



Advanced Color Adjustments in Lightroom Classic

with
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Learn more about Tim Grey at
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Basic Refresher

Before getting into the more sophisticated color adjustments in Lightroom Classic, I think it can be helpful to review the basic adjustments used to refine the overall color in a photo.

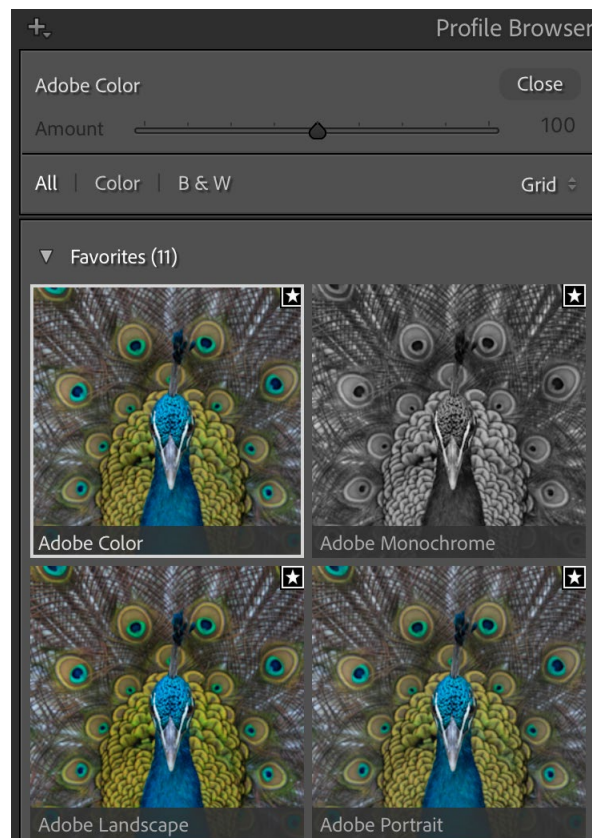
The first setting I recommend looking at is the Profile popup at the top of the Basic section on the right panel in the Develop module. The selected profile will determine the overall interpretation of the image before the effect of any other adjustments has been applied. When you click the popup, you'll see a list of the profiles that are marked as favorites. You can also choose the Browse option from the popup (or click the grid icon to the right of the Profile popup) to browse all available profiles. This will enable you to browse all available profiles. You can click on a profile to apply it to the current image or click the star icon at the top-right of the thumbnail for a profile to mark it as a favorite so it will appear on the Profile popup. Click the Close button to close the profile browser.

With a profile selected, you can then adjust the overall color in the image with the White Balance controls. There are three basic options for applying this adjustment, which is focused on compensating for the color of light illuminating the scene you photographed, but that enables you to adjust the balance of colors in a photo to your liking.

The first option is to select a profile from the WB (White Balance) popup. This popup includes the same profiles you may be familiar with from your camera's white balance settings, such as Daylight and Cloudy. You can also choose "As Shot" if you want to keep the color based on how the camera interpreted the scene or "Auto" if you want Lightroom Classic to determine what color adjustment should be applied to the image.

The second option for adjusting the white balance for an image is to click the White Balance Selector tool, which is the eyedropper icon that appears to the left of the WB popup. When you click the eyedropper, the tool will be activated, and you can then click on an area of the image that should be perfectly neutral gray. The color will then be adjusted for the overall image in a way that causes the area you clicked on to be neutral. This doesn't always represent the right final color for the image, but it can provide a good starting point for further refinement.

Regardless of whether you've used the WB popup or the White Balance Selector tool, I recommend fine-tuning the overall color in every photo using the Temp (color temperature) and Tint sliders. The Temp slider enables you to shift the color in a photo between more blue and more yellow, and the Tint slider shifts the color between



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more green and more magenta. If you don't feel you have a good eye for color, I recommend dragging these two



sliders left and right through their extremes. You can then start to reduce the distance you are dragging the slider, as you zero in on a range of values that provide good overall color. You can then use very small movements of the sliders to get the color balance looking as good as possible.

After adjusting the balance of colors with the White Balance controls, you can refine the overall saturation of colors using the Vibrance and Saturation sliders. I recommend starting with the Vibrance slider, because it has some variability built into it that can be very helpful. This includes mitigating the effect of saturation on skin tone colors and preventing highly saturated colors from getting over saturated when you increase the value for Vibrance.

You can use Vibrance to either reduce or increase overall saturation.



The Saturation slider provides a more linear

adjustment affecting all colors the same way. Because of the differences in behavior between these two adjustments I often find it very helpful to increase the value for Vibrance somewhat significantly to balance the overall saturation of colors in the photo, and then use a slight negative value for Saturation to tone down the overall saturation to a more appropriate level.

Once you've applied the basic color adjustments to an image, you're ready to exercise detailed control over the colors in the image using the more advanced options of Color Mixer and Color Grading.

Color Control with Color Mixer

Anytime you have a photo where you're happy with the overall color, but one or more specific colors don't look quite right, the Color Mixer adjustment can prove tremendously helpful.

One way to describe color is to identify the hue, saturation, and luminance values for the color. The hue is the basic underlying color, represented by the number of degrees around a color wheel. You can think of the hue as representing the name of the color, since hues include red, green, and blue, for example. The saturation is the purity of the color. At minimum saturation a color would become a shade of gray, and at maximum saturation a color would become the most pure and vibrant version of the color. Luminance identifies the brightness of the color, on a scale from black to white.

Just as we can describe a color based on values for hue, saturation, and luminance, so to can we modify the appearance of a color by modifying these attributes. Taking that a step further, with the Color Mixer adjustments we can alter the hue, saturation, and luminance of specific ranges of colors.

In the Color Mixer section of the right panel in the Develop module, start by selecting the Mixer tab rather than the Point Color tab (the latter will be covered in the next section). From the Adjust tab you can choose HSL or Color depending on how you want the adjustment sliders organized. If you choose HSL from the popup, the sliders for each color range will be displayed in groups for Hue, Saturation, and Luminance. If you choose Color from the popup the sliders will be grouped by color, such as by having a Hue, Saturation,

and Luminance slider for Red, another set of sliders for Orange, and so on. You can also choose whether you want to see only one set of sliders or all sliders at once by selecting an option just below the Color popup.

Regardless of how you have configured the sliders they will still operate the same. You can then adjust the hue, saturation, and luminance value for any range of colors. For example, you can use the Hue slider for Blue to shift the blue color values in the image between a more turquoise versus purple color.

By being able to adjust the hue, saturation, and luminance individually for each of a total of eight color ranges, you can exercise excellent control over the color in a photo. For example, you can make the reds appear purer and more saturated while making blues more cobalt and less saturated.

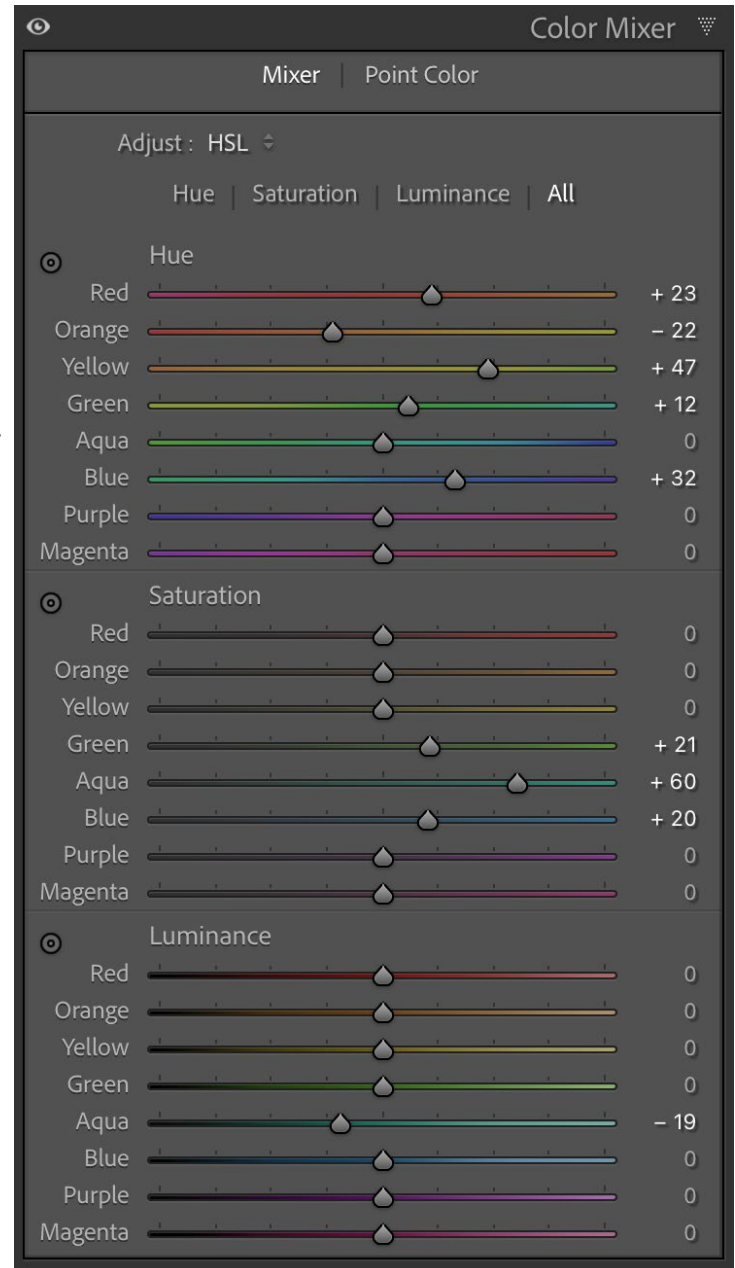
Point Color for Color Mixer

While the Mixer tab in the Color Mixer section enables you to exercise great control over the colors in a photo, the Point Color tab offers even greater control by allowing you to define custom ranges of colors you want to affect.

To get started, first select the Point Color tab in the Color Mixer section. Then click the Sample Point Color tool (the eyedropper icon) at the top-left of the section. Click in an area of the image that represents the color range you want to adjust, which will add a color swatch to the right of the eyedropper representing the color you selected. Note that as you apply adjustments this color swatch will be split between the before and after color for the adjustment.

At the far right of the color swatch is a triangle you can click to expand or collapse the gradient controls above the Hue Shift, Saturation Shift, and Luminance Shift sliders. You can drag the handle around the larger gradient to adjust hue (left to right) and saturation (up and down) with a single overall control. You can drag on the smaller gradient on the right to adjust luminance. You can also simply drag the sliders for Hue Shift, Saturation Shift, and Luminance Shift to adjust the appearance of the color defined by the current color swatch.

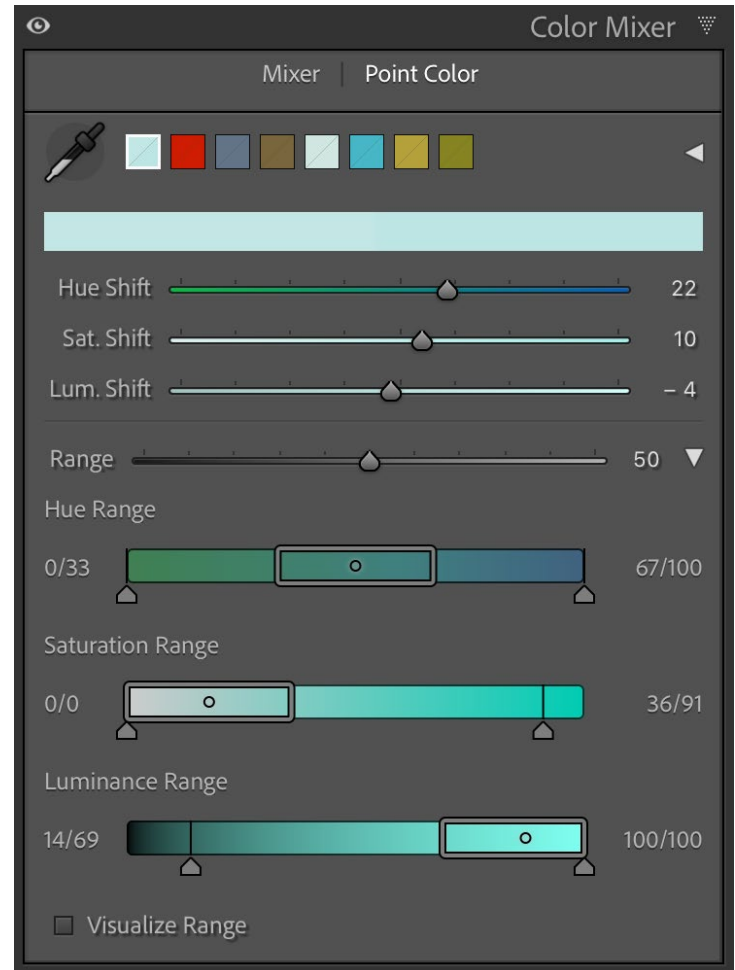
The Range slider can be used to expand or contract the range of color values being affected by the adjustments. However, you can better control the range of colors being affected by clicking the triangle as needed to expand the set of controls below. These controls enable you to adjust the range of colors being affected for the current color swatch by defining ranges of hue, saturation, and luminance.



For each of these controls the circle within the gradient identifies the value based on the color you sampled in the image. The box around that circle identifies the range of values that will be completed affected by the adjustment. The sliders below each gradient allow you to define the degree of feathering or transition between areas affected versus not affected by the adjustment.

I strongly recommend turning on the Visualize Range checkbox while adjusting the range of colors to be affected for a color swatch. This will cause the overall image to appear in black and white, with areas that will be affected based on your current range settings appearing in color. In this way you can adjust the ranges for hue, saturation, and luminance until ideally the only areas that appear in color in the image are the areas you want to have affected by the adjustment. Once you've refined the range of colors to be affected, you can turn off the Visualize Range checkbox and finalize the adjustment settings with the Hue Shift, Saturation Shift, and Luminance Shift sliders.

If you want to apply a different adjustment to another color range for a photo, you can click the eyedropper icon again and sample another color, which will create another color swatch to the right of the eyedropper. You can click on a color swatch to switch between them as you fine-tune the color adjustments for each color swatch. You can add a total of up to eight color swatches for an image.



Color Grading Corrections

Another option for exercising control over the colors in an image is the Color Grading adjustment. With Color Grading you can adjust the hue, saturation, and luminance within areas of an image. While those are the exact same color attributes you can adjust with the Color Mixer controls, the difference is that with Color Grading you are focusing the adjustments on areas of the image based on tonal value rather than color value. You can therefore apply individual color adjustments to the shadows, midtones, and highlights.

The Color Grading adjustment is especially helpful when you need to apply different color adjustments to the shadows versus the highlights in an image, for example. I've often found that I want to shift the shadow areas toward yellow while shifting the highlights toward blue, which is the opposite color adjustment for those two areas of the image. With Color Grading you can apply exactly that type of adjustment.

To get started go to the Color Grading section of the right panel in the Develop module. At the top of the Color Grading section, you can choose what you want to adjust. The first button is the 3-Way option, which will show controls for Shadows, Midtones, and Highlights all at once. The next three buttons enable you to adjust only Shadows, only Midtones, or only Highlights, respectively. The last button is for the Global

adjustment option, meaning your adjustments will affect all areas of the image.

You can adjust the hue and saturation directly on the color wheel control, with a separate Luminance slider shown below the color wheel. For all but the 3-Way option for the Adjust setting you can also click the triangle icon to expand or collapse the Hue and Saturation sliders, so you can use the sliders rather than the color wheel control if you prefer.

The hue can be adjusted either with the Hue slider or by dragging the circle that is just outside the color wheel. Position the circle at the point representing the color you want to shift toward, such as yellow if you wanted to shift relatively blue values toward a more yellow appearance.

The circle within the color wheel is technically the hue adjustment, but it can be used to adjust the hue and saturation at the same time. If you drag the circle in a straight line between the center of the color wheel and the current position of the hue slider, you'll be adjusting only the hue. If you instead drag away from that line, the control will "break free" from the line. You can then drag the handle around the color wheel to adjust the hue and inward or outward from the center of the color wheel to adjust saturation. You can then refine the brightness of the color you're applying using the Luminance slider.

If you apply a color adjustment to more than one of the color wheels for Shadows, Midtones, or Highlights, you can also adjust the balance in terms of how these colors are applied to the different tonal ranges in the photo. For example, if you drag the Balance slider to the left the Shadows color will affect a larger portion of the image, and if you drag the slider to the right the Highlights color will affect a larger portion of the image.

You can also determine the degree to which the colors focused on different tonal ranges will blend into each other by adjusting the Blending slider. This control is more impactful, however, for images that have been converted to black and white rather than color images.

Color Grading Creativity

In addition to using the Color Grading adjustment to refine the color in an image, you can also use the adjustment for a variety of creative effects.

For example, you can apply a somewhat exaggerated color shift individually for the Shadows versus Highlights to add a creative effect to a color image. This can be used, for example, to create a vintage film type of effect, such as by adding a magenta tint to the shadow areas of the image and a green tint to the highlight areas.

In most cases when using Color Grading for a creative effect I prefer to first convert the image to black and



white by turning on the “B&W” option at the top of the Basic section. If you then want to apply only a single color, you can drag the Balance slider all the way to the left, for example, so that only the Shadows color will apply to the image. Then select a color using the Shadows control to finalize the effect.

You could also apply a duotone or tritone effect by converting the image to black and white and then applying color using two or three of the controls for Shadows, Midtones, and Highlights. With an image that was converted to black and white the impact of the Balance slider will be more impactful in terms of being able to see how you can shift the balance between having more of the image affected by the Shadows color versus the Highlights color. It will also be easier to see the effect of the Blending slider in terms of whether color blend very little with a low setting compared to greater blending between colors with a higher value.

Color Control

Color can be a significantly impactful attribute of a photo. While the basic color adjustments offer a good degree of control over the impact of a photo, being able to exercise greater control with more advanced adjustments can be tremendously helpful. That is exactly the type of impact that can be achieved using the Color Mixer and Color Grading adjustments.

