

## Fundamental Editing Case Study #4

# USING FUNDAMENTAL EDITING TO ADD COMPOSITION TO A BACKLIT LANDSCAPE

By Kent DuFault

Image 001 is the original image file as it came out of the camera.

One might look at this picture and think, “This is fine! There is detail everywhere, and the exposure is good. The color looks alright. Why does this need Fundamental Editing?”

My answer is this:

It needs Fundamental Editing to improve the composition. In its current state, the waterfall and sun carry equal visual weight; there is too much balance. On top of that, the picture is very flat in the tonal range and color saturation.

With the use of FE, I can provide a better path for the viewer to venture through this photo.



Image 001 – Photograph by Kent DuFault



Image 002 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

If this photo is too balanced between the sun and the waterfall, then the intent stage of FE (Fundamental Editing) is critical.

I have to establish where I want a viewer's eyes to go.

The overall subject is the landscape scene. That's for sure. But for a quality landscape image, you really must have someplace within the frame that becomes the final resting spot for a viewer.

I have decided that the area within my red outline is going to be that spot. This means that the area within the yellow oval must be subdued in visual weight as relative to the red zone.

The sun will become a focal point.



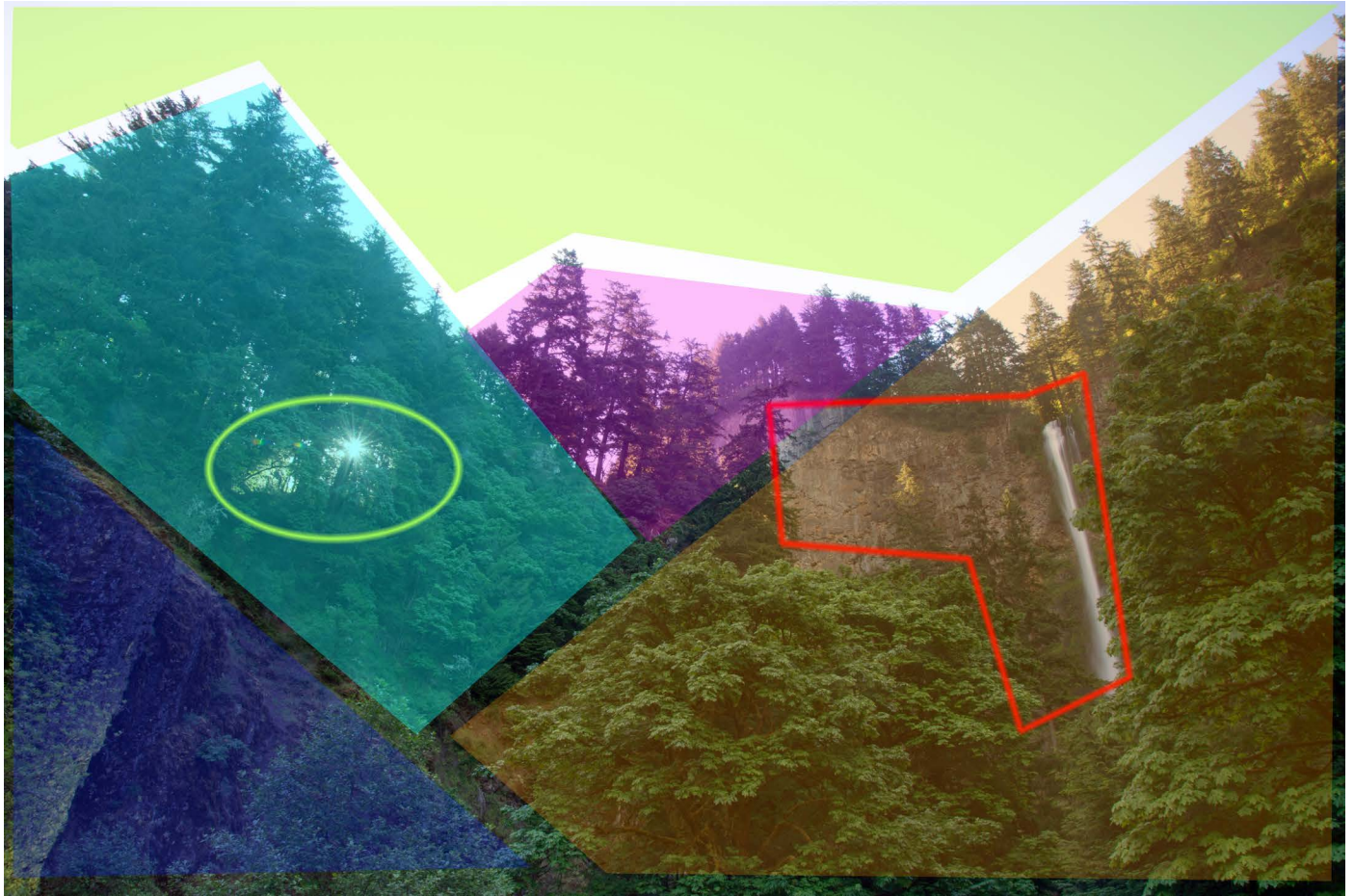


Image 002a – Illustration by Kent DuFault

Remember back in Case Study #1, when I talked about dividing the picture into puzzle pieces? I use this technique a lot with my photographs, both in the shooting phase and in the post-processing steps.

I'm going to use it in the FE process of this shot as well. Once again, I will be establishing a layering effect.

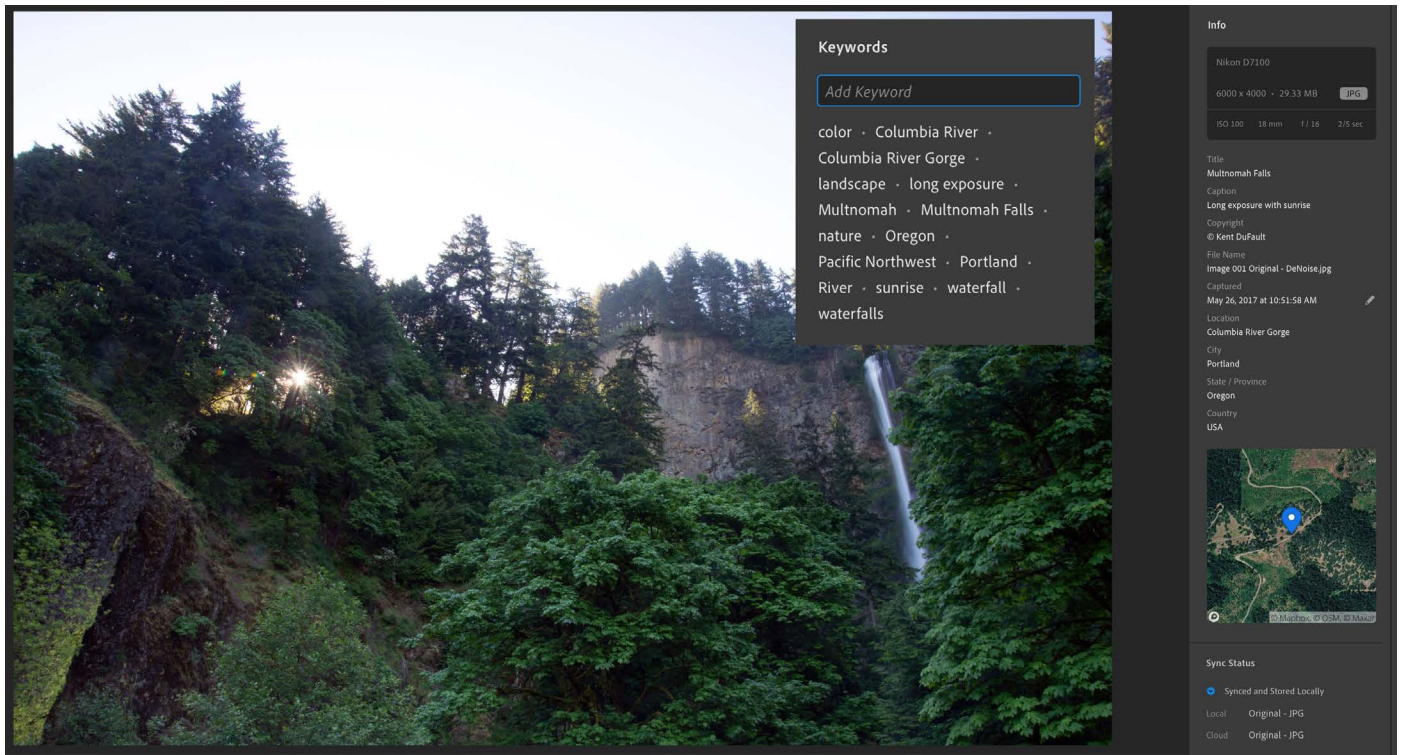


Image 02b – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Following the steps laid out in the FE list, I am now putting in important metadata and keywords. This photograph was taken at ISO 100, f/16, at 2/5ths of a second. The long exposure was used to blur the water.



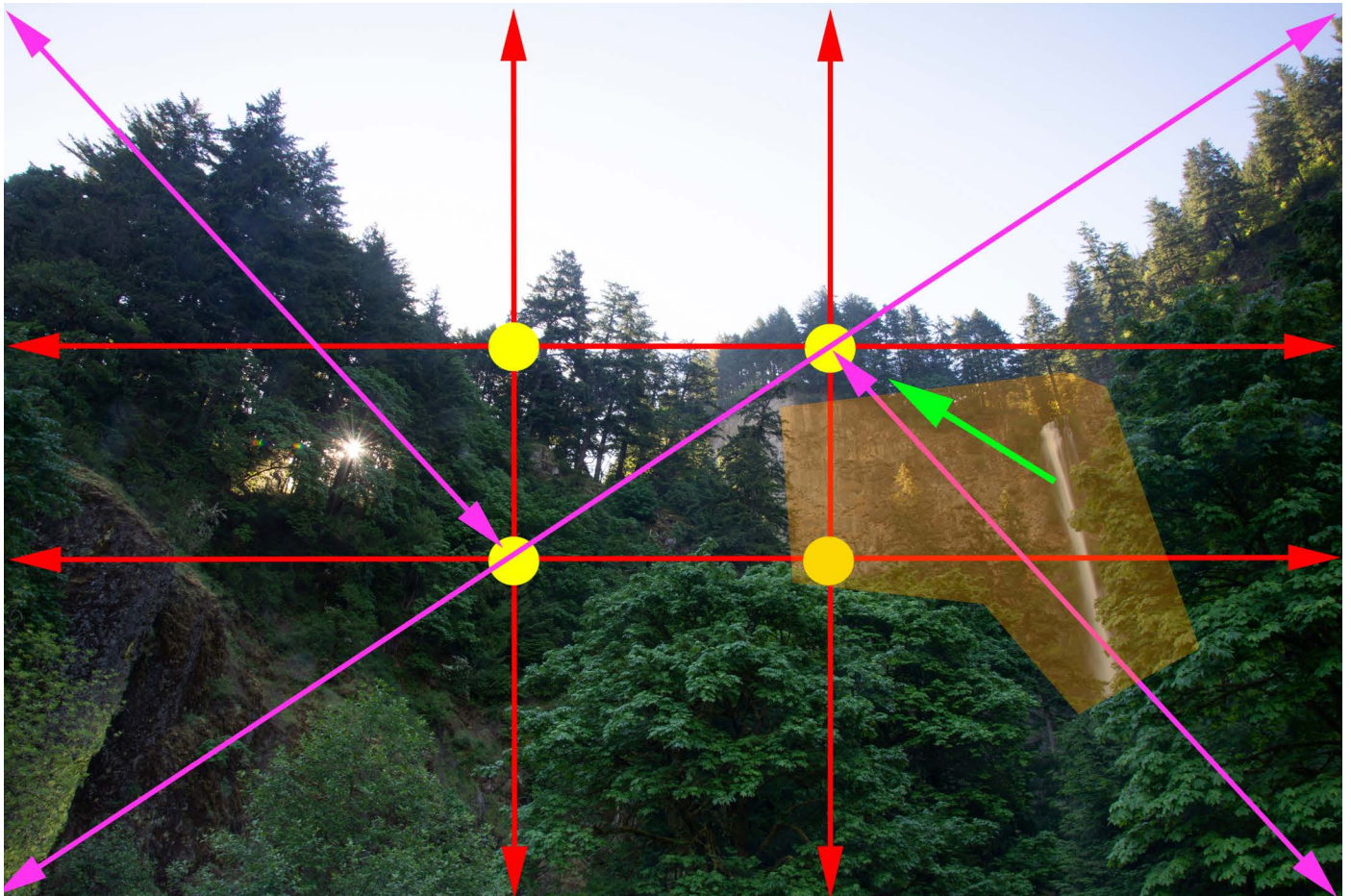


Image 003 – Illustration by Kent DuFault

I studied this picture with several different crop overlays to determine if a crop would improve my composition.

This was a rare case where I felt that absolutely none of the frame could be lost.

A crop will be of no use here.

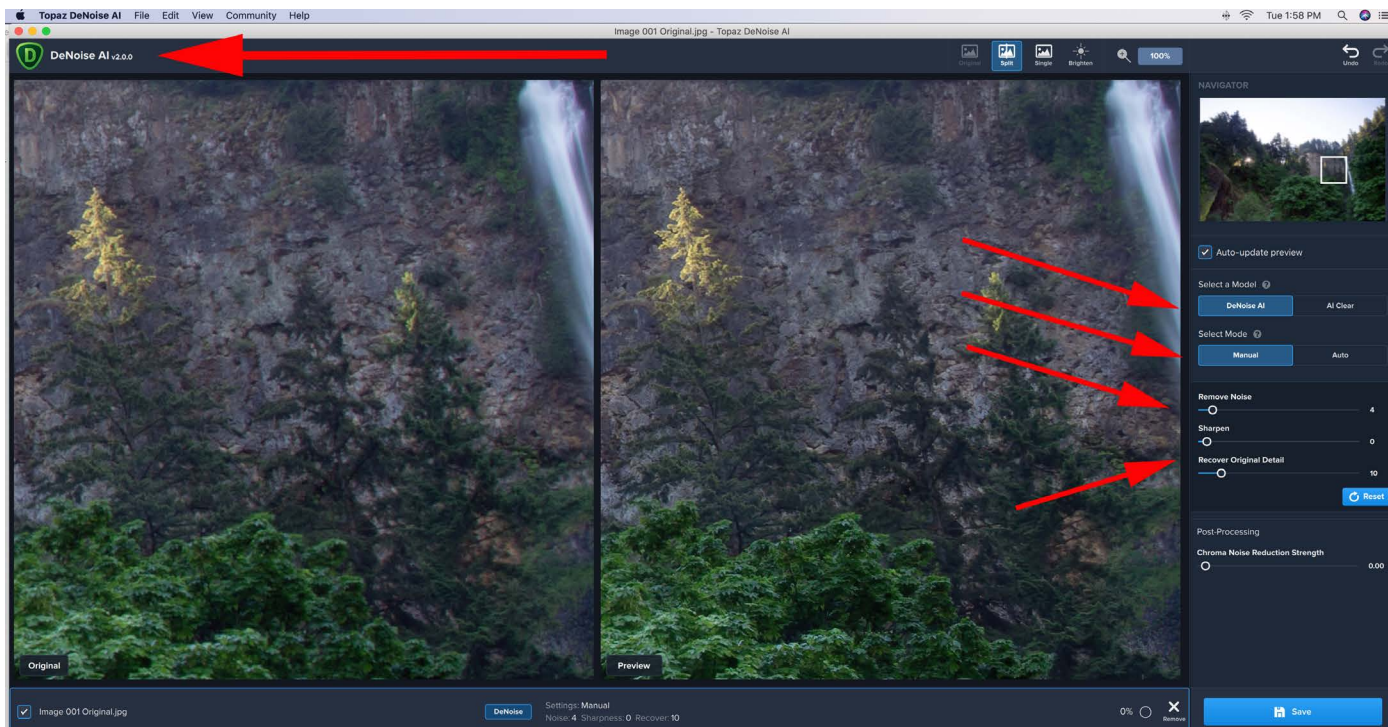


Image 004 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Even though this photo was created at ISO 100, it still displayed a fair amount of noise due to the backlighting and the predominance of deeply shadowed areas.

**Note:** I often correct for Noise right within the Lightroom software suite. My other noise reduction tool is DeNoise AI by Topaz Labs. I will typically use DeNoise AI when the noise is tricky in nature, or I plan to print a large photograph. I thought I would introduce the software in at least one of the case studies.

Image 004 depicts the DeNoise AI workspace. The left preview window shows the original, and the right window depicts the file with DeNoise AI applied.

The software is pretty simple. I typically use the following settings: Preview set to 100%, DeNoise AI (versus AI Clear option), Manual Mode, and then adjust Remove Noise, Sharpen, Recover Original Detail as needed.

I rarely use the Chroma Noise Reduction Strength feature.



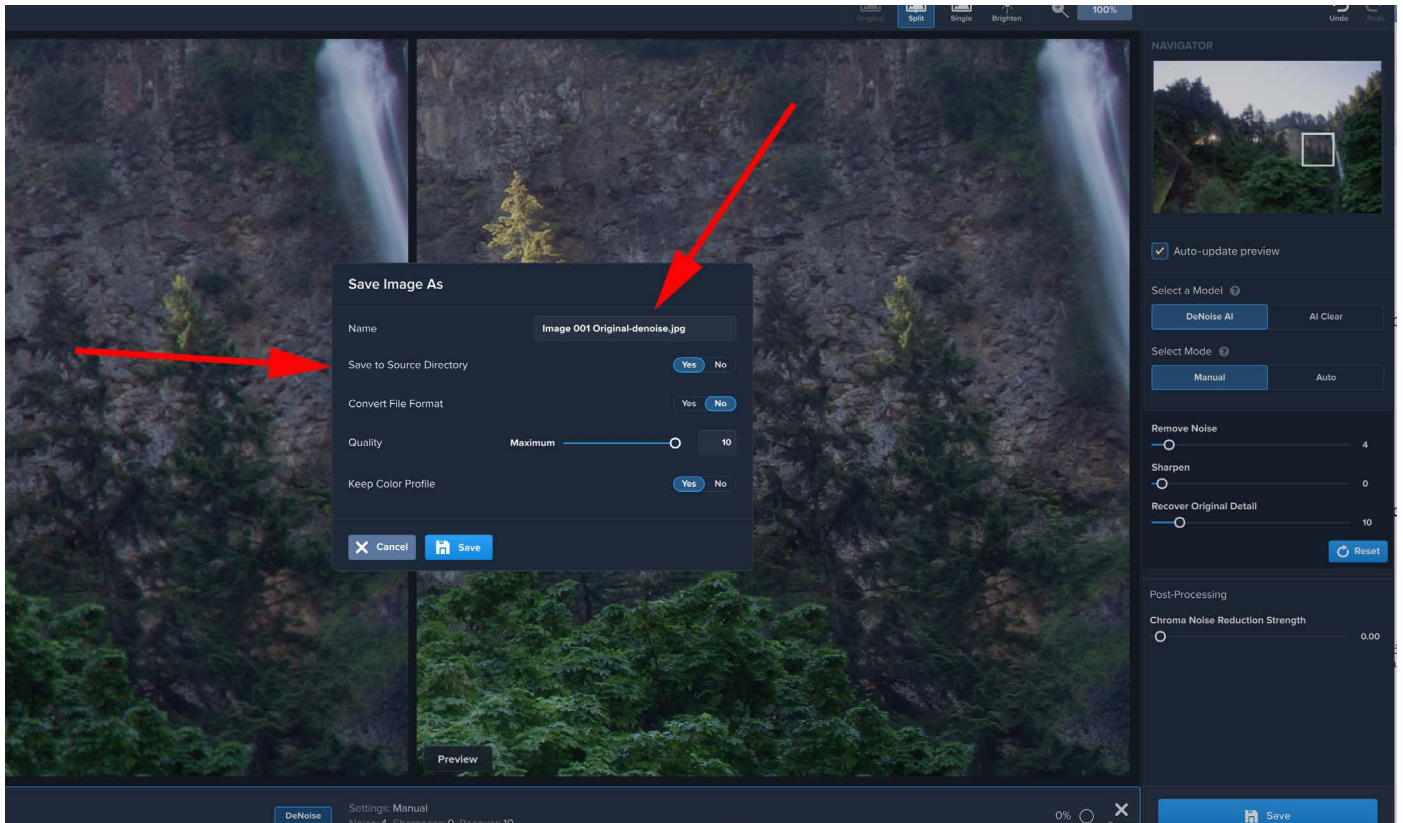


Image 005 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

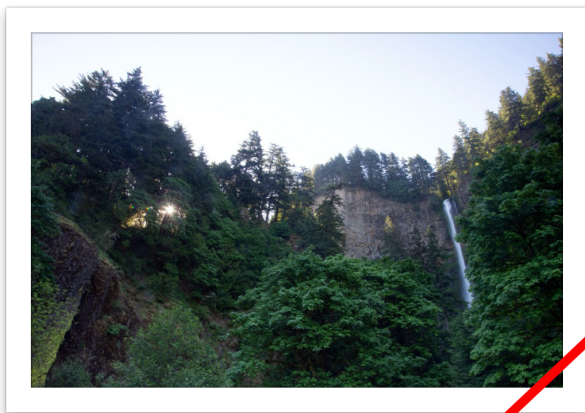


Image 001 Original-denoise.jpg

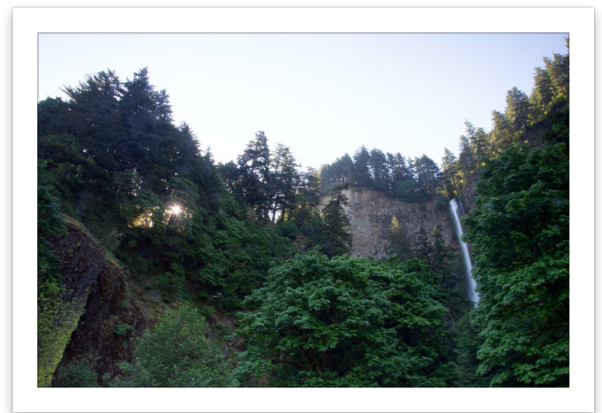


Image 001 Original.jpg

Image 006 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

*If I have already imported the original camera file into Lightroom, I must now also import the DeNoise AI version of the file. I give the file a unique name to help differentiate between the two files. For example, if this file were named "Multnomah Falls at Sunrise," then the Topaz Labs version will be called "Multnomah Falls at Sunrise DeNoise."*

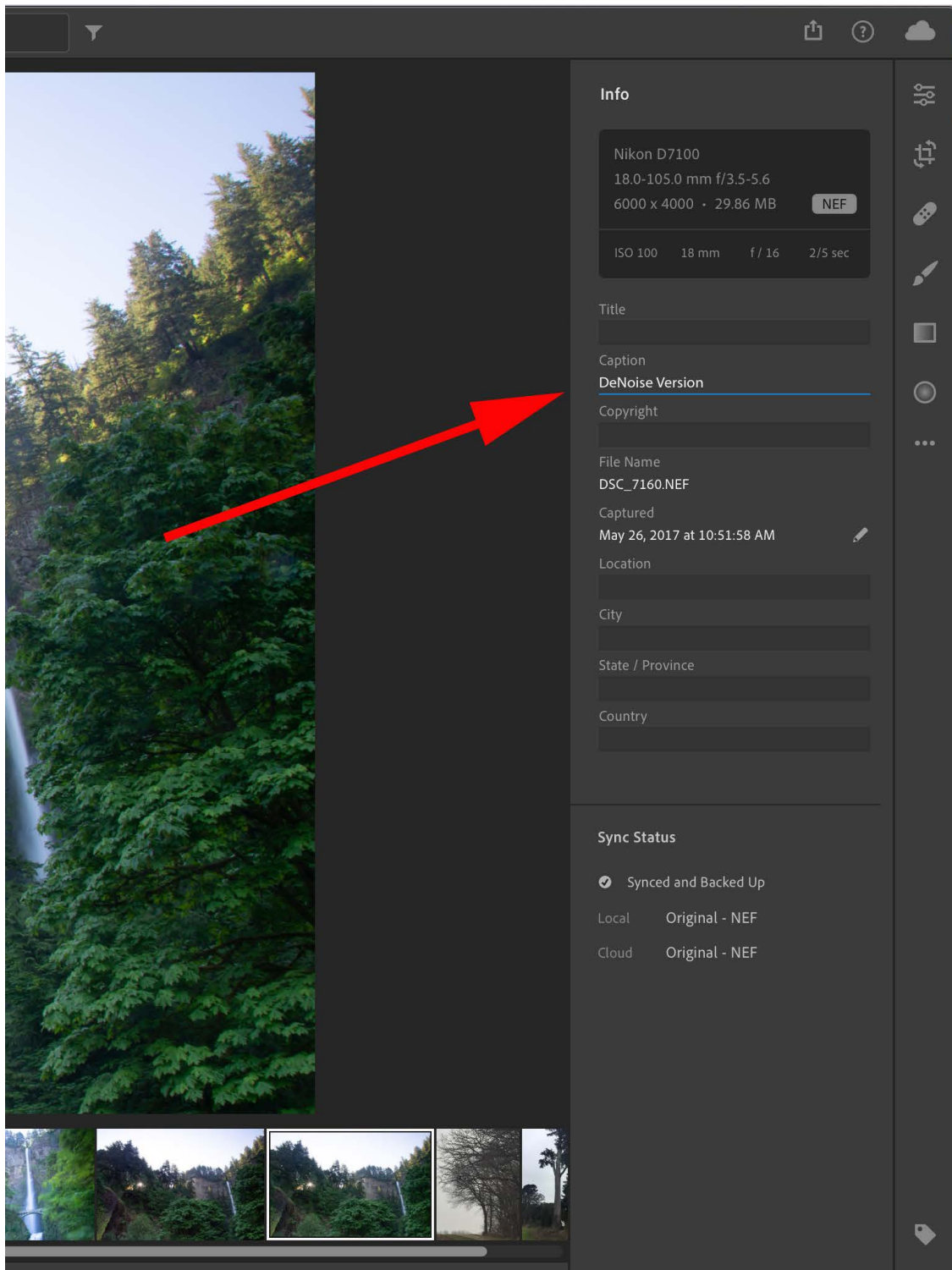


Image 007 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I also add "DeNoise Version" to the Caption and the Keywords.

**Note:** These steps are only necessary if you use a third-party noise reduction software. In all honesty, the Lightroom Noise Tool has gotten much better than it used to be. I find myself using it more and more.





Image 008 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

When post-processing your Fundamental Editing steps, always turn on the histogram. This is a vital tool in creating the best picture possible.

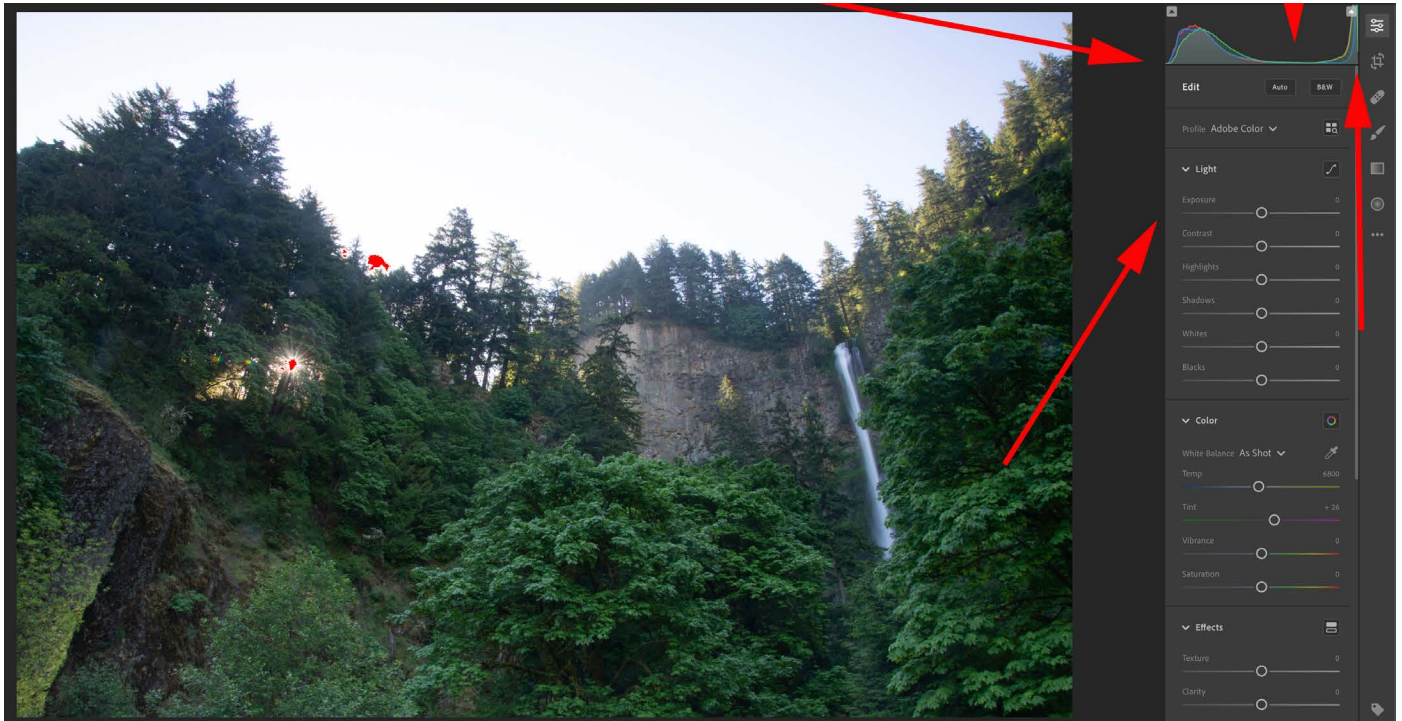


Image 009 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

The next step on the FE list is a global exposure adjustment.

- Make sure that the Shadows and Highlights Clipping Indicators are turned on. They are the two triangles at the top of the histogram. Click them on and off as a test.
- Study this histogram for a moment (Image 009).

The histogram, depicted in Image 009, tells us that this photo has high contrast. When you have a peak within the histogram on the far left (Shadows) and on the far right (Highlights), and the middle section is flat, this indicates high contrast.

Secondly, when a peak is 'cut off' at either end, it means that the end of the tone scale is clipped off (detail is lost).

What end is clipped off in this photograph? The highlight end is clipped.

If you have the Clipping Indicators turned on, you will see a mask over the Preview Image that shows you where the Clipping is occurring. Highlight Clipping appears as a red mask, and the Shadows Clipping appears as a blue mask.

In Image 009, you can see that the Highlight Clipping is located around the sun and in the sky.



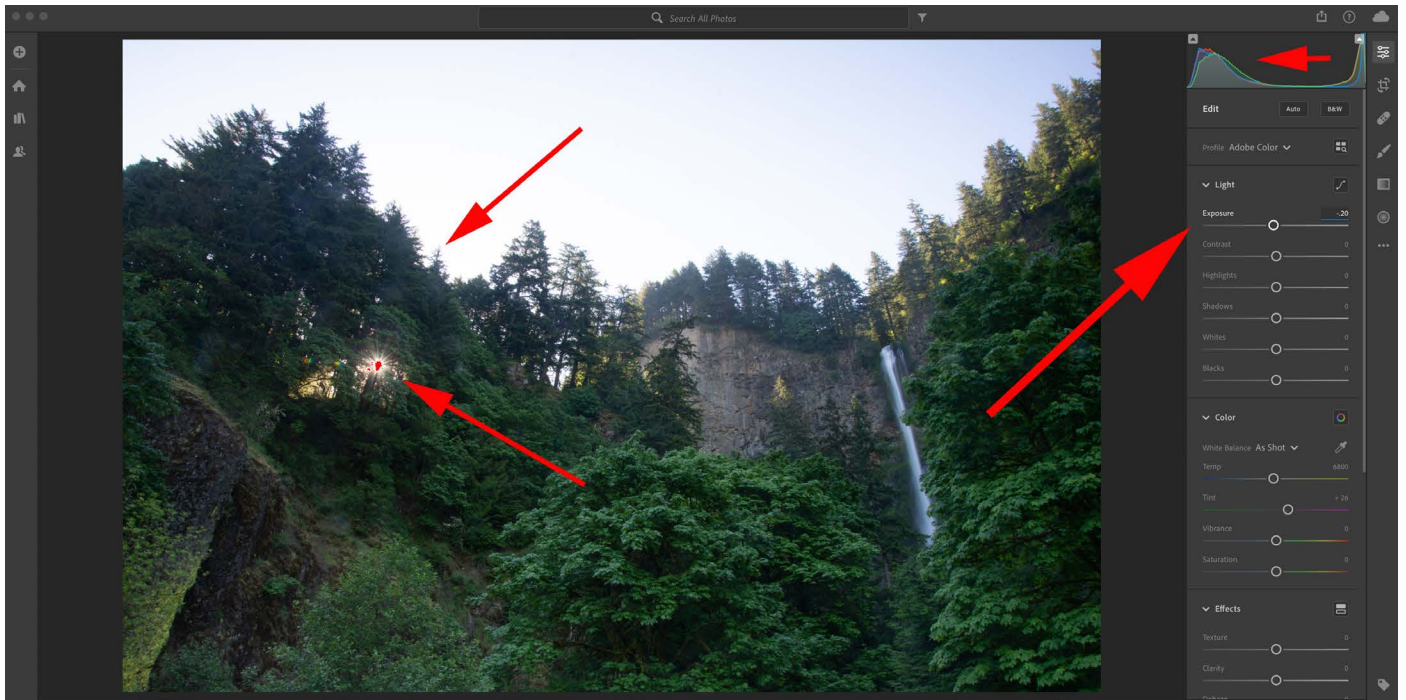


Image 010 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Reducing the global Exposure slider to -20 reduced the Highlights Clipping to only the rising sun. This is good, and I have now set my White Point.

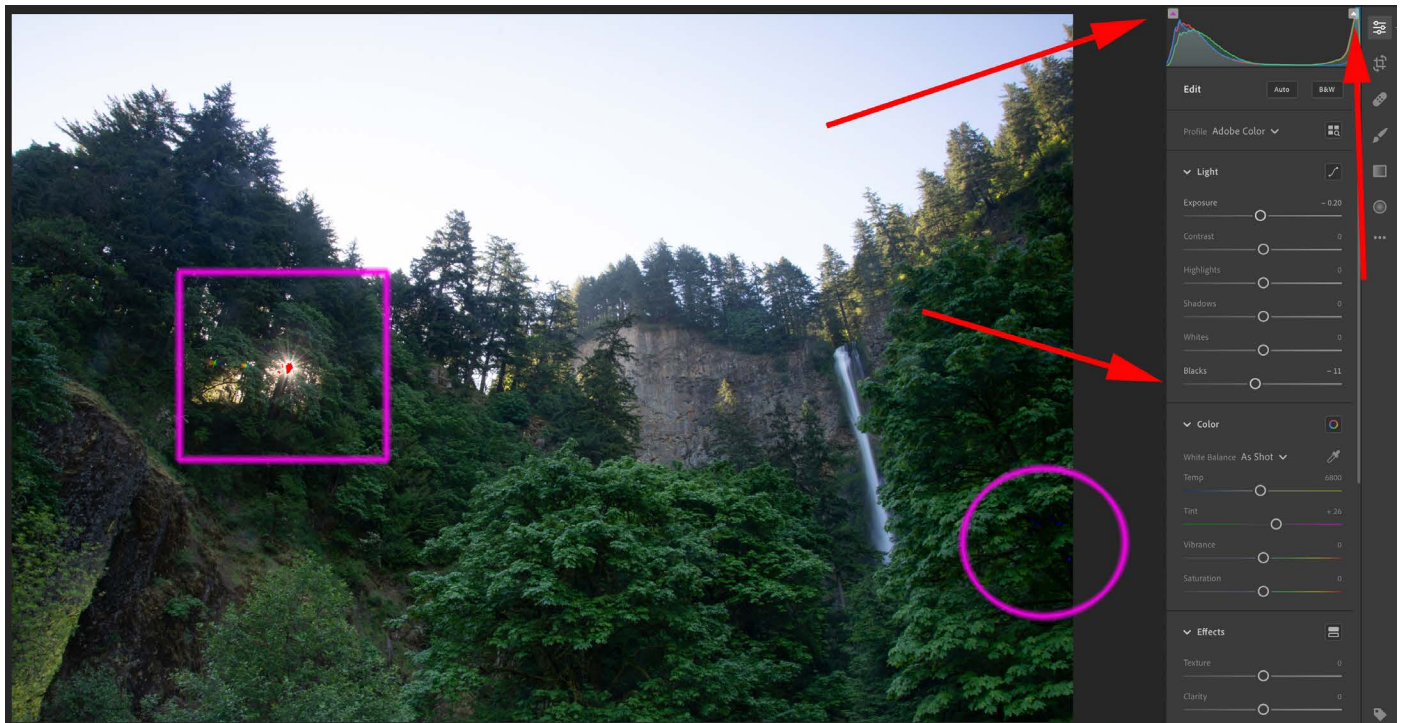


Image 011 Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I moved the Black slider to -11. Some Shadows Clipping began to show up in the trees where you see the purple circle. This sets my Black Point.

**Note:** Adobe kind of dropped the ball a bit on their labeling in Lightroom (in my opinion). They labeled the Clipping of the left end of the histogram as Shadows Clipping. However, it's the Blacks slider that affects the left end of the

histogram scale. The Shadows slider affects the lower third of the histogram scale. Test this for yourself. Open an image in Lightroom that has many middle tones and almost nothing on the black end of the histogram scale. First, slide the Blacks slider to the left and watch what happens to the histogram. Now return it to zero and repeat the process with the Shadows slider.





Image 012 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Our next step is to look at the White Balance (WB). The red arrow in Image 012 shows that I have a unique problem with this picture.

One part of the picture, around the sun, is decidedly warm in the color temperature. At the same time, the area around the waterfall is decidedly cool in color temperature.

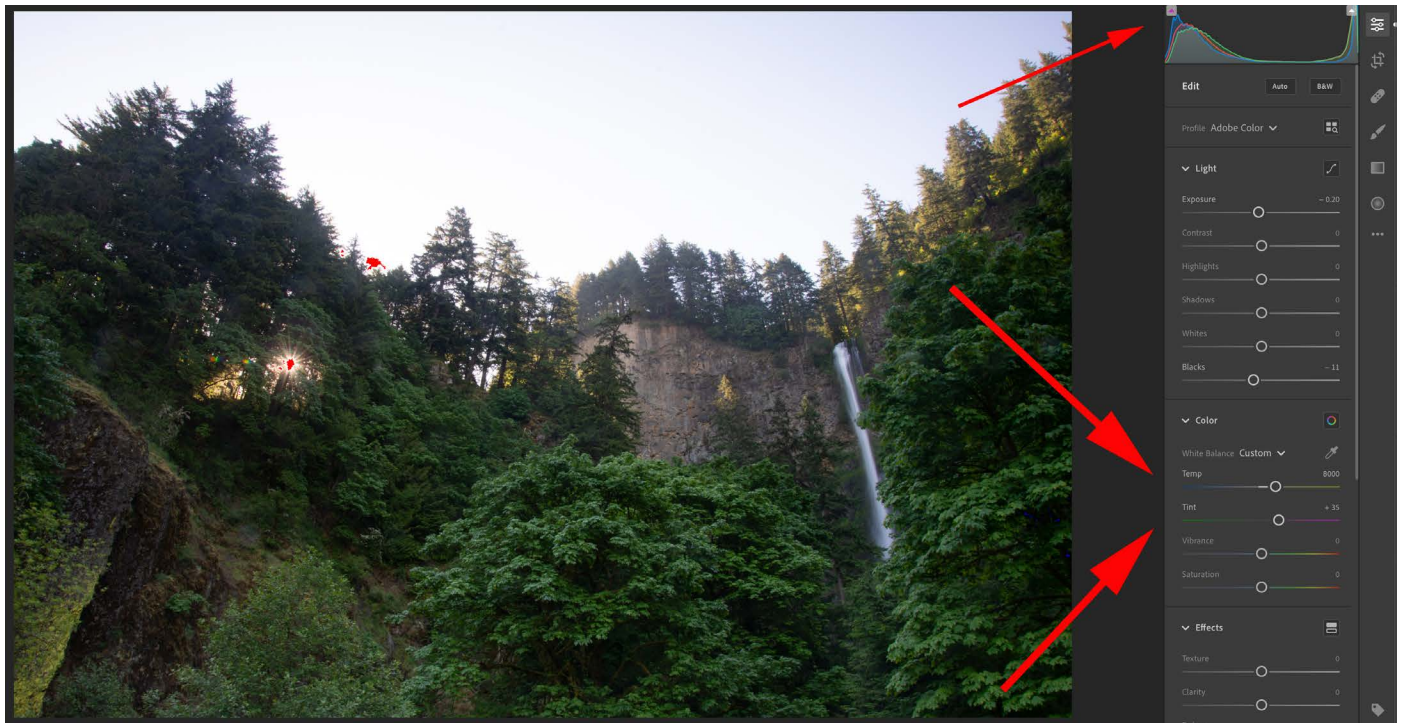


Image 013 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I increased the Temp setting under the WB workspace from +6800 to +8000. I also increased the Tint from +26 to +35.

These changes added warmer tones globally across the entire photo, which also opened up the shadow areas without creating an unnatural appearance around the sun-drenched regions to the left.

Take notice that this adjustment added some Highlights Clipping back into the sky. You should always review Clipping a second time at the end of the FE list.





Image 014 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

The left side of Image 014 is untouched by the Saturation adjustment. The right side depicts an increase in the Saturation of +45.

A lot of folks like to really saturate their colors, even beyond what I'm showing here.

I generally don't do that to my images unless it's for a special effect. I call mega-saturated colors the 'cartoon look.' I prefer to keep my pictures, especially nature images, looking realistic.

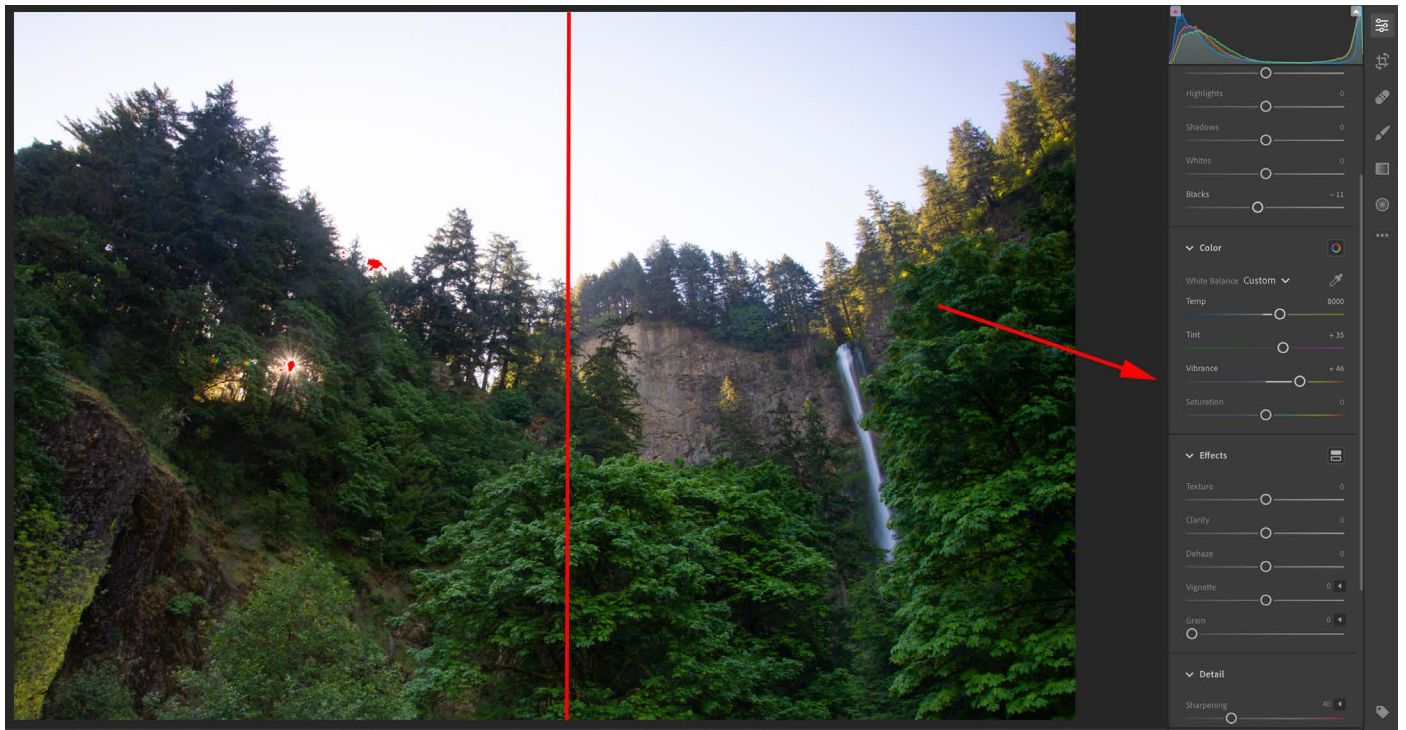


Image 015 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Image 015 depicts the original on the left and a Vibrance setting of +46 on the right. In this case, Vibrance does a better job of boosting color Saturation while maintaining a realistic look.



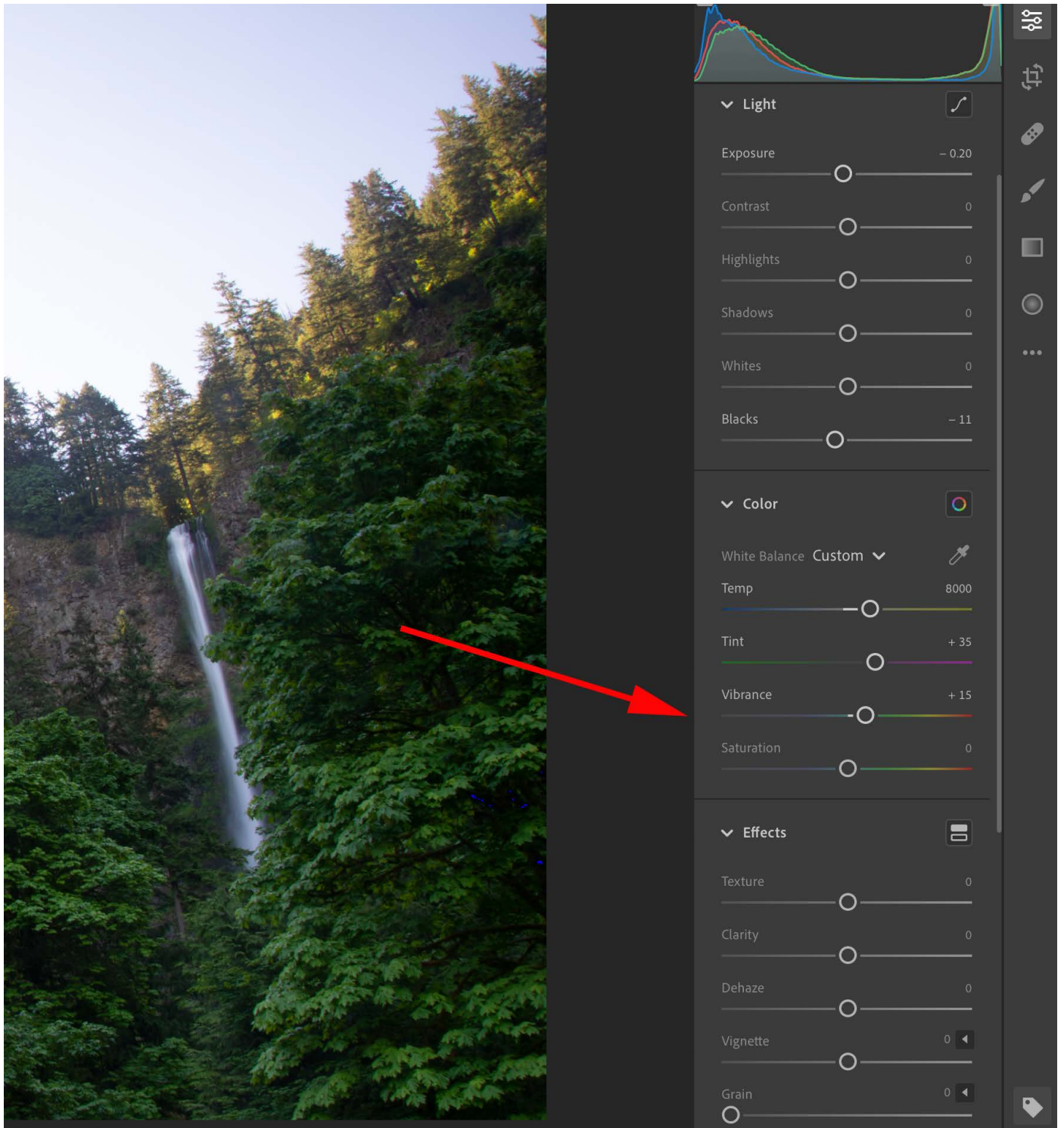


Image 016 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I decided on a final Vibrance setting of +15.

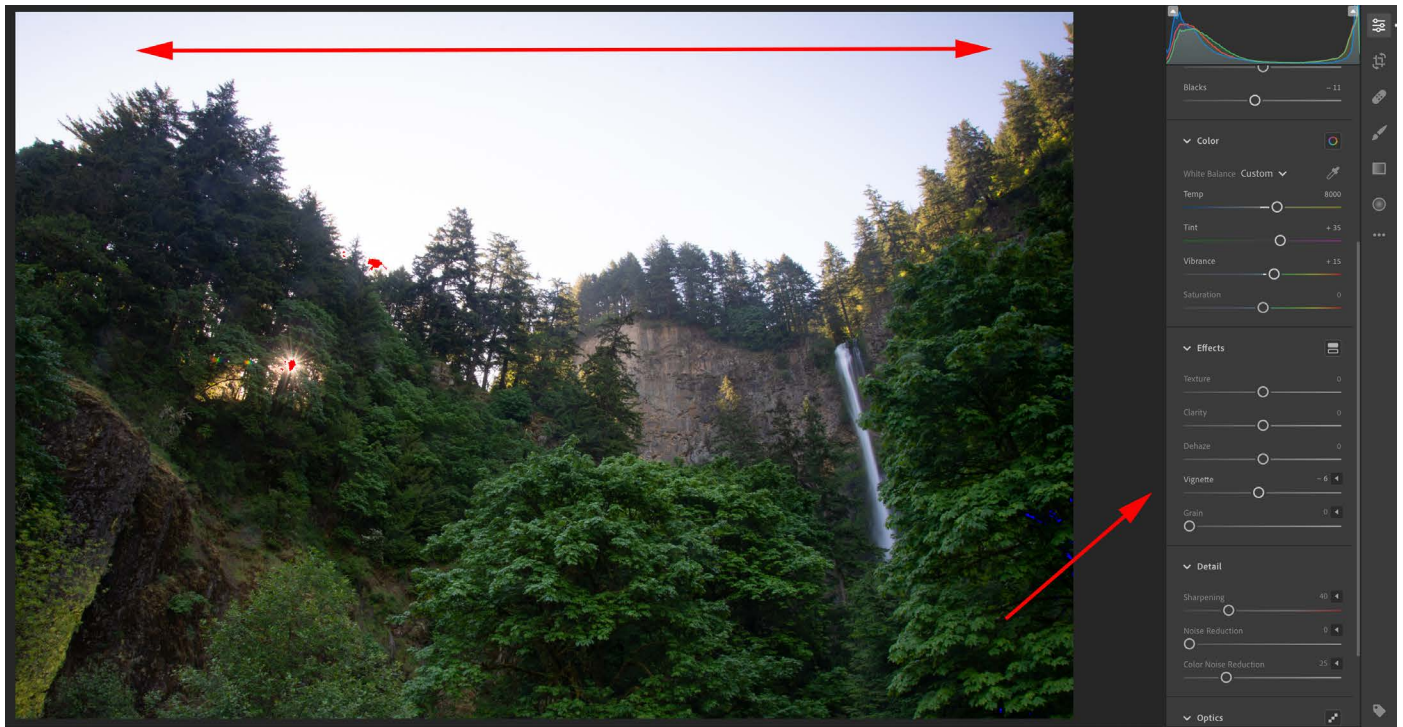


Image 017 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I often use a dark Vignette to force a viewer's eyes towards the center of a picture. This image has an unusual composition that is more panoramic with key elements located on the left and on the right, but not so much in the middle.

I won't use a dark Vignette on this photograph.





Image 018 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I decided to see what a white Vignette would do in this case. A very light, +3, white Vignette evened up the hues of color across the sky.

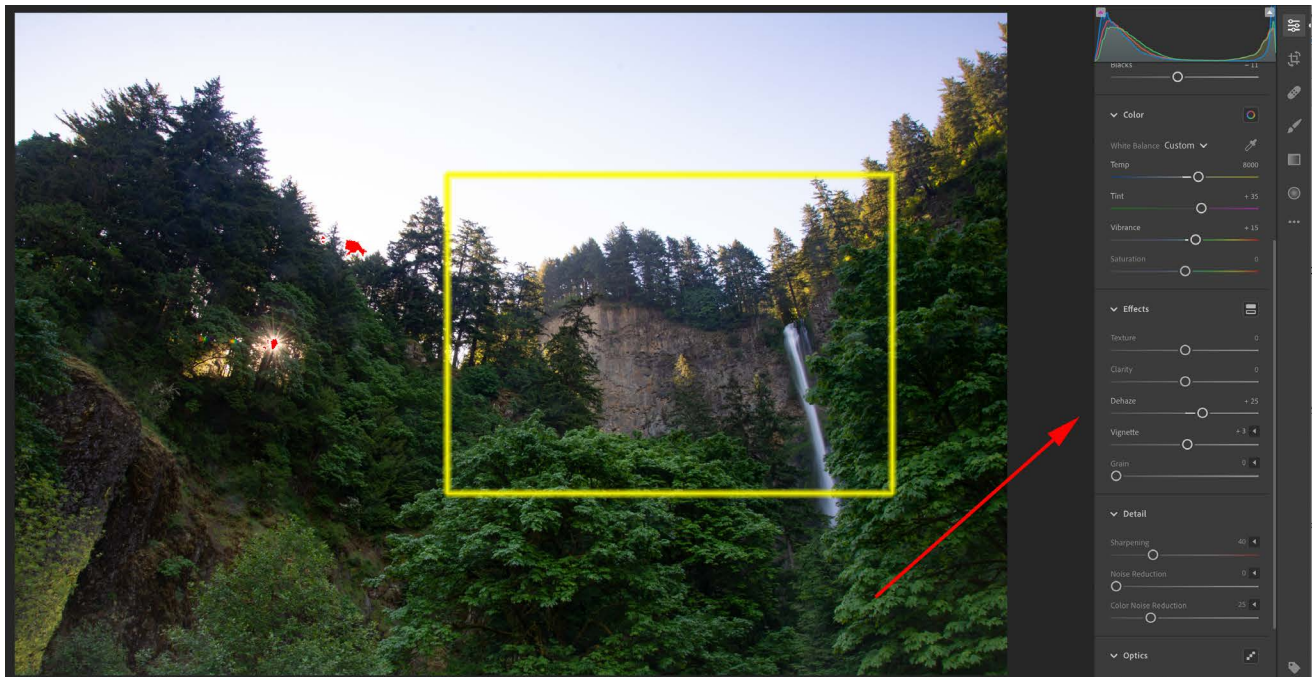


Image 019 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

My next step is the Dehaze slider. Dehaze adds contrast with a bias towards the upper third of the frame.

In this case, it worked perfectly to add definition to the areas within the yellow box. I set the Dehaze slider to +25.

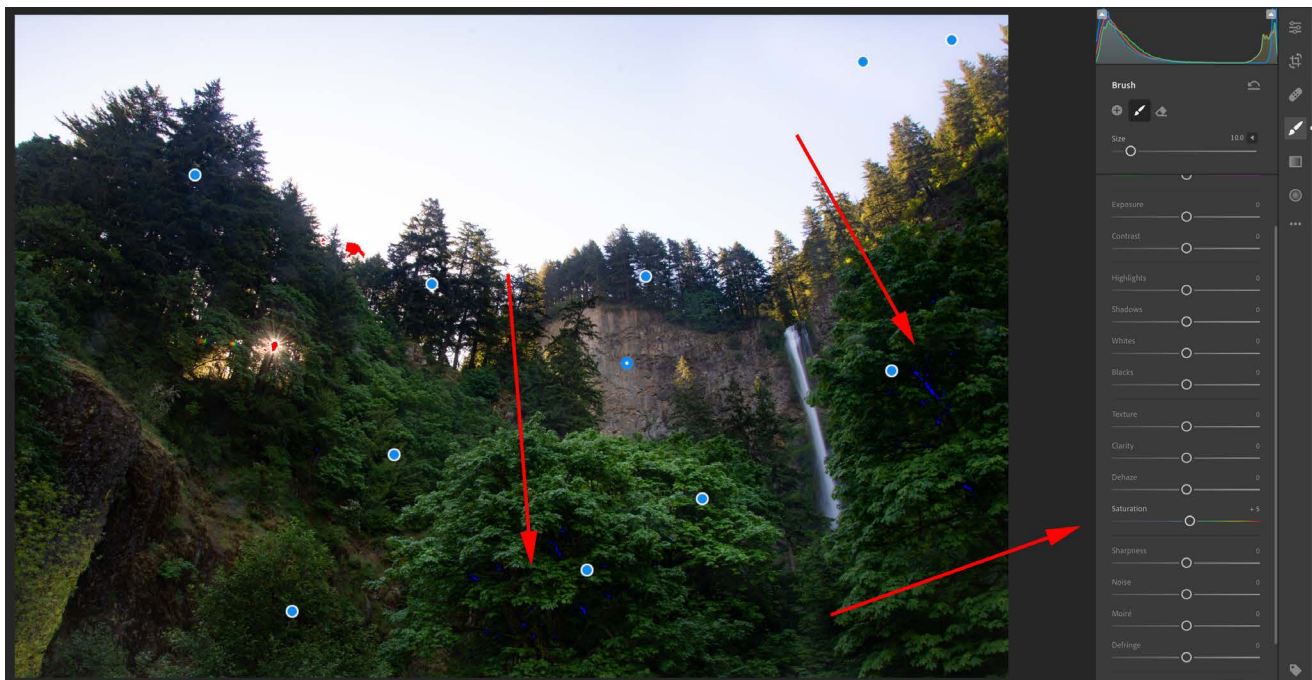


Image 020 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Each of those blue dots in Image 020 represents a localized edit using the Adjustment Brush. They were all Exposure and Saturation adjustments. This is how I create my layering, my puzzle effect. It's like being a painter.





Image 021 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Some of my adjustments throughout the FE (Fundamental Editing) steps also increased the Shadows Clipping. I will use the Adjustment Brush to locally dial these areas back to the place where I was when I set my Black Point and White Point.

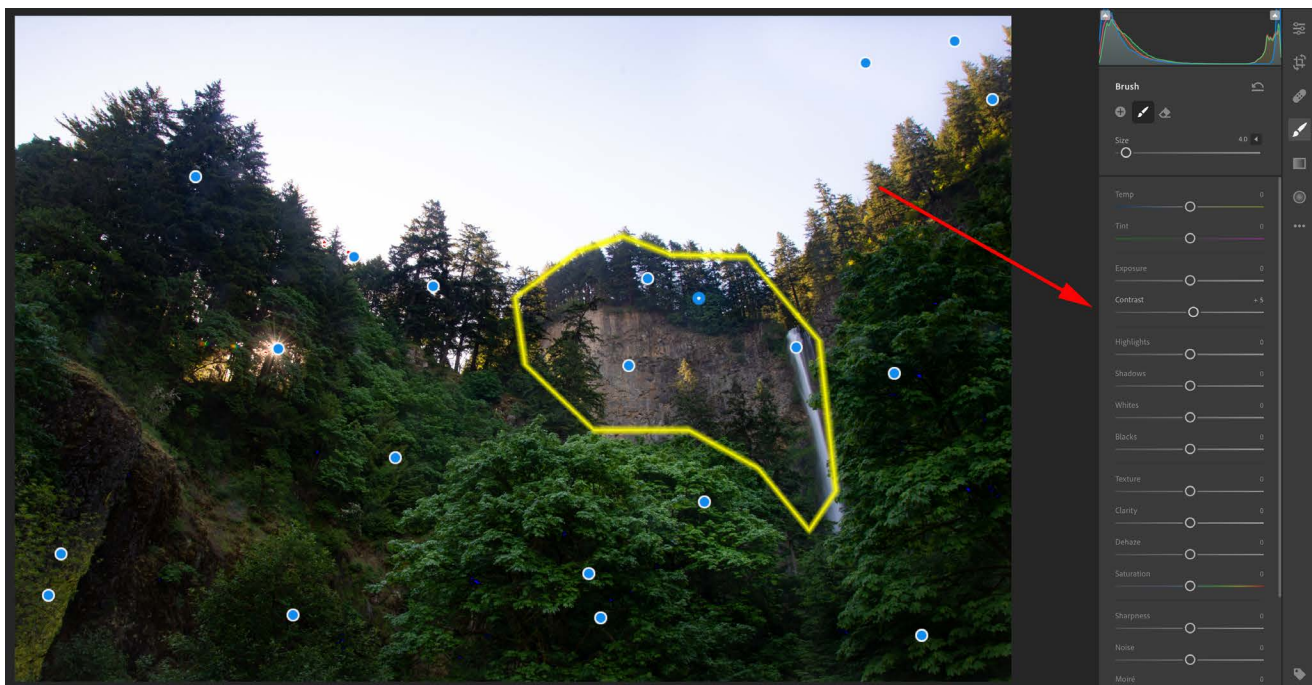


Image 022 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I want the subject area with the yellow boundary to pop out even more from the rest of the photograph than it currently is.

Using the Adjustment Brush, I increased the Contrast of this area by +5.

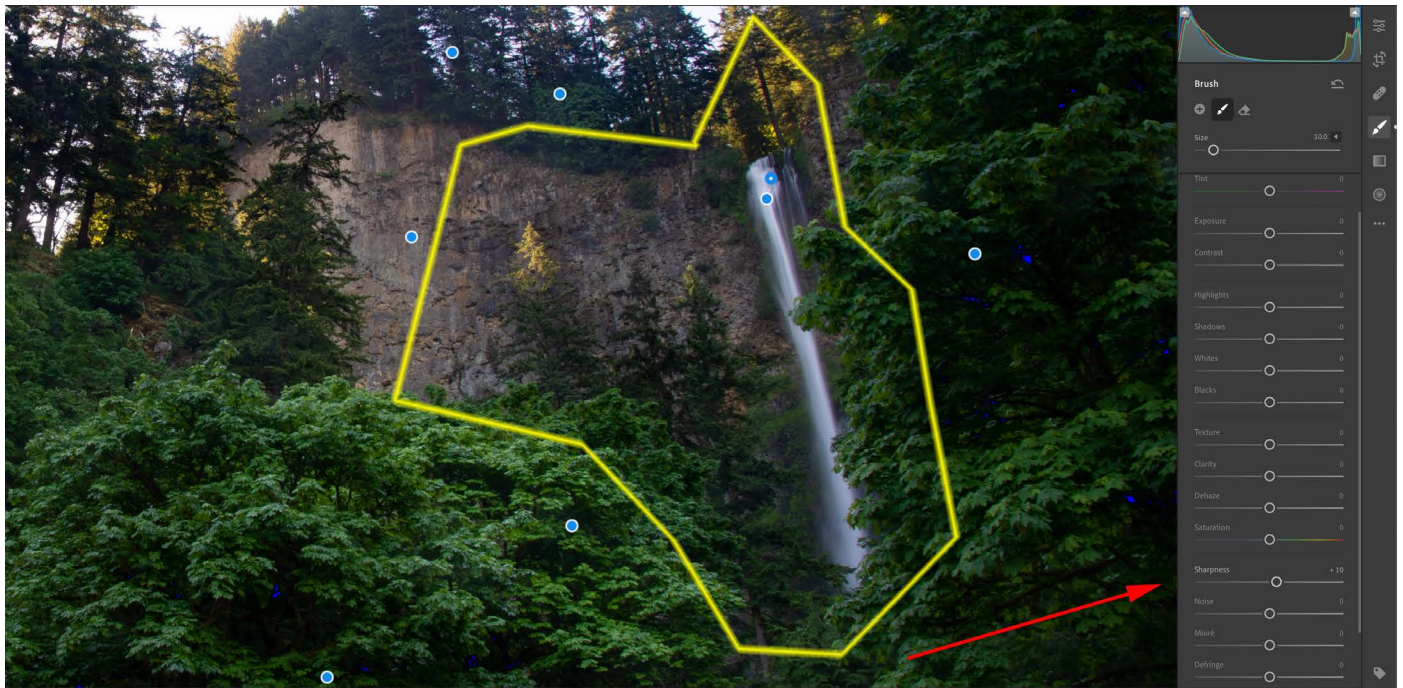


Image 023 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

### **I have a secret sauce tip for you.**

I always Sharpen my subject area with the Adjustment Brush. Sometimes, I don't globally Sharpen my pictures at all.

I locally Sharpened the area within the yellow boundary.

The eyes of a viewer are always pushed within a photograph by subconscious signals. That is the core reason for composition.

In general, the sharpest area of a photo will be where the eyes will come to rest. Remember my intent?





Image 024 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

The depth of field (DOF) in this photo covered the entire picture.

I want to 'soften' various foreground layering elements as a boost to push the eyes towards the

sharpest spot within the picture: the waterfall. I did not soften the tree line at the top of the ridge or around the sun.

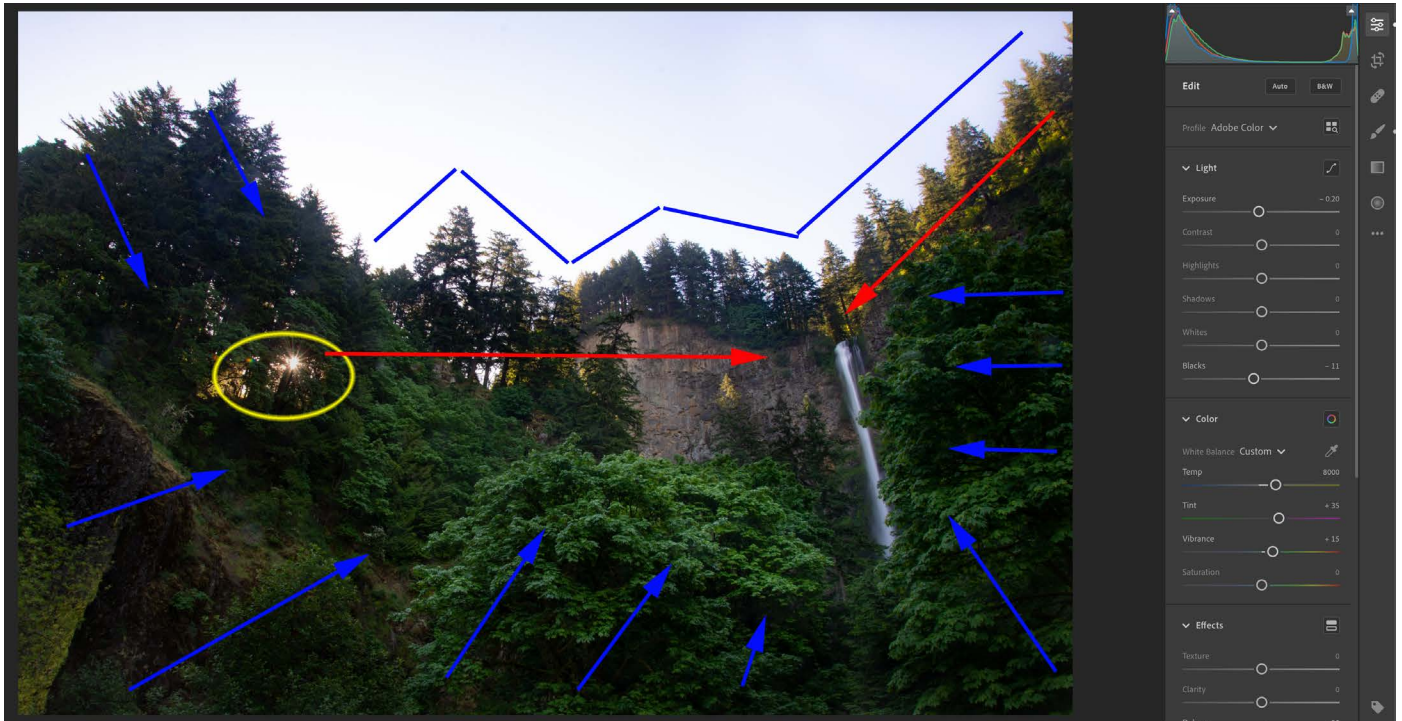


Image 025 – Illustration by Kent DuFault

Here is a dissected view of the composition. This was created in FE.

- The areas with the blue arrows push the eyes in the direction indicated.
- The blue line along the trees indicates a substantial change in contrast that effectively blocks the eyes from moving upward.
- The yellow oval is the area of sun that works as a focal point. It attracts the eyes first and then lets them move towards the right where the waterfall is located.
- The waterfall is the final resting spot. It achieves this position through brightness, tonal contrast, color contrast, texture, layering, and sharpness.



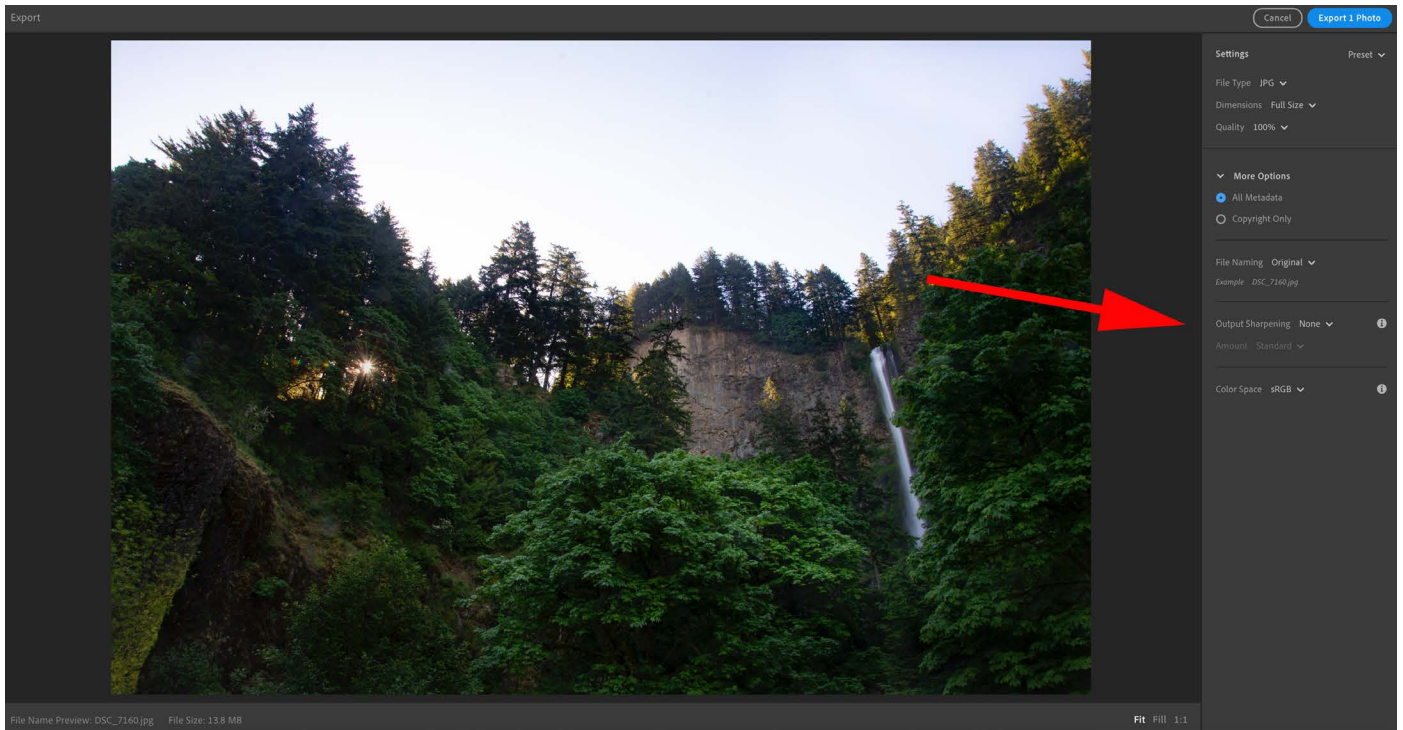


Image 026 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

With all of the specialized FE that I did for Sharpening. I won't apply any global Sharpening or Output Sharpening.

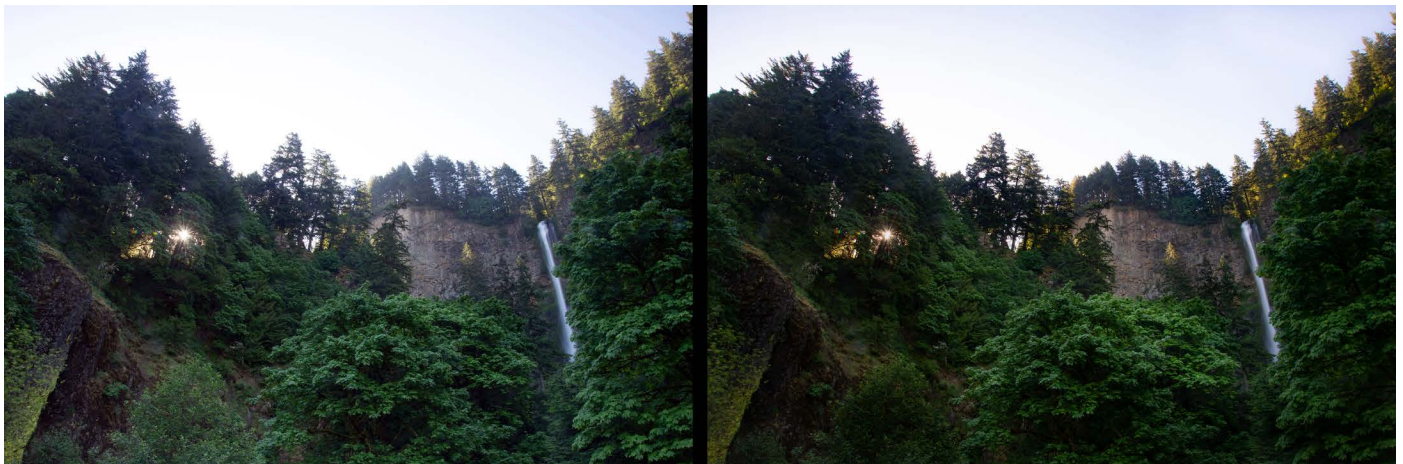


Image 027 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

On the left, you see the original camera file. On the right, you see the photo after the application of Fundamental Editing.



Image 028 – Photograph and Editing by Kent DuFault

*Here is the final photograph. It's ready for export, printing, and publication.*