



The Digital Workflow

Introduction

Talking about digital workflow is almost like talking politics or religion, in that most people are very opinionated and equally passionate about their way of doing things. Remember that their way, or my way are not necessarily the right way for you. A good place to start when setting up your digital workflow is to ask yourself "why do I take photographs?" By answering this simple question honestly, you are well on your way in determining your workflow. I say this because every step in your process should bring you one step closer to the reason why you take photographs, and in the end it should precisely accomplish that end. By definition, a digital workflow is the process and steps from capture to final product, whatever that product is for you.

RAW vs. JPEG

This is by far the most important decision you can make in your digital workflow, because it is the absolute starting point in your workflow. Let me start off with a definition of both.

RAW file format is uncompressed, unprocessed, RAW data from the digital imaging sensor. If you capture in this format, you will need to process every single image through your computer and some necessary software (i.e. Photoshop or Lightroom). However, by processing every image, you have absolute control as to how the image will be printed, or viewed with no compression and no data loss. The format is stored as 12-bit data, which is significantly more than 8-bit data, but remember, more is not always better!

JPEG file format is compressed and all colors are processed inside that really expensive digital processor you paid for (your camera body). With JPEG you do not post-process your images because they are already finished. If you do process images in your computer using software (i.e. Photoshop) you will lose clarity and detail every time you save it from its original state, unless you use adjustment layers and save as a TIFF or a PSD file (a lesson for another day). This image format stores its information as 8-bit compressed data.

So which one is better? Well, I am going to leave that one up to you. Again, it depends on why you take pictures. If you like sitting in front of your computer and processing every single image, then RAW will be fun for you. If you do not like processing every image and are happy with what the camera gives you, then JPEG may be what you are looking for. This is a rather simple way of looking at things and not always accurate. Please keep in mind RAW is NOT the professional format, and JPEG the amateur despite what others may say. This is absolutely not true. Just remember to ask yourself why do you photograph?