One of the most frustrating tasks all photographers have to face is managing their digital library.

Organizing in Adobe Lightroom

I'm as guilty as the next person of putting all my images into one big folder called Pictures. When I began working in Adobe Lightroom, it became abundantly clear I needed a better plan.

First step, educate myself on image storage and organization. I highly recommend "The Dam Book" by Peter Krogh (www.thedam-book.com) as a guide to building a digital asset management (DAM) system for your needs. The following is my system of moving images into Lightroom, including naming files and organizing my Lightroom library.

I dedicated a large RAID Array drive to my images and my Lightroom library and presets. I frequently clone this drive to another buss-powered FireWire drive I take on location, and to a third I keep in a fireproof safe. It's far easier to clone this data from drive to drive than to select images or folders that you need

to back up and copy to another drive. I clone using a Macintosh product called SuperDuper (www.shirt-pocket.com), which only affects files changed since my last backup/cloning, so it's a fast process.

One of the most common questions I hear asked about Lightroom is, "Where are my pictures stored?" When you come back from a shoot, make a folder on the hard drive, then download the images from the media card into the folder. When you create a folder with a descriptive name and copy the images from the card into it *outside* the Lightroom application, there's no question as to *where* those images reside: on the hard drive and on the PC card. I *never* format the card until I verify the integrity of the data on the hard drive.

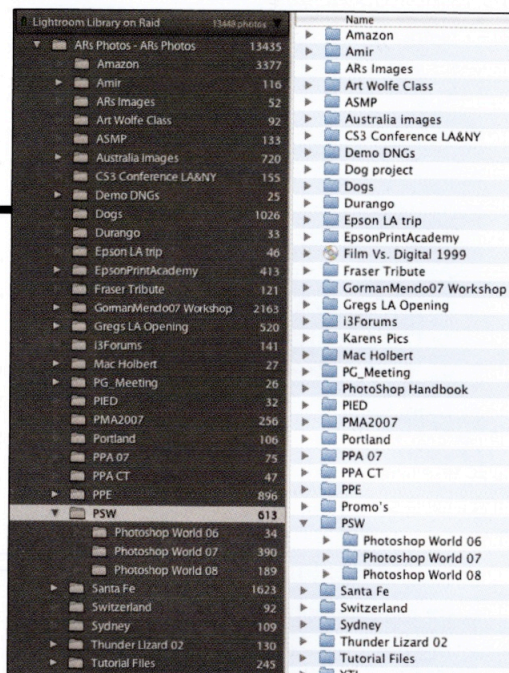I name folders based on image content (**Figure 1**). Some get regularly updated

Figure 1, above: Lightroom keeps track of the same folder structure that I have on my RAID array. Note that I don't have to import every folder into the library. My wife's images (Karens Pics), and a few others, haven't been imported into this library. Also note the use of nested folders (PSW). Figure 2, below: This import dialog is set to add existing images from the Dogs folder to the library. I have selected my metadata template and a keyword in the Information to Apply area. Minimal previews provide faster import, but if you have time, use 1:1 for a full-size preview that will make zooming into the image instantaneous when editing.
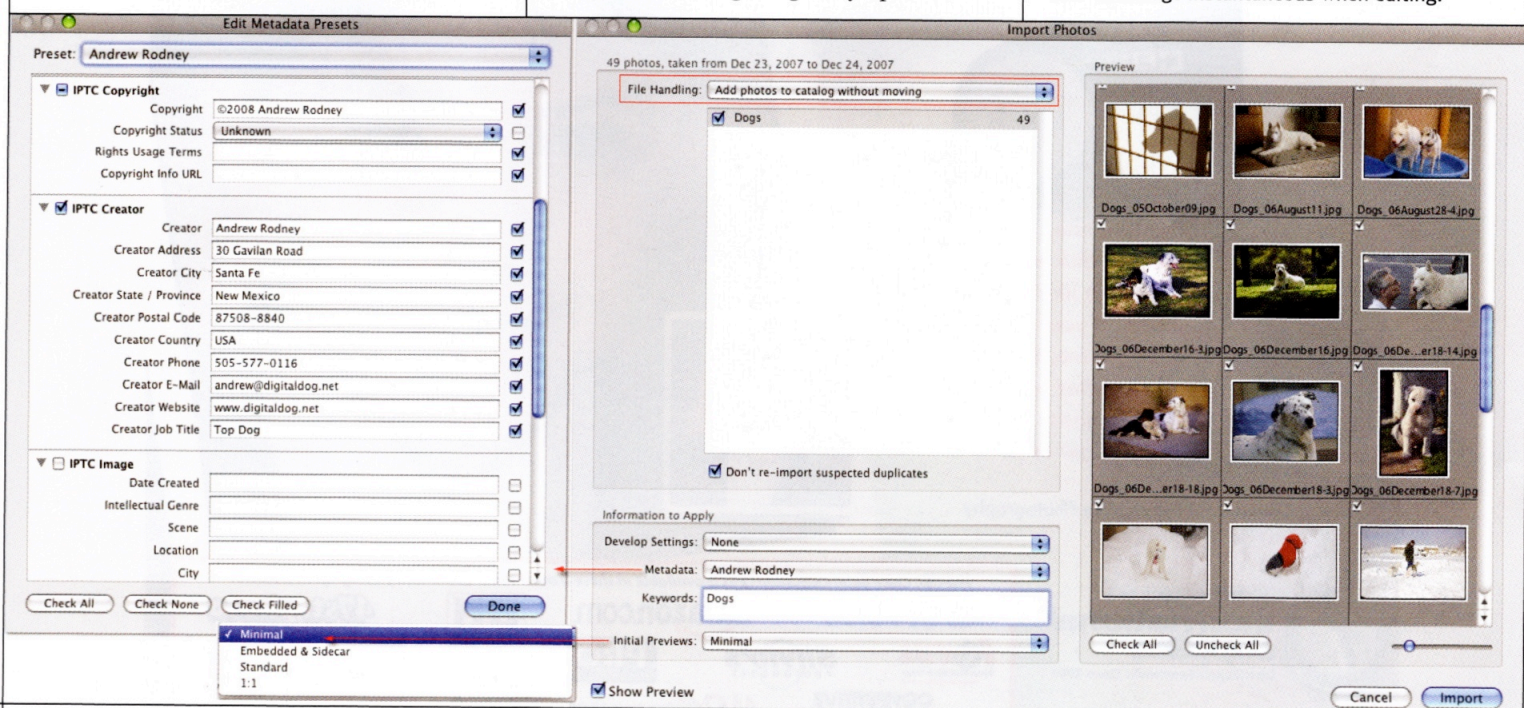
with newer images that fit the content category. Others are named for a single trip, event or subject.

Once I launch Lightroom, I click the Import Images button and navigate to the folder of images I just copied to my hard drive (**Figure 2**). Since they reside in the location I set up, I use the option *Add photos to catalog without moving.* You can make a new folder on the drive from this dialog, but it's easier to import from your existing designated location. I can also import newer images to an existing folder; Lightroom's import dialog is smart and fast enough to list only the new images that need to be imported.

In the *Information to Apply* area, I select a metadata template to apply such global information as my name and copyright—the info you'd want included in every image, every time you import. You can build and save a template from this dialog if one doesn't exist. You can add additional image-specific information later.

Once I've imported the images to my Lightroom library, I convert them to the DNG format (Library > Convert Images to DNG...). This serves a number of purposes, but most important, it provides an integrity check of the raw data. If during this process I see a message about a problem with a raw document, I still have the document on the memory card. I never format a card of images until I convert the images to DNG format. I hope that someday we'll have the option to import from a current location and simultaneously convert the files to DNG. You can convert to DNG on import if you import directly from the camera card and select *Copy Photos as DNG and add to catalog.*

I do a rough edit of all the newly imported images. I select the set of images called *Previous Import* under *Library* on the left. Using the arrow key to move from image to image, I type P (for pick) if I think the image is excellent, and X to tag it for deletion. Type U to remove a rating. Type E for the loupe view to zoom in for closer inspection. Type G to go back to the grid view. To delete all the rejects, hit cmd/ctrl-delete. You'll get a prompt asking if you want to remove them from the library or banish them to the trash. Most of my images get no rating; they're neither superb nor totally useless. After my rough edit, I can always go back and apply a 1- to 5-star rating (simply type the number) when I have more time.

I might move some images to other folders. Say I had a card with 30 shots of my garden, 10 of my dogs, and 200 from a recent seminar. I can copy them all to the

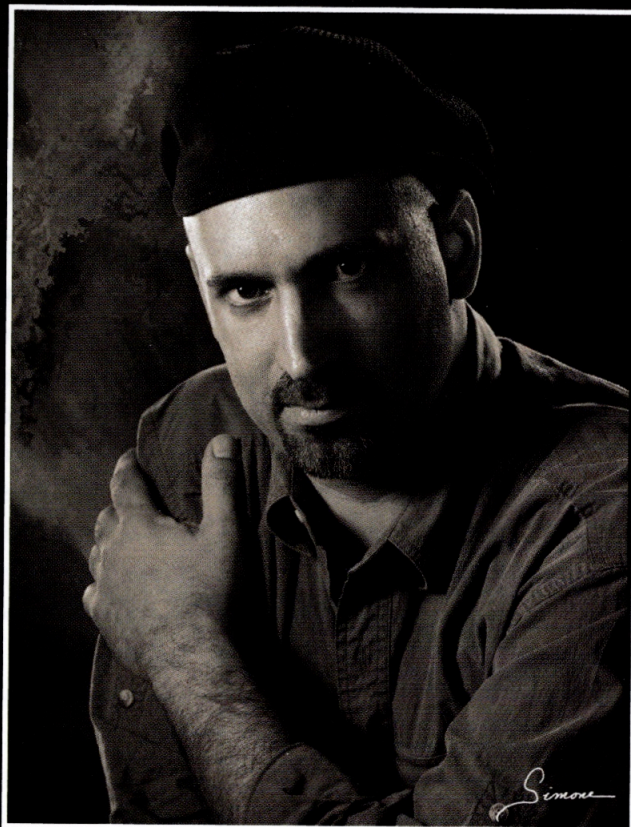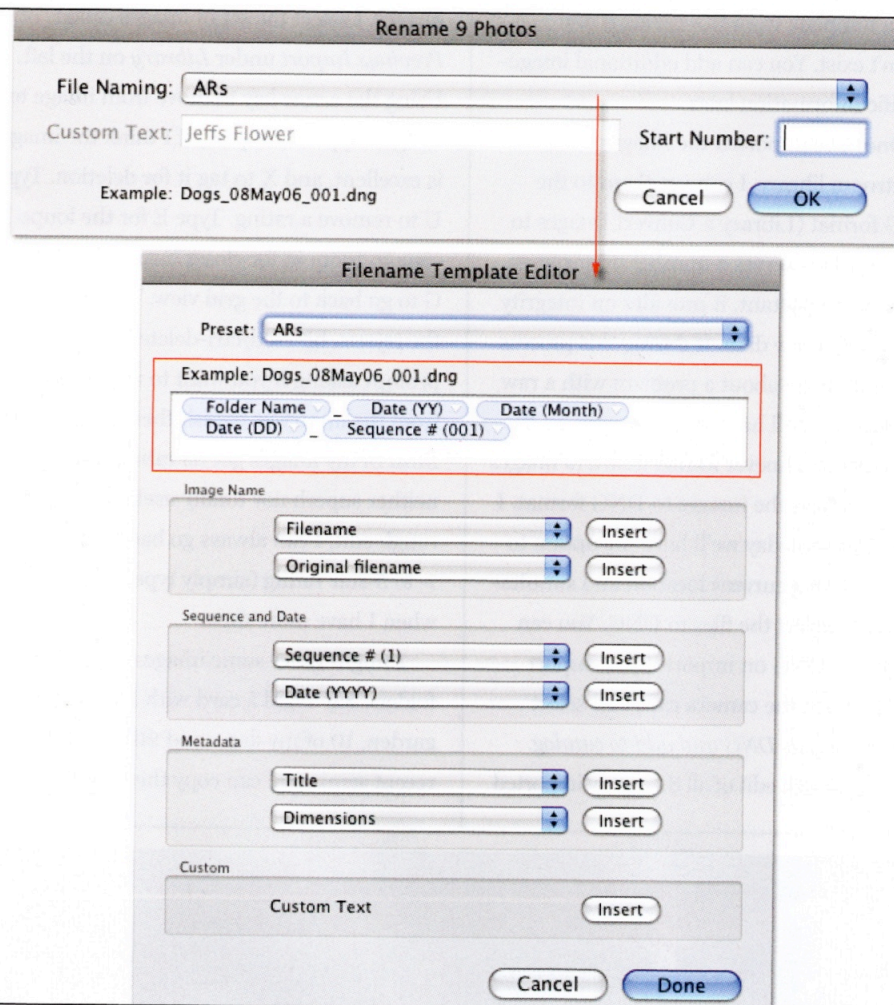Figure 3: The batch-rename dialog shows my custom template at the top and an example of how the images will be named. Clicking on Edit in that list calls up the Filename Template Editor dialog, which shows the tokens used to build this file naming, again with an example of how it will work.

folder I create for the seminar, import them to Lightroom, then select only the dog images and drag them into my existing folder named Dogs, and move the garden shots to my Santa Fe folder. The Lightroom database knows where you have physically relocated those images and moves them for you on your hard drive. If you did this from the Finder, Lightroom wouldn't know where the relocated images were, and would place a question mark next to each missing image in the list. You'd have to locate them from within Lightroom to update the library. Once they're imported, I always move images around from within Lightroom.

Now I batch-rename all the images to something descriptive (Library > Rename Photos …). One awesome feature of Lightroom's batch naming function is a token called *Folder Name*. I want my image names based on the folder where they reside, since the folder name is descriptive. Then I want a date, a unique number, and a file extension (**Figure 3**). Lightroom shows an example of how the template will name the images. Since I don't shoot more than 999 images of one subject in a day, three digits after the date is enough to give each file a unique name. This naming method tells me the folder in which the image resides and its capture date. If I move images from other

folders, all I have to do is select them, press the F2 key (rename photo), and select my custom naming template to update the names based on their new location.

Outside Lightroom, the file name tells me a lot about an image before I open it. That's why folder names are important. Notice that I have nested folders, which aids in file naming. For example, I go to Photoshop World twice a year. I created a folder called PSW, and within that folder I have created sub-folders for each year (**Figure 1**). Use whatever folder name, and thus file name, makes sense to you.

The last step is key-wording. Some photographers spend huge amounts of time on key-wording, others use simple systems. Keywords allow you to search among all folders and to select images that could have multiple references. My system is pretty simple, but I know others who use literally thousands of keywords. For example, I use the keyword Travel for any image I shoot on the road. Then I have a keyword for each city I've gone to. I can find all the images I shot in Sydney by simply asking Lightroom to find them, but Sydney is an offspring of the keyword Travel.

Keywords can be hierarchical, allowing you to find all the images with the Travel keyword or all the Travel keywords that also contain Portland. It's this kind of functionality that makes DAM so useful: the ability to find images based on several criterion. It's a far cry from opening a folder of 15,000 images and attempting to find all the images shot in 2007, in Sydney, at ISO 100, with a 35mm lens. Yes, all that metadata exists, some of it automatically recorded from your camera. With a DAM system and good organizing strategies, finding these images is a snap. ∎