

## Fundamental Editing Case Study #7

# STREET PHOTOGRAPHY WITH SMOG PROBLEMS

By Kent DuFault

I took this photograph while on a trip to China. This scene was located at Tiananmen Square, which had become quite a tourist destination.

The man pictured here is a tourist photographer. He would take tourist pictures in front of the Tiananmen Tower. He would then bring his photos to this RV, which served as a mobile darkroom. His partner would process the prints, and a third partner would sell them.

The day that I was here, the smog was terrible. It was hard to breathe just walking around.

This man was running around asking people to have their picture taken.

I saw him again later sitting in front of the RV, looking exhausted. I took the picture quickly, as I wasn't sure if it would upset him.

I was cautious about what and who I photographed while I was in China.



Image 001 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

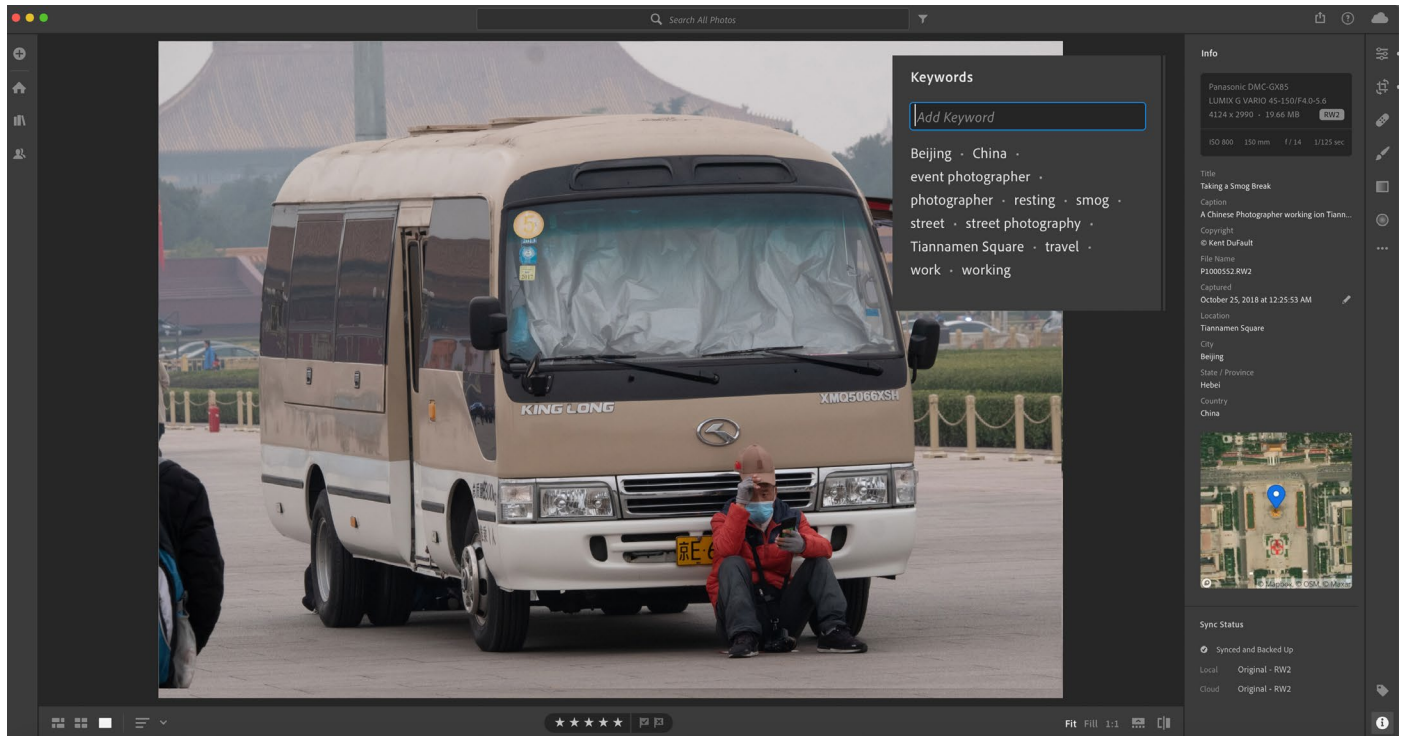


Image 002 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Most street photography has little value for sales, as I don't generally ask for model releases. However, I still complete the metadata and keywords section of Lightroom for my own benefit.



Image 003 – Photograph and Illustration by Kent DuFault

My intent was to highlight the man as the subject with the RV as a backdrop. I saw the potential for the RV to work as leading lines towards the man, and perhaps provide some layering interest to the composition.

The question mark is located in an area that I don't need and is somewhat of an eye snag. I will likely crop some of this area out of the picture.

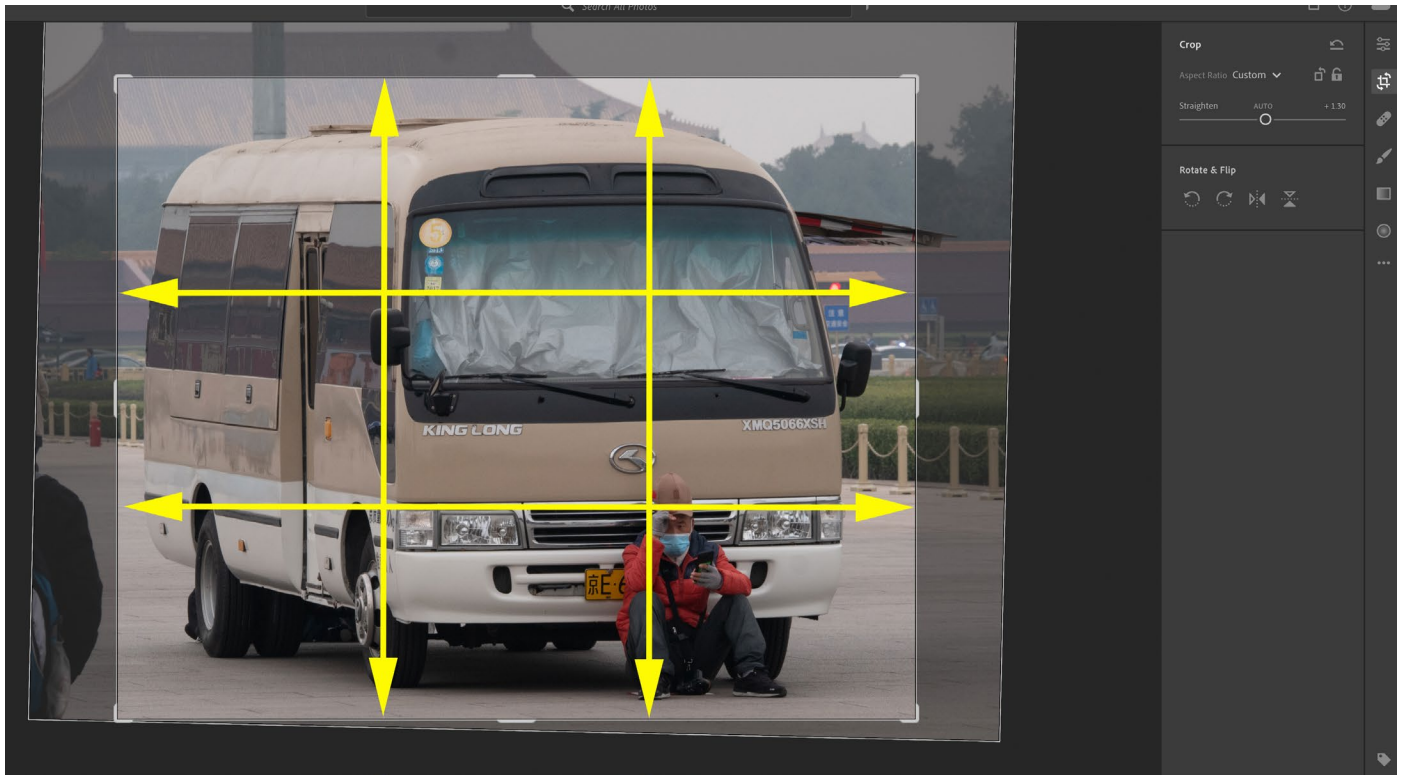


Image 004 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

After studying the photograph, this is the crop that I decided would work out the best. I didn't remove as much area from the right-hand side of the frame as I originally anticipated. That was necessary to keep the man positioned in the right place within the framework for the Rule of Thirds.

As an alternative, I can remove visual weight from that area on the right using some other tools later in the Fundamental Editing list.



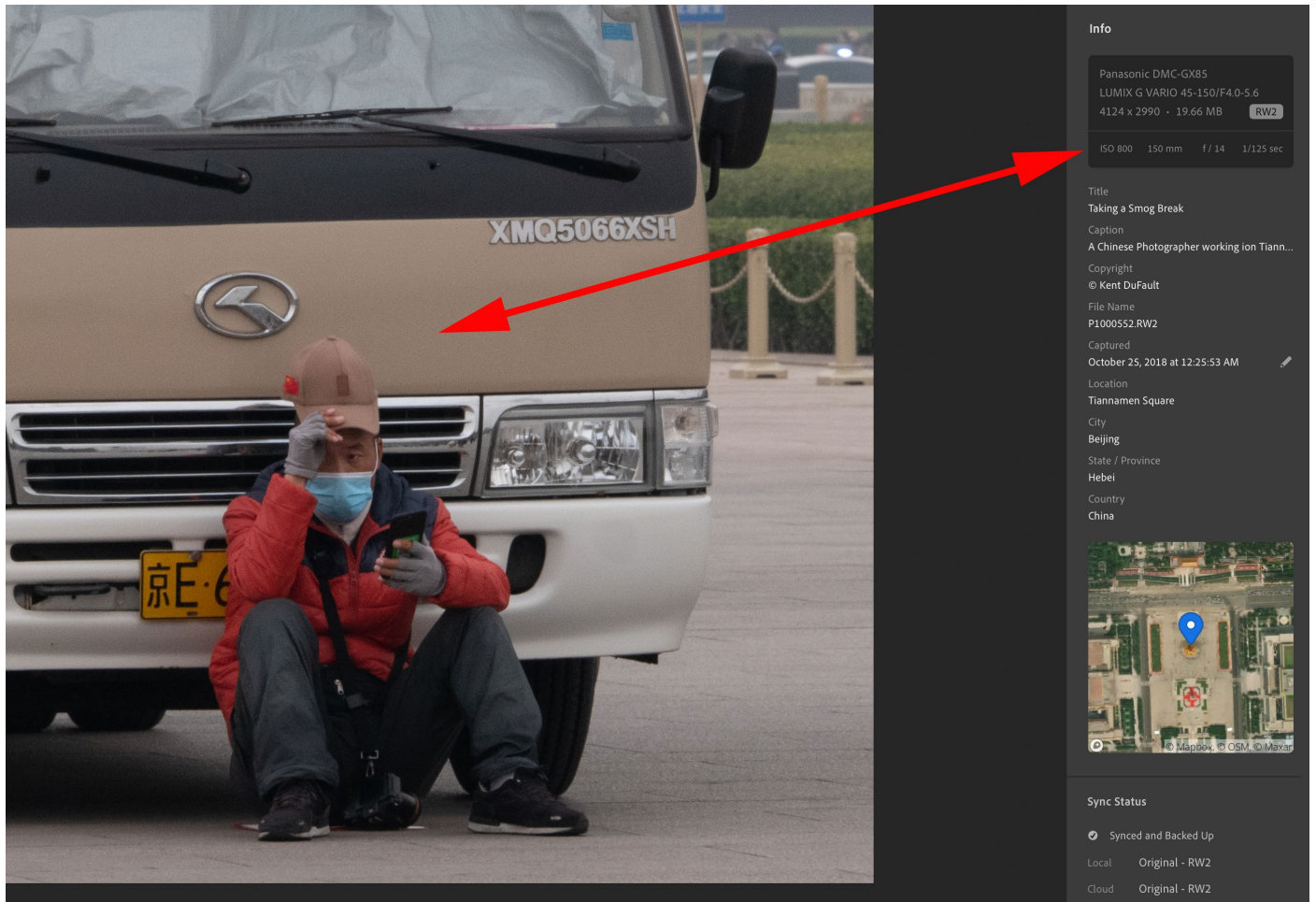


Image 005 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I checked for noise, and I couldn't see any even at a 200% Preview. I'll skip the noise reduction step.



Image 006 – Screenshots by Kent DuFault

This photo had an excellent distribution of tones across the entire histogram scale. However, on the Highlights/Whites end of the scale, the values did drop off before reaching the far right.

This indicates a slight underexposure when the picture was created.

I added +0.31 to the global Exposure slider. If you look at the Preview Window, within Image 006, you can see the before image (left) and the after (right) for this Exposure edit.



Image 007 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Smog plays havoc with white balance. I manually adjusted the Temp and Tint sliders using the Preview Window as my guide.

However, this is going to take a bit more detailed editing to achieve a proper WB (white balance).



Image 008 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I decided that step one towards a better WB would be to clean up the whites. I opened the Color Mixer and selected the Color Picker Tool. Using the tool, I attempted to clean up the whites first using the sky as my selection point and then using the bumper of the RV.

The white balance improved, but I still wasn't satisfied.



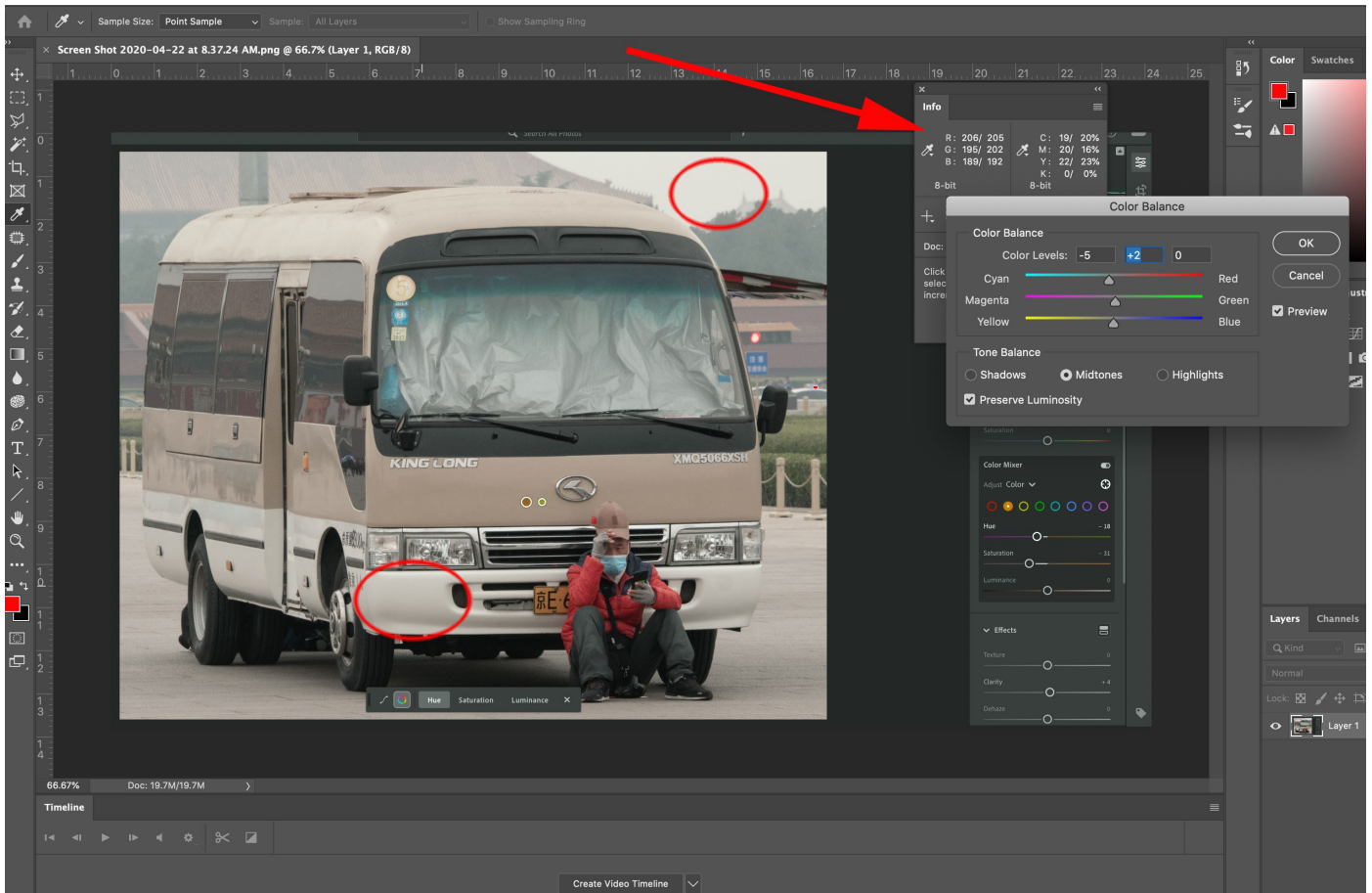


Image 009 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

One tool that Adobe left out of the Lightroom CC software is the RGB Info palette. That is unforgivable, in my opinion. If you're using Lightroom Classic, then you still have access to it.

I'm going to switch over to Photoshop for a moment so that I can see the RGB values.

Being able to see those values is the only way to accurately clean up a color bias.

After tweaking the Color Balance in Photoshop, I returned to Lightroom CC.



Image 010 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

My fundamental edits began to reveal some digital noise, so I returned to the Noise Reduction step and applied a Noise Reduction setting of 31 in Lightroom.

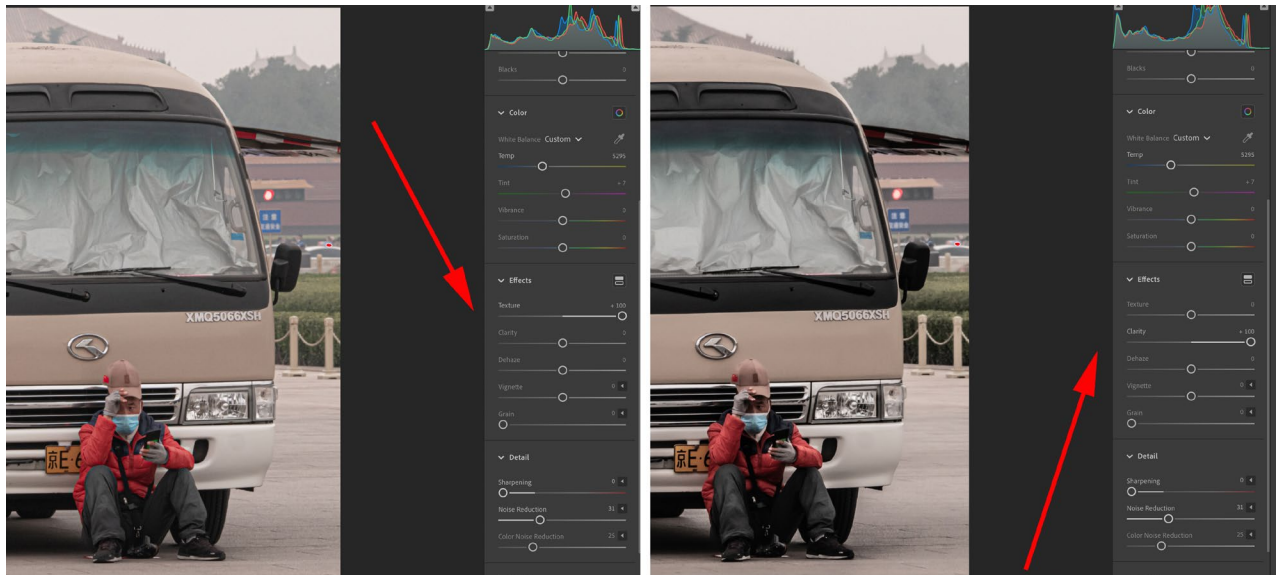


Image 011 – Screenshots by Kent DuFault

The next steps in the Fundamental Editing list are Clarity and Texture.

As I've previously indicated, I work with these two settings in tandem.

I maxed out each slider to visually see what the effect was on this photo.

I didn't like what Clarity was doing at all and left it at 0.

The Texture slider did an excellent job of pulling out some details in the man's clothing and on the RV. I set it at +35.



Image 012 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

The image is improving. However, the man doesn't really pop out as the subject. I need to work with layering, lines, and color saturation to give him more visual weight.

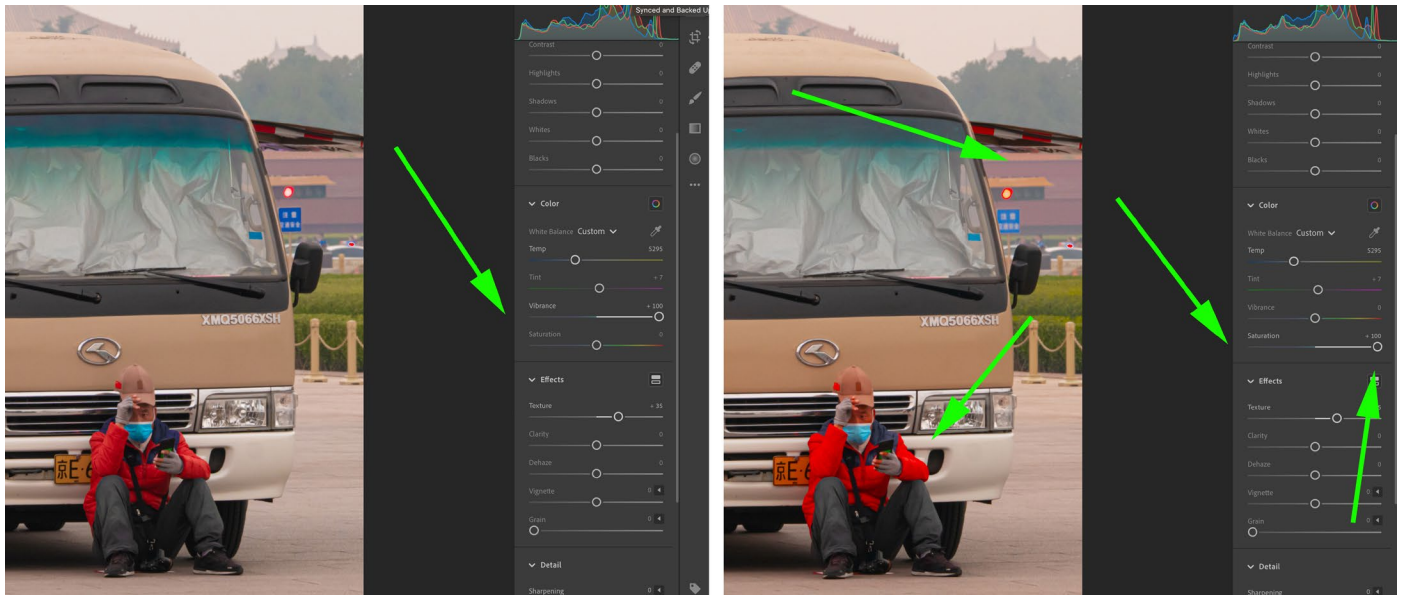


Image 013 – Screenshots by Kent DuFault

I also tend to work with the Vibrance and Saturation sliders in tandem. It's usually some mix of the two that provides the best result.

I always start out by maxing out each slider to get a clear picture of how it is affecting the shot.

Adding some color value to the coat and the mask really helps. However, I need to keep an eye on those areas in the background. I don't want to attract too much attention back there or add color saturation to the smog.





Image 014 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I decided to do a global Vibrance setting of +35, and I left Saturation at 0. You'll notice that I'm not big on supersaturating colors. I like to try and keep my images looking realistic for the most part.

I may return to the coat and the mask when I get to the localized editing stage of the Fundamental Editing list.

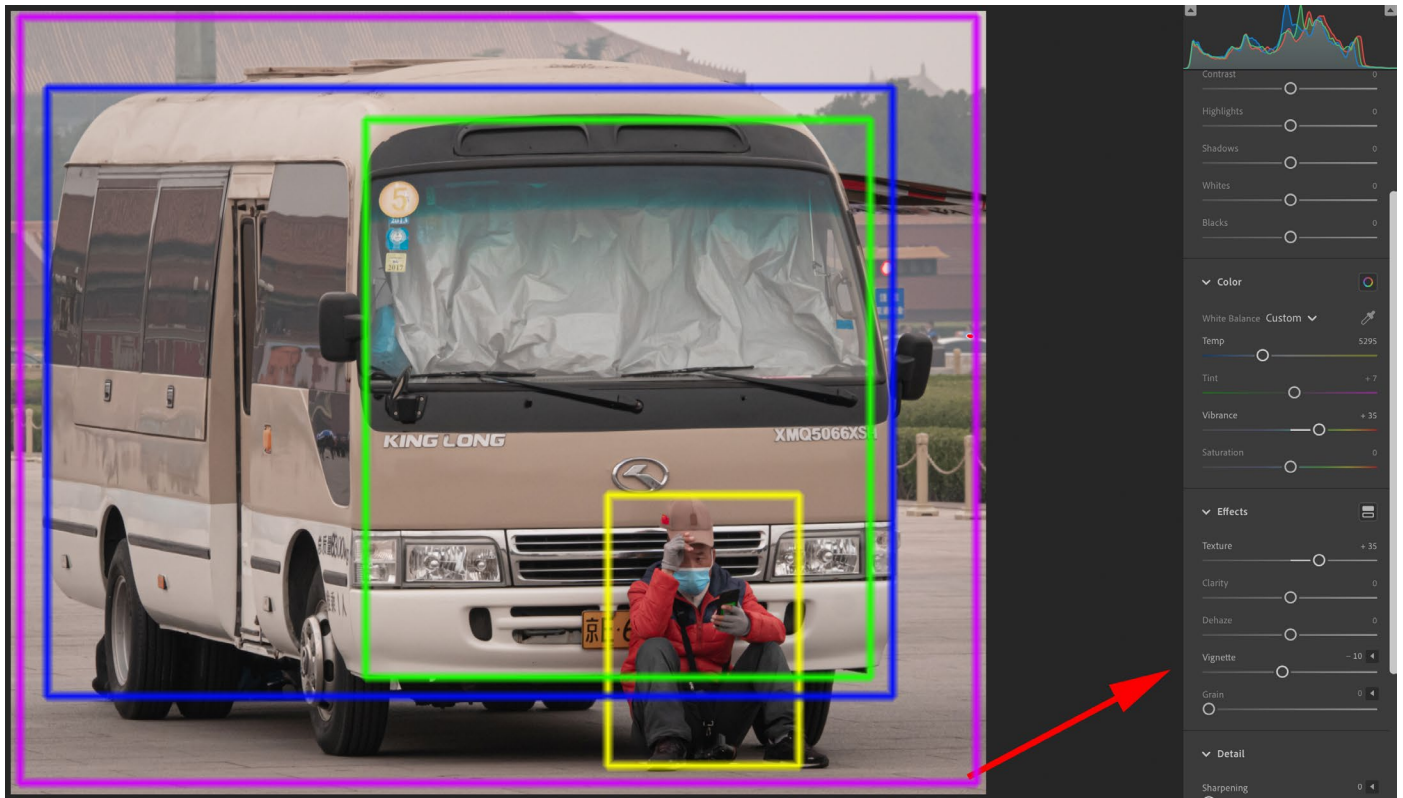


Image 015 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I wanted to show you how I see the layering working for this photo.

- 1) The man is layer one
- 2) The front of the RV is layer two
- 3) The rest of the RV is layer three
- 4) The background is layer four

To start that process, I'm going to darken the background edges of the frame by creating a -10 Vignette.



Image 016 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Dehaze is the next step on the FE list. I played around with it but saw no benefit. I'm leaving it set to 0.



Image 017 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Now we come to the localized editing steps. This portion of the FE list will bring this picture to life.

One of the reasons that I took this picture was because this man was a hardworking photographer.

However, it was difficult to see the camera with it hanging in the shadows.

So, step one with the localized editing was to lighten up the pants and the camera. Take notice that the process involved three settings: Exposure, Shadows, and Blacks.





Image 018 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Now, I'm going to work on his jacket. I will lighten it as well. Plus, I will slightly increase the color saturation level.



Image 019 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Now that I have the coat looking good. Let's take a look at the mask.

I'm going to really make that mask pop. I increased the Shadows and Blacks and then increased the color Saturation to +50.

**Note:** I like raising color Saturation levels locally versus globally. When you view the final picture, take note of how his jacket really pops in color as well as the mask, but his skin tones look normal. How many photos have you seen where the Saturation has been globally maxed up, and people in the photograph look red? Don't be that photographer. Local editing for Saturation levels is using professionalism.



Image 020 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I am now creating a fourth mask at the vehicle license plate that will attract attention to the subject through brightness level and color saturation. It will serve as a focal point.



Image 021 Screenshots by Kent DuFault

Let's compare the work completed around the subject area so far. On the left is the original image, and on the right is a Preview after my four localized edits around the subject.





Image 022 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

A point of higher contrast is always an eye-catcher within a photo composition. Plus, depending upon how a composition is laid out, the eyes will gravitate first toward the brightest white or the darkest black area within the frame.

With this knowledge, I am going to make the RV bumper the brightest white. Using the Adjustment Brush, I applied a mask with these settings: Contrast +10 and Highlights +10.





Image 023 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Now, using that same knowledge, I am going to darken the shadow areas in the grill area above the bumper. I created a mask and set the Exposure to -24. This will deepen the black shadow areas.

**Note:** It will be helpful to you when reading these case studies to thoroughly examine each step in

the Fundamental Editing process. The edits all have a purpose. However, even more importantly, when viewing the end result, you can't tell that any work has been done to the picture!



Image 024 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

You can see in Image 024 that I've created quite a few masks on the front of the RV. The last one was on the windshield, where I added Contrast +27 and Texture +54. This helped to create another layer.

Study the nuance in the variation of color, tone, and texture across the front of the RV. These steps all help add visual weight to the area occupied by the subject.



Image 025 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I made some tweaks along the side of the RV to help add some leading lines.



Image 026 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Image 026 shows you all of the localized Fundamental Edits that were performed on this picture.





Image 028 – Screenshots by Kent DuFault

I fussed around with the overall color in Lightroom once again, and the left side of Image 028 was the best I could get.

I then took the image into Photoshop and fussed around with the overall color, while having the advantage of the RGB readout. The right side of Image 028 was my final result with Photoshop, and it was much more pleasing to my eye. I went with the Photoshop version.



Image 028 – Photograph and Fundamental Editing by Kent DuFault

*The original camera file is on the left, and my post-processed version is on the right.*





Image 029 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Here is my final photograph.