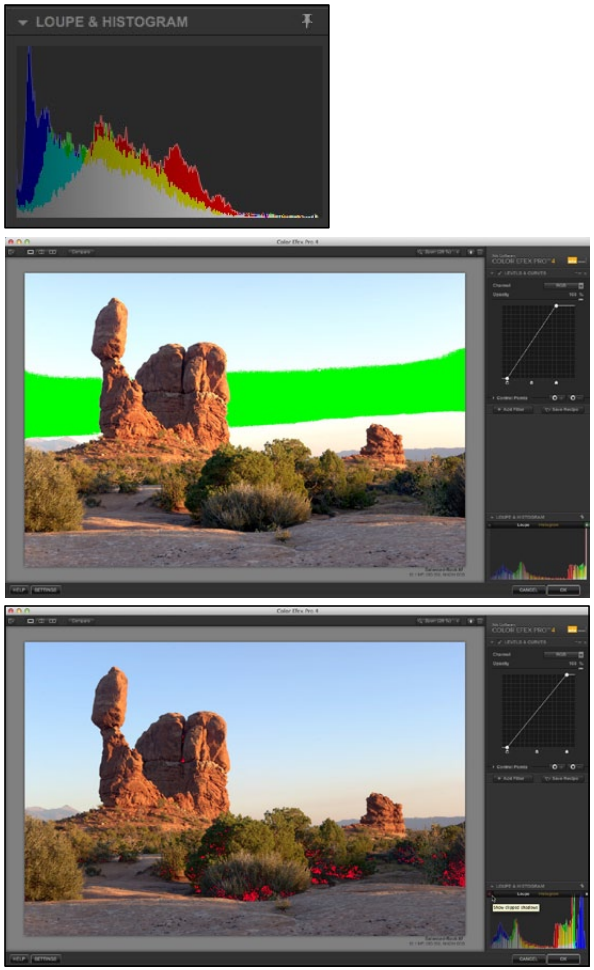
Normally the Loupe view follows the position of your mouse in the Preview Window. You can lock the position of the Loupe window by using the pin tool. Click the pin icon at the top right of the Loupe panel, and then click on the part of the area you wish to view in detail. That area will remain in the Loupe

view even after you move the mouse cursor. When the Loupe is locked, you can change its position by clicking and dragging the mouse in the Loupe window. To unpin the Loupe, click the pin icon a second time.

Histogram Options

The default view for the image histogram is the combined RGB view. You can view individual color channels and the luminosity channel by clicking in the Histogram window. Each time you click, the histogram will toggle to the next channel view.

You can also show highlight/shadow clipping with the histogram. By placing the cursor on either of the two squares at the top left and right of the histogram view, you'll temporarily toggle the clipping view. Clipped values will appear in the Preview Window as colored areas. Clipped highlights are green, and clipped shadows are red. If you click on either or both of the clipping boxes, the clipped shadows/highlights will stay toggled on until you uncheck the boxes.



The Histogram (top) shows the distribution of tones in your image. Click on the clipping warning icons to show lost highlights (middle) or shadows (bottom).