REAL ESTATE PHOTOGRAPHY

Digital Workflow

Step-By-Step Instructions Guide

Revision 1.0.9

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INTRODUCTION

This step-by-step instructions guide has been prepared and authored to provide the photographer with the digital workflow steps needed to professionally edit real estate photos after a photo shoot.

Digital workflow is nothing more than the steps you take with your digital photos to produce professional results. There are a myriad of ways to achieve professional results in post processing. This written material will focus on a set of professional tools that has worked for the author in producing award-winning real estate photos.

Digital Workflow Software Tools

The following paid software tools (and paid plugins) are required to follow the steps outlined in this step-by-step instructions guide:

- **Photo Mechanic 6**
  https://home.camerabits.com

- **DxO PhotoLab 3** (w/ DxO ViewPoint 3, DxO FilmPack 5, and DxO Nik Collection)
  https://www.dxo.com

- **Photomatix Pro 6**
  https://www.hdrsoft.com

Camera Settings and Suggestions

In preparation for a photo shoot, configure your DSLR camera to shoot 5 bracketed exposures at 2 stops (2ev). Set your camera shooting mode to Manual, set your aperture to f/8, and set your ISO to 100-320. Do not use your built-in flash or a speedlight. Shoot with a wide angle lens (10-24mm for crop-sensor cameras and 15mm for full-frame cameras).

Shoot on a sturdy tripod and shoot with a cable release or a remote. Ensure that the camera height is approx. 5 ½ ft. from the floor and is level prior to taking shots. Avoid tilting the camera. Disable vibration reduction (VR) or image stabilization (IS) on your camera lens or in the camera menu settings while your camera is mounted on your tripod. Set you camera's focus system to Auto Focus Single Focus Point (AF-S). If possible, configure your camera for back-button focus.

Practice

Practice at home often with the recommended camera settings provided above. Doing so will build your confidence and ensure you capture professional photos on the job.

GETTING STARTED

The first thing real estate photographers need to perform after a photo shoot is to transfer the digital photos from their camera chip(s) to their computer. This step can be performed within Photo Mechanic through a process called "ingesting," or it can be performed directly within the operating system using Windows Explorer for PC or Finder for Mac.

The material in this step-by-step instructions guide assumes that you possess a basic understanding of your PC or Mac operating system. Furthermore, this material does not cover all the features and settings of Photo Mechanic, DxO PhotoLab, or Photomatix Pro. That would require a whole book by itself. Rather, what is covered is simply the steps required to batch process and professionally edit bracketed real estate photos.

STEP 1: Before you transfer (or 'ingest' as referred to by Photo Mechanic) the photos from your memory card, make a copy of the template folder structure suggested by the author and rename it to the property address (e.g. 20 Meadow Marsh Lane Old Greenwich CT 06870). For this step, you will need to use Windows Explorer on a PC or Finder on a Mac.

STEP 2: Connect your memory card to your PC or Mac via the built-in or external USB card reader.

STEP 3: Launch Photo Mechanic and select the drive letter of your memory card in the Navigator window then select the first photo thumbnail displayed. Scroll down to the last photo thumbnail for the job and press your Shift key and click on the last photo to select all the photos from the job. You can also simply press CTRL+A on a PC or CMD+A on a Mac to select all the photos.
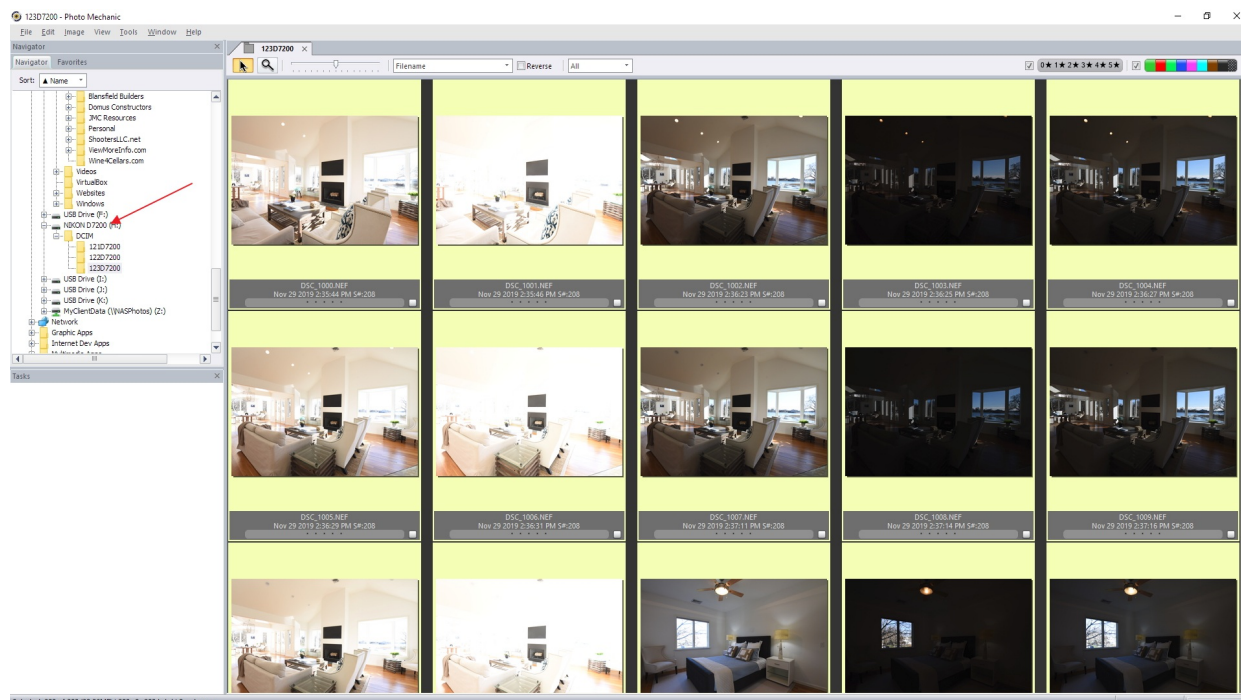
STEP 4: Select File>Ingest from the dropdown menu.
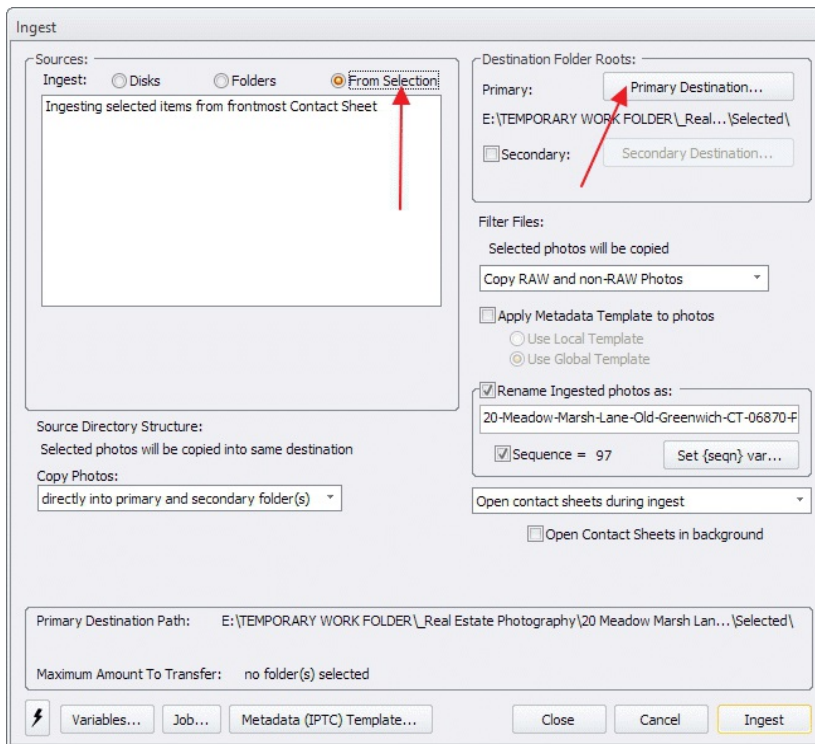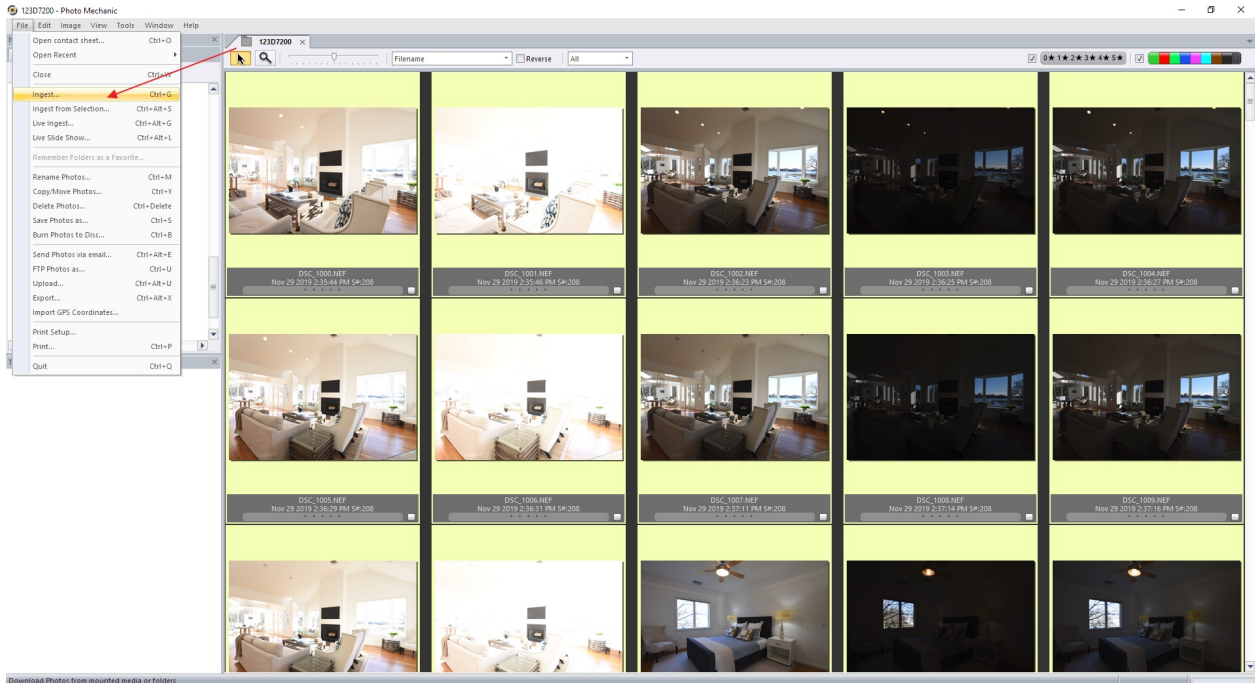
STEP 5: Select the "From Selection" option from the Sources panel, then select "Primary Destination" button in the Destination Folder Roots panel and browse to the RAW>Selected folder within the renamed template folder.
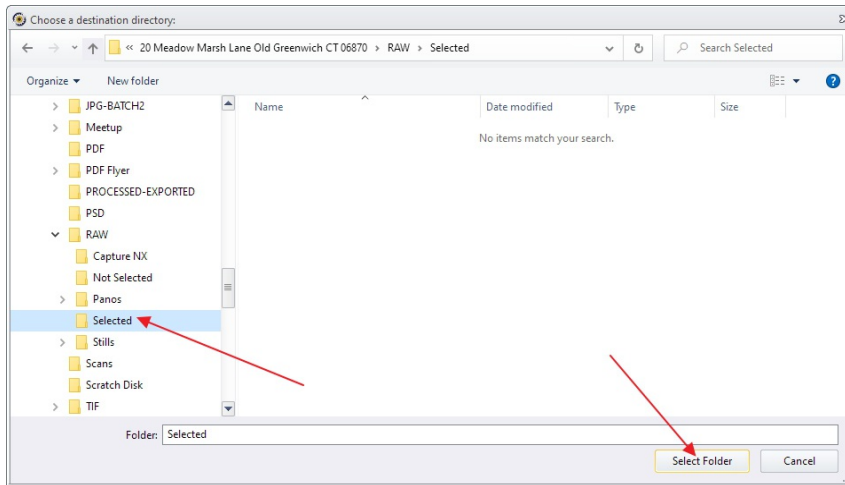
STEP 6: Highlight the "Selected" folder within the RAW folder then click the "Select Folder" button to select the destination folder.
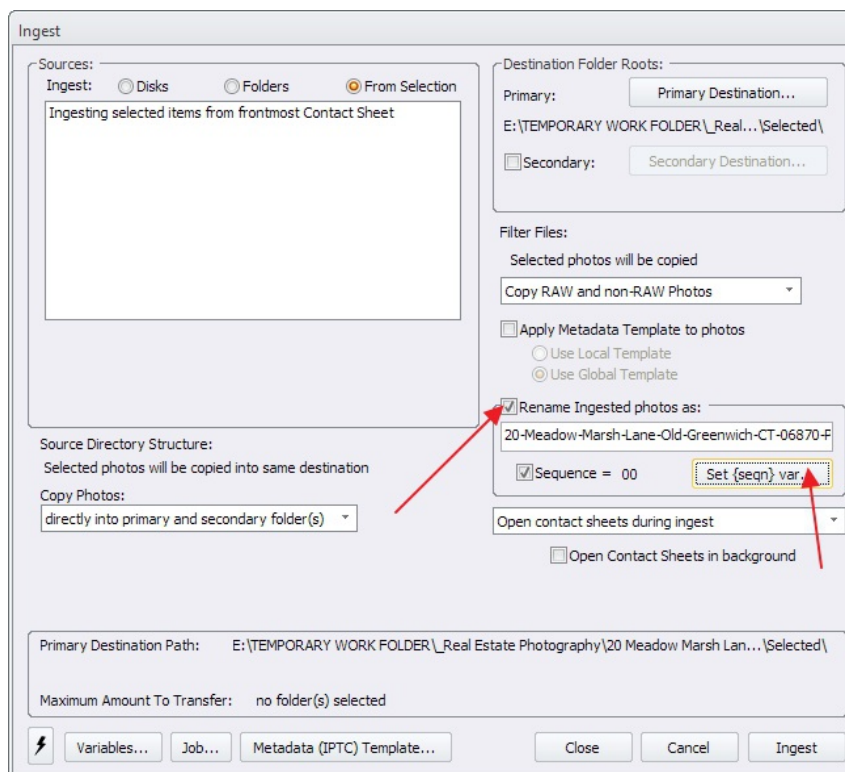
STEP 7: Select the "Rename Ingested photos as" checkbox. Rename photos as in the following example: **20-Meadow-Marsh-Lane-Old-Greenwich-CT-06870-Photo**. Be sure to set the sequence variable to 00.

STEP 8: Click the "Ingest" button to begin copying the photos to your computer. Once the photos have finished copying to your computer, close Photo Mechanic and eject the memory card from your computer.

STEP 9: Launch DxO PhotoLab and navigate to the folder containing the photos you just copied to your computer.

STEP 10: Select the "Customize" tab in the left window pane. Single-click on the first photo in the thumbnail strip at the bottom of the screen and press CTRL+A on a PC or CMD+A on a Mac to select all the photos in the project.

STEP 11: Make the following correction settings:

(a.) Enable Contrast and set the Contrast, Microcontrast, and Fine Contrast to +10.

(b.) Enable Noise Reduction and set correction setting to "Prime."

(c.) Enable Lens Sharpness and Unsharp Mask. Leave both correction settings set to their default. *Do not disable the other correction settings DxO PhotoLab has determined is best enabled based on your camera and lens combination.*

STEP 12: Unselect all selected photos in the thumbnail strip by selecting the first photo in the strip. Now select the first 5 photos in the thumbnail strip and make any necessary white balance adjustments. Try using the eye dropper tool to adjust the white balance. If the eye dropper is not producing accurate colors, use the Temperature and Tint sliders to adjust the white balance. Repeat for all the photos for the project by selecting 5 photos at a time that make up each bracketed photo.

STEP 13: Press CTRL+A on a PC or CMD+A on a Mac to select all the photos in the thumbnail strip. Select the "Export To Disk" button on the bottom right of the window. Select TIFF as the preferred export format. Change the Destination Path on the right side by selecting the yellow folder dropdown arrow. Navigate to the TIF HDR Batch folder for the project (hint: TIF-HDR-BATCH1).

STEP 14: Click on the Export button to begin the batch export from RAW to TIFF.

STEP 15 (*See Photomatix Screenshot A*): Once the DxO PhotoLab batch process is complete, launch Photomatix and click on "Batch Bracketed Photos." Select the source folder containing the exported TIFF files from DxO PhotoLab (hint: TIF-HDR-BATCH1).

STEP 16 (*See Photomatix Screenshot A*): Ensure that "Bracket Selection" is set to merge 5 images at a time.

**STEP 17 (*See Photomatix Screenshot A*):** Choose the Destination folder (hint: TIF-BATCH1-PHOTOMATIX).

STEP 18 (*See Photomatix Screenshot A*): Ensure that "Save results as" is set to TIFF 16-bit.

STEP 19 (*See Photomatix Screenshot A*): Select "Real Estate" from the Preset Category dropdown then select "Natural" from the second dropdown.

STEP 20 (*See Photomatix Screenshot A*): Enable Image Alignment, Crop aligned images, Noise Reduction, and Ghost Removal from the Merge with panel. Keep Contrast and Sharpening set to None.

STEP 21 (*See Photomatix Screenshot A*): Click on Run to begin the HDR batch process.

Photomatix Screenshot A
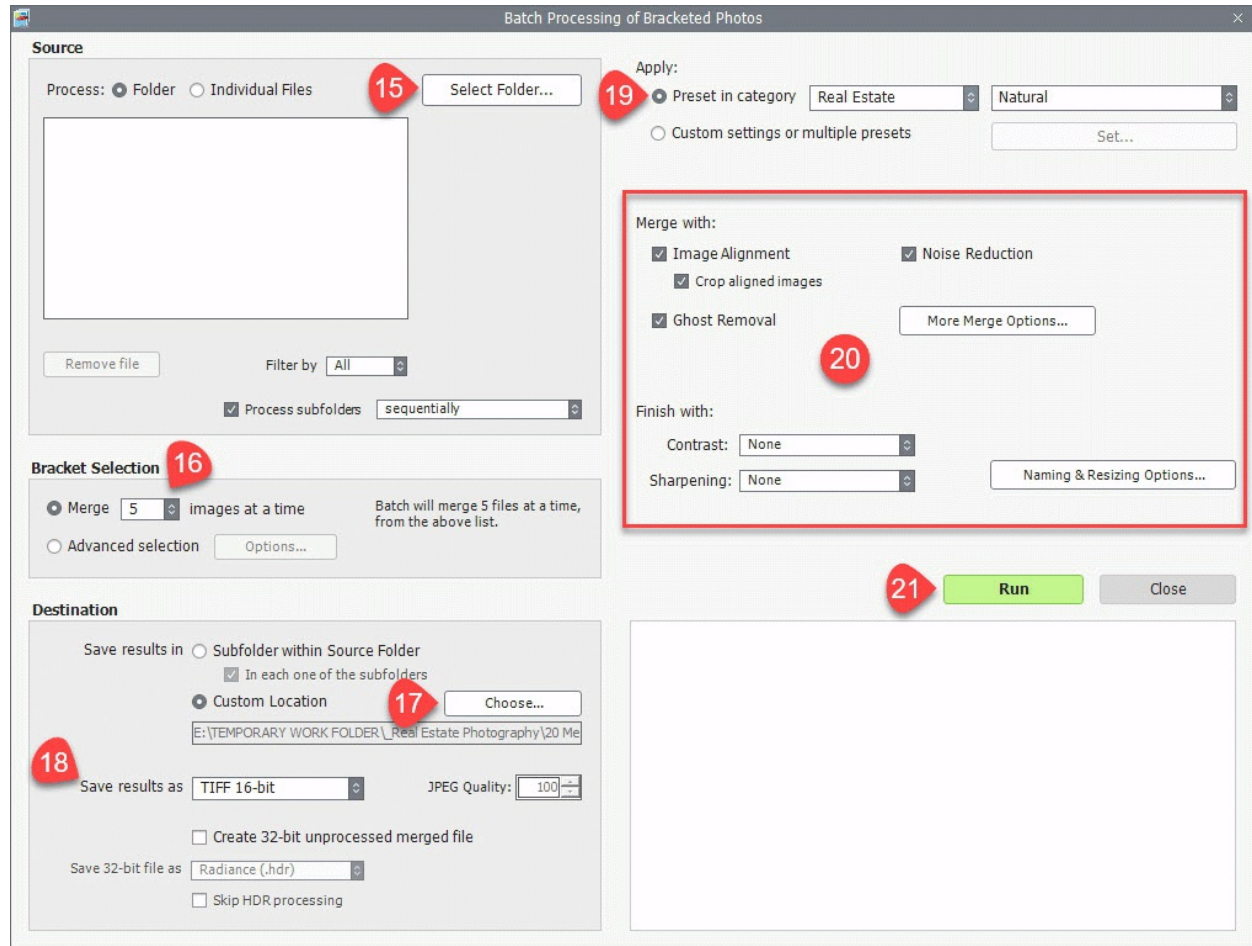
STEP 22: Once the Photomatix batch process is complete, re-launch DxO PhotoLab and navigate to the folder containing the batched HDR photos (hint: TIF-BATCH1-PHOTOMATIX).

STEP 23: Select the "Customize" tab in the left window pane. Single-click on the first photo in the thumbnail strip at the bottom of the screen and press CTRL+A on a PC or CMD+A on a Mac to select all the photos in the project.

STEP 24: Make the following global correction settings to all selected photos:
(a.) Enable the Perspective Correction setting under DxO Viewpoint panel then select the magic wand tool to auto correct the vertical perspective on the photos. In the next step, you may need to make adjustments to the perspective correction on individual photos on an as needed basis.
(b.) Set the Contrast, Microcontrast, and Fine Contrast to +6.
(c.) Enable Lens Sharpness, Unsharp Mask, and Noise Reduction. Leave their correction settings set to their default. The Noise Reduction correction setting should be set to HQ (Fast), not Prime. Prime has already been used on the RAW files in Step 11 (b). *We don't want to over-apply this correction.*

STEP 25: Unselect all selected photos in the thumbnail strip by selecting the first photo in the strip. Now, one photo at a time, begin making individual correction adjustments to the perspective correction (*if needed*), exposure compensation, and selective toning (highlights, midtones, shadows, and blacks) as needed. This is the step you will want to individually crop your photos as needed. This is also the step to make local adjustments to individual photos using control points as needed **(*See Appendix A*)**.

STEP 26: Once you've made all correction adjustments to each image in the previous step, you are now ready to export your photos to JPG. Press CTRL+A on a PC or CMD+A on a Mac to select all the photos in the thumbnail strip. Select the "Export To Disk" button on the bottom right of the DxO window. Select JPG as the preferred export format. Change the Destination Path on the right side by selecting the yellow folder dropdown arrow. Navigate to the following folder for the project: JPG-BATCH1>Web Resolution.

STEP 27: Congratulations, you're done! You've successfully – *and professionally* – edited real estate photos that your clients will appreciate. Deliver the exported JPG photos to your clients as you normally would.

NEED HELP?

For support and assistance, send an email message to Jim Fuhrmann at jim@jimfuhrmann.com.

Appendix A

The '**Local adjustments**' in DxO PhotoLab provide advanced tools to further edit and enhance photos. In this section, we'll briefly explore the Control point tool and how to use it to selectively edit parts of photos.

To get started, click on the 'Local adjustments' button in the top toolbar. You should notice that your mouse cursor changes to a circle with 4 inner points. If not, right click anywhere on the photo to bring up the 'tools selector' then select the 'Control point' tool (*See Appendix A-1 Screenshot*).

Appendix A-1

Now that you've selected the Control point tool, click on an area of the photo that needs editing, such as a window to enhance the outside view. As the example screenshots in this section show, the use of control points in and around the windows has made it possible to enhance the outside scene. The next screenshot (*See Appendix A-2 Screenshot*) depicts how this was accomplished.

Now that you've placed your first control point in an area of a photo, decide which edits will make that part of the photo better. You can make adjustments to light, color, and detail. As Appendix A-2 Screenshot depicts, many control points were used to achieve optimal results. In the Light panel, the Exposure slider was adjusted to -0.56. The ClearView Plus slider was adjusted to +24. The Highlights slider was adjusted to -18. No edits were made in the Color panel or the Detail panel.

To avoid selective edits from spilling over to areas of a photo that should not be edited, press the ALT key on your keyboard and click on areas of the photo to be protected with negative control points. As Appendix A-2 Screenshot depicts, many negative control points were used to protect areas of the photo such as window frames, ceiling, walls, floor, etc... You can identify negative control points by the minus symbol located on the bottom right of control points.

TIP: To hide the equalizer for the control point, press E on your keyboard. Press E again to show the equalizer.

Once you've made local adjustments to all photos in your project, and you're satisfied with the results, return to Step 26 in this instructions guide to begin exporting your photos to JPG.

Appendix B

Camera Settings:

1. Mode: Manual
2. Aperture: F/8
3. ISO: 100-320 (turn off auto ISO)
4. Shutter Speed: Varies
5. Set camera and/or lens to autofocus.
6. Set White Balance to auto.
7. Set Metering Mode to Matrix (Nikon) or Evaluative (Canon).
8. Set image quality to RAW.
9. Set camera to shoot 3-5 bracketed exposures (2-stops between each exposure).
10. Turn off Vibration Reduction/VR (Nikon) or Image Stabilization/IS (Canon) when camera is mounted on Tripod.