

Fundamental Editing Case Study #2

SHOOTING FROM AN IMPEDED POSITION – CALIFORNIA SURFERS

By Kent DuFault

In this case study, I will discuss improving a picture that wasn't the best due to an impeded environment.

What do I mean by an impeded environment?

It's when you are presented with an exciting photographic opportunity, but due to circumstances beyond your control, the picture isn't the best it could be.

For the surfer pictured in Image 001, I was on vacation with my wife. We were driving up the western United States coastline from San Diego, California, to Portland, Oregon.

We had pulled into a beach pullover lot in Malibu Beach, California. I saw these two surfers and the moment was delightful.

However, I had several environmental impediments.

- It was midday lighting.
- There was a noticeable haze in the air.
- The two surfers were quite a distance away from me.
- The lot that we had pulled into had no easy access to the beach. Plus, my wife is patient with my photography, but I try not to let it interfere too much with our vacation time!

Using the longest telephoto lens that I had with me, I created a couple shots.

Image 001 was my favorite due to the composition. I like where the surfers are positioned as well as how the surf appears.

I'm going to use Fundamental Editing to improve this picture. Let's examine my intent.



Image 001 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

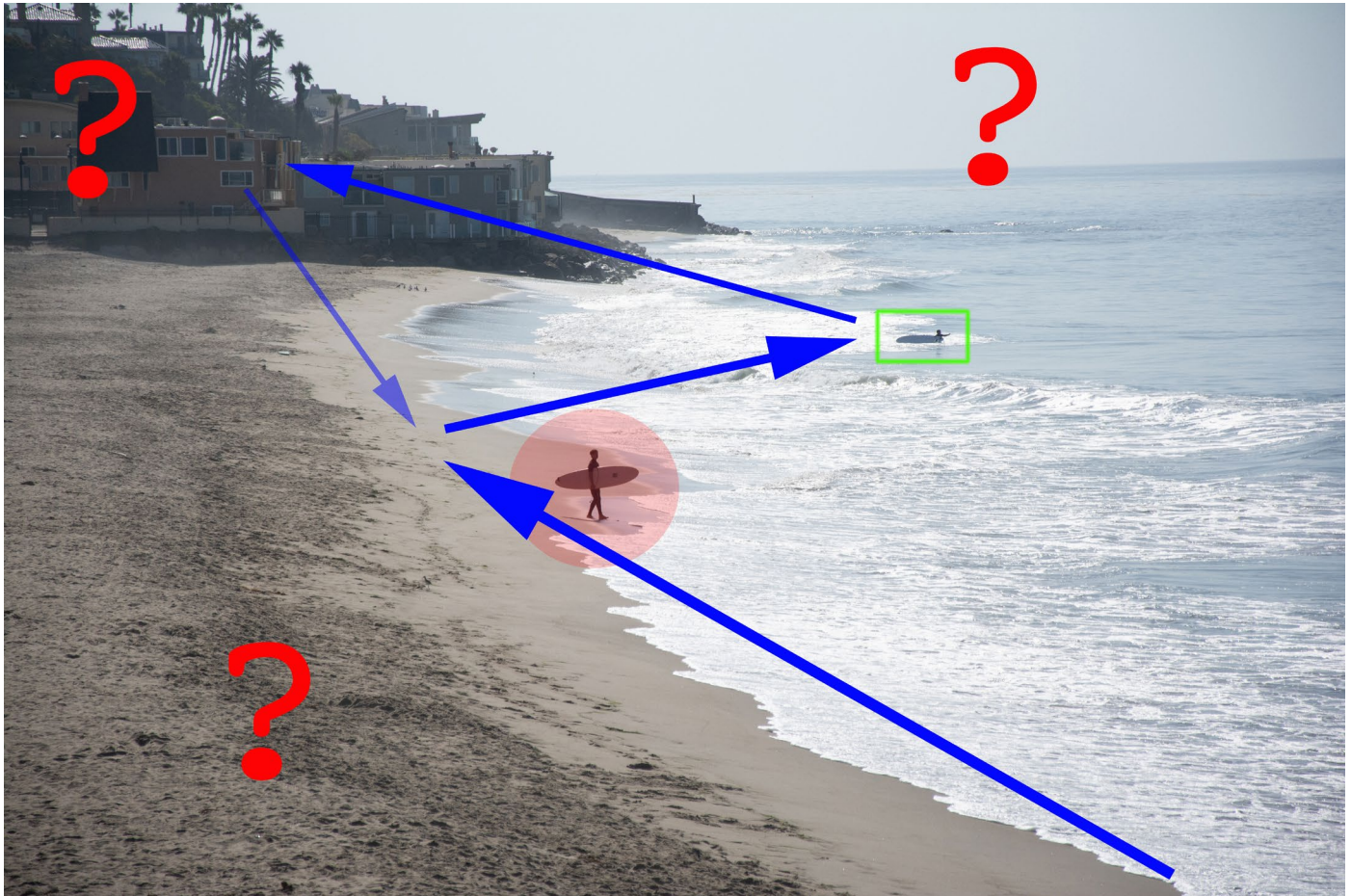


Image 002 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

The darker blue lines indicate how I would like a viewer to travel into my photo. When they get to the buildings, I want their eyes to circle back to my surfer in the foreground. He is my subject.

I want the other surfer in the green box to be a focal point along the path.

I have placed question marks in the areas that aren't serving any purpose to the composition at this moment.

I need to fix that.

You will see how I make use of these spaces in the later steps.

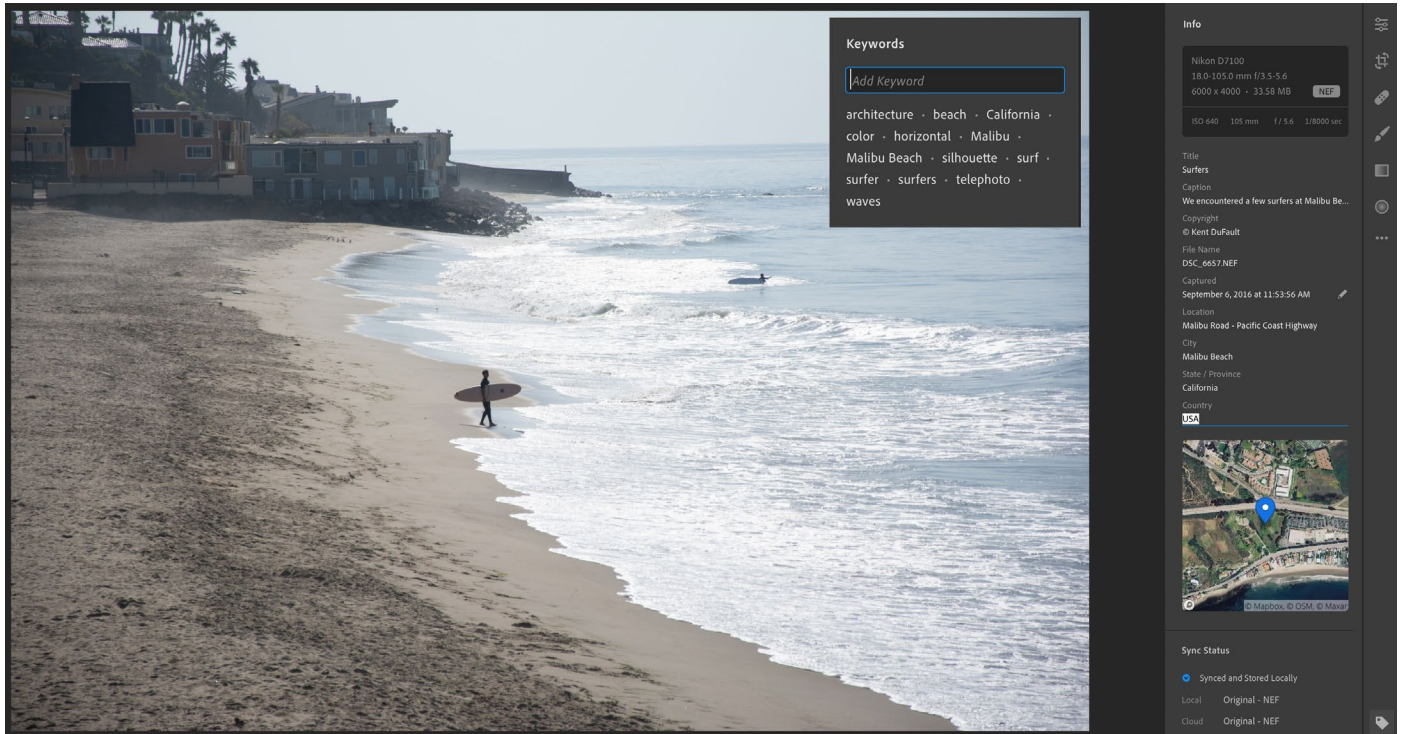


Image 003 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

No matter what editing suite you are using, if it allows you to add Meta Data and/or Keywords then you should do so right away before you forget.

Adding this information is **always** my next step after establishing my intent for the picture.



Image 003a – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

With Lightroom CC, the global Sharpening tool defaults to +40. I haven't figured out a way to reset that default to 0. (If anyone knows, please let me know!)

So, before the next step, I manually set the slider to 0.

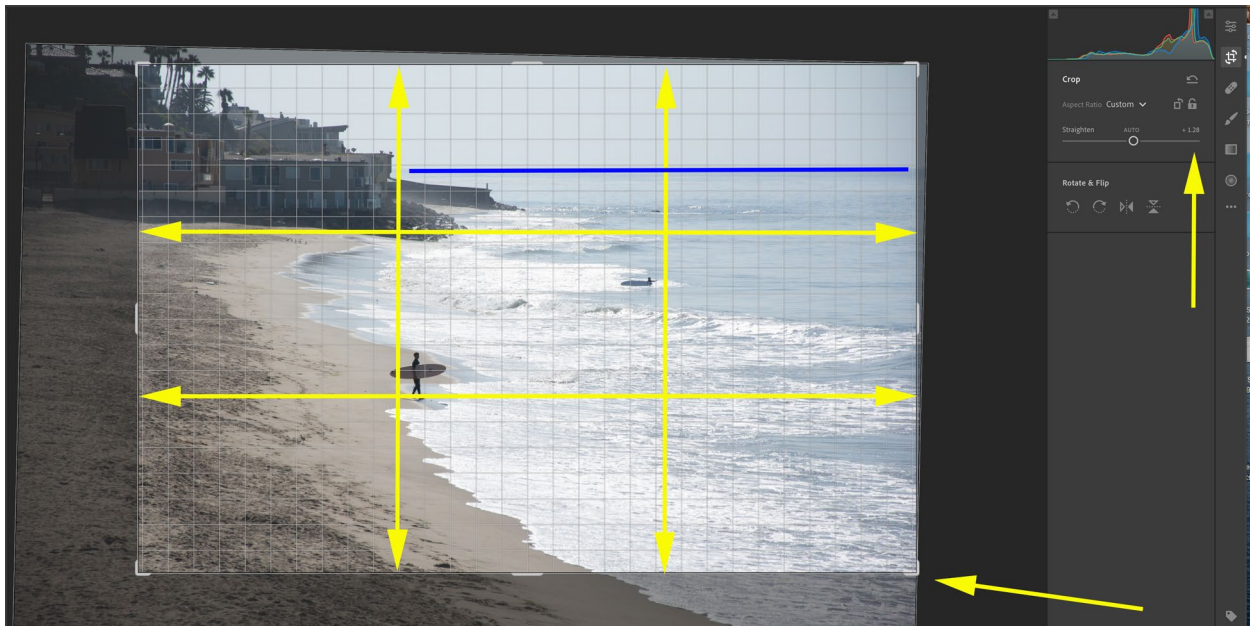


Image 004 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

The cropping step is going to accomplish much in the improvement of my shot.

- I will remove some of the negative space that isn't adding anything to the composition.
- I'll straighten the horizon line.

- I will place my subject within the crosshairs for the Rule of Thirds.
- I will place my second surfer, the focal point, near another set of crosshairs for the Rule of Thirds.

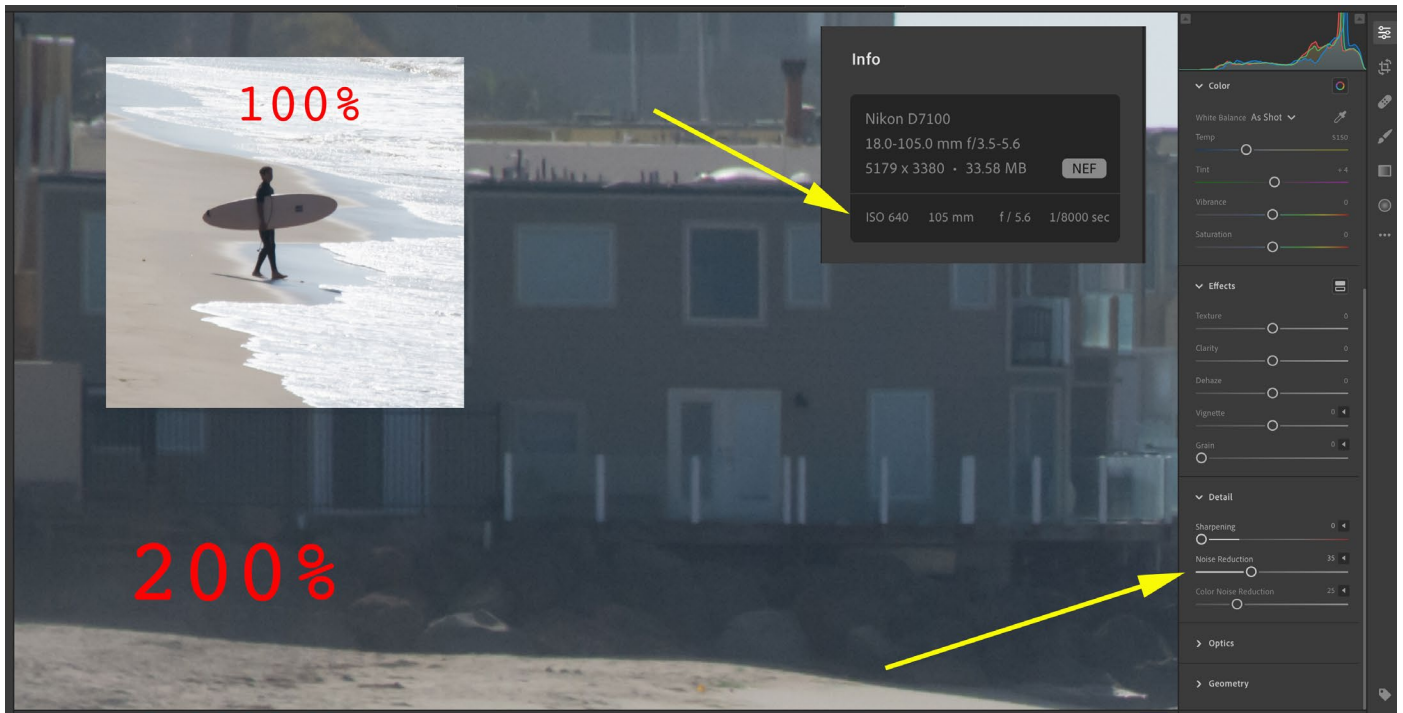


Image 005 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

The next step is always to check for digital noise. It's a good idea to complete this step very early in your Fundamental Editing workflow, and also to go back and recheck it after completing your Fundamental Editing steps.

This picture was taken at ISO 640, under reasonably bright lighting, with a good camera. Even at 200%, it shows minimal noise.

Note: Always check the noise level at 100% or 200%. Make sure you look at the shadow areas, as this is where noise will typically show up first.

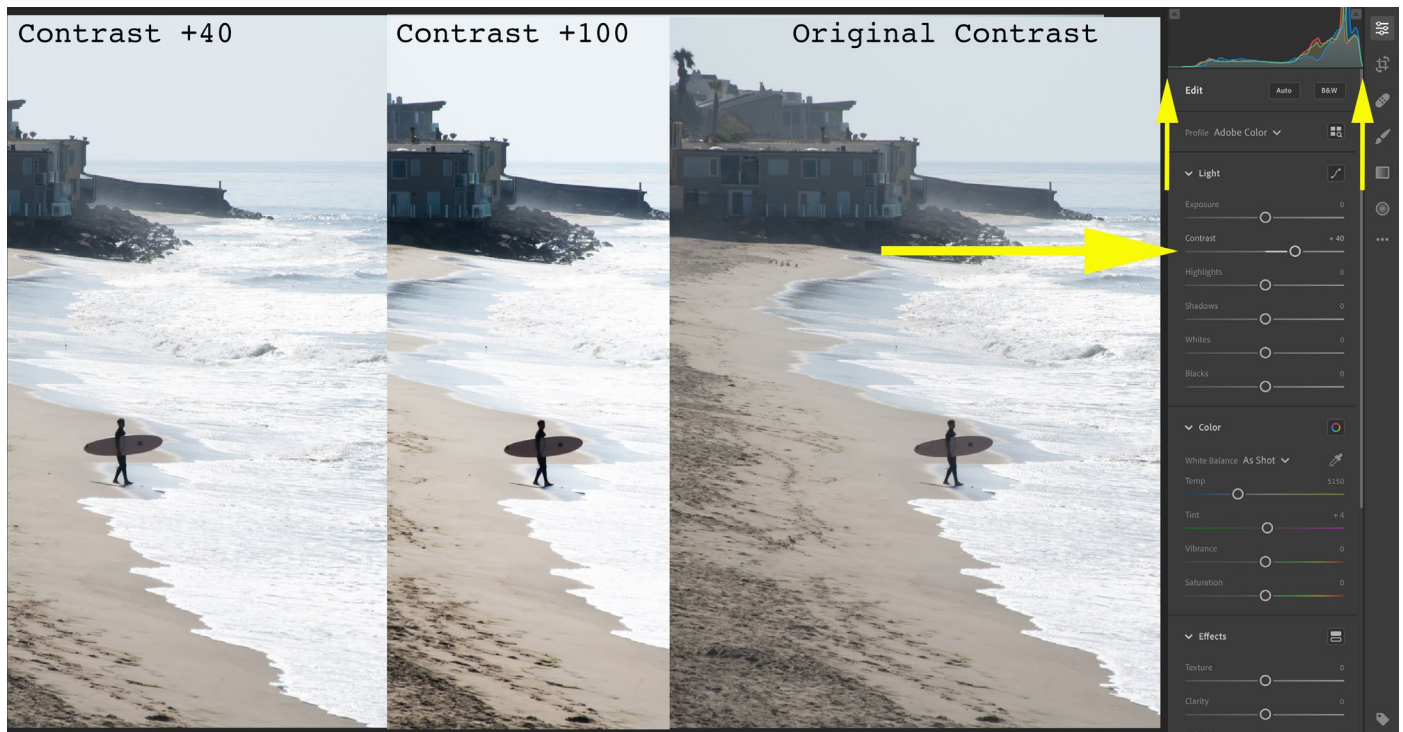


Image 006 - Screenshots by Kent DuFault

In the original Fundamental Editing Guide, the next step is listed as 'Global Exposure Adjustment.'

In Case Study #1, we discussed the difference between global and localized adjustments. If you missed that, go check it out before moving on.

The Exposure of this photograph isn't really an issue. What presents a problem is the contrast, due to lighting and atmospheric haze.

If I reduce the global Exposure slide by moving it to the left, the picture becomes dark and muddy.

This is not a good option for this picture because of the low contrast.

Note: When a picture is low or high in contrast, the global Exposure adjustment is generally not your best option. It will be more useful to work with the five sliders below it: Contrast, Highlights, Shadows, Whites, and Blacks.

For this photograph, we need to **add** contrast. If I add too much contrast (center image of 006 +100), the highlights become blown out and lose all of their details. After moving the slider around, I settled on a Contrast of +40.

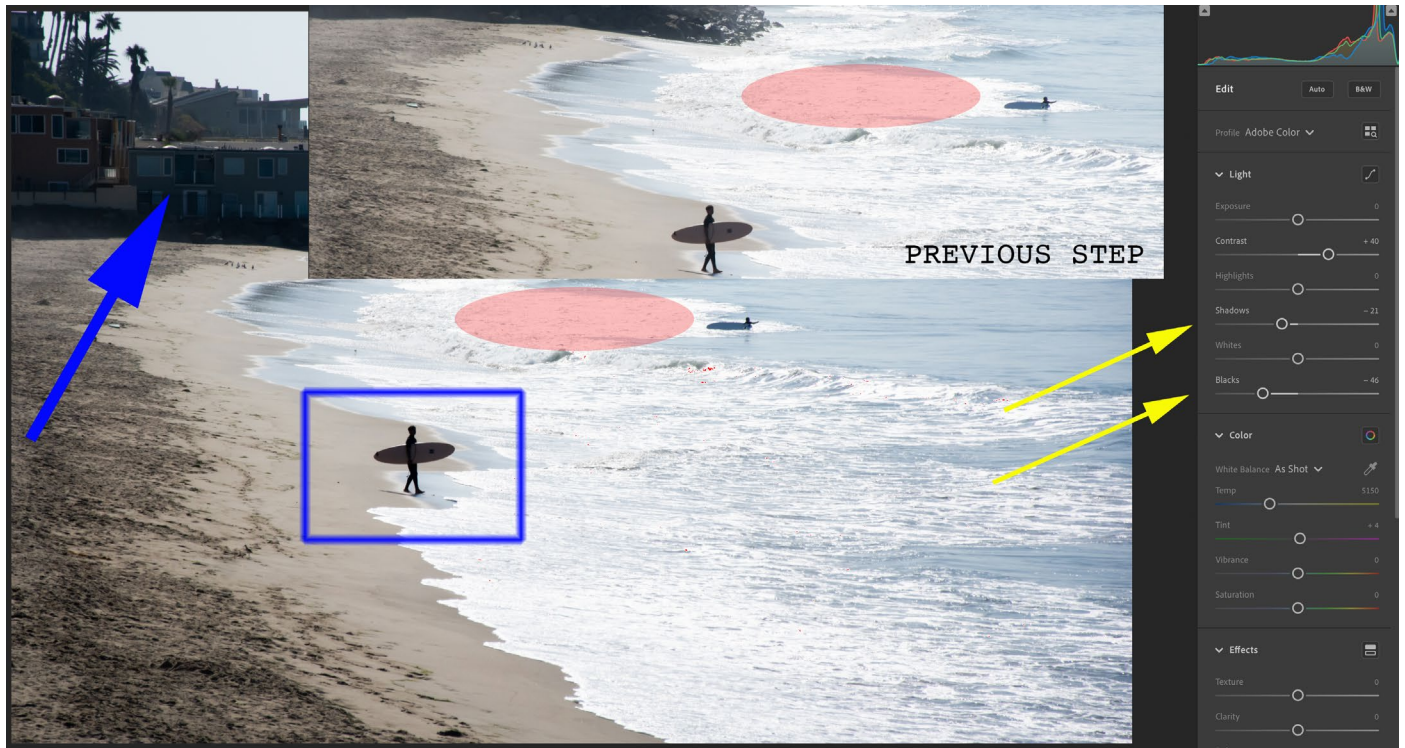


Image 007 – Screenshots by Kent DuFault

The photograph still lacks contrast because of the atmospheric haze. I need to deepen my black and shadow areas.

To give my subject the most potent visual weight within the composition, I will use several tools.

I've already illustrated how cropping improved the subject placement.

I'm also going to make that position within the frame, the highest level of contrast, which always attracts the eyes. I'll also use the exciting shapes of the man and his surfboard, which will be emphasized by the contrast.

I set the Blacks to -46 and the Shadows to -21. These two adjustments affected the subject surfer and the buildings in the background.



Image 008 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I have turned on my Clipping Indicators. The areas within the blue boxes are now set to be a Black Point.

The blue arrow points to a small area of Highlight clipping within the surf. This sets my White Point.

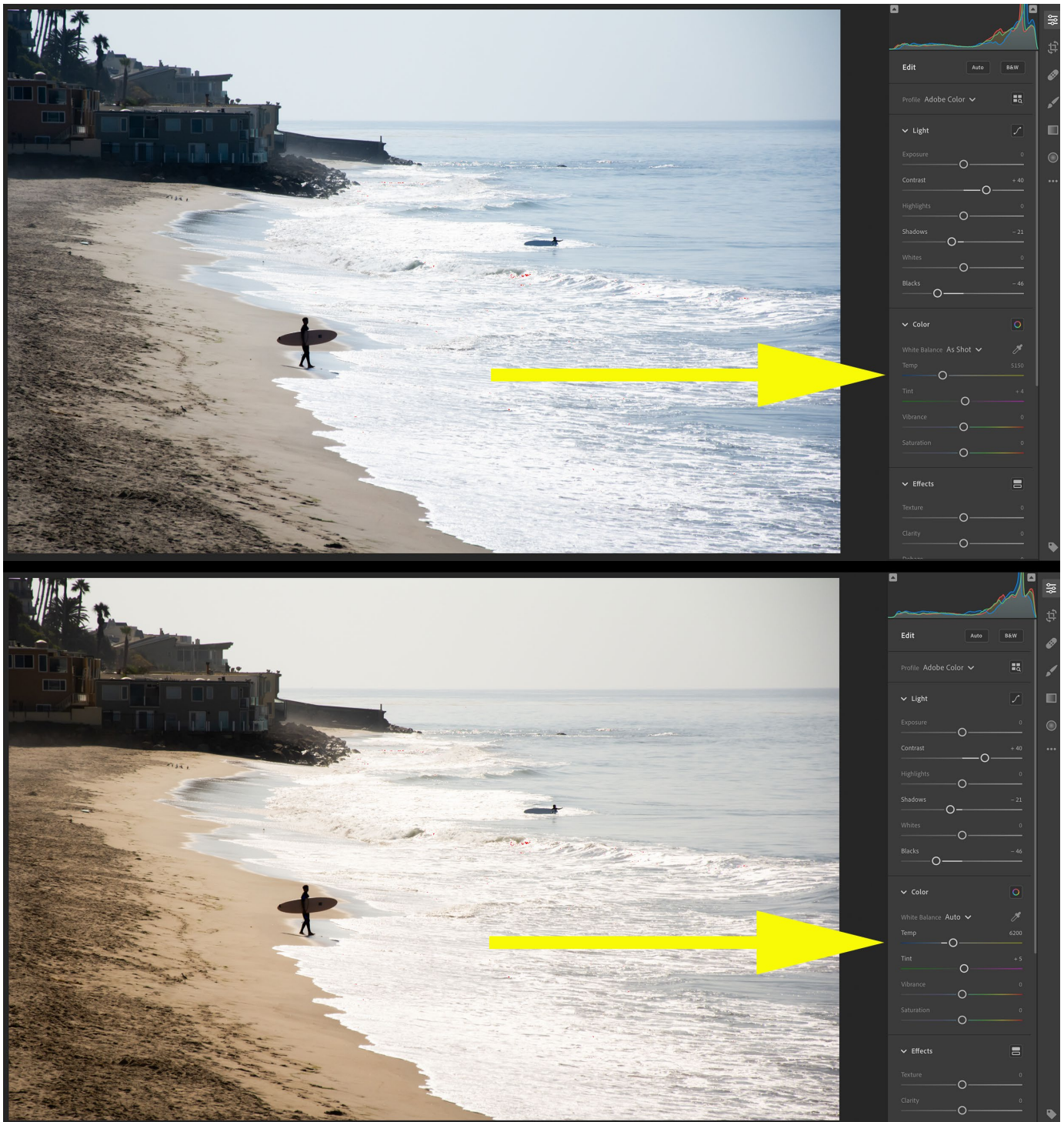


Image 009 – Screenshots by Kent DuFault

Photos shot under midday light tend to contain a lot of blue and cyan. The upper screenshot of Image 009 depicts the white balance (WB) as the image file was created. I tried Auto WB to see what the software would do to the picture. It added a lot of red and yellow to 'warm up' the scene. However, that adjustment also removed

the soft blue hues in the water and the sky, which I rather liked.

I decided to keep the WB as it was initially shot and use my edits to emphasize the blue hues of the water and sky. Later, I will locally add warmth to the sand.

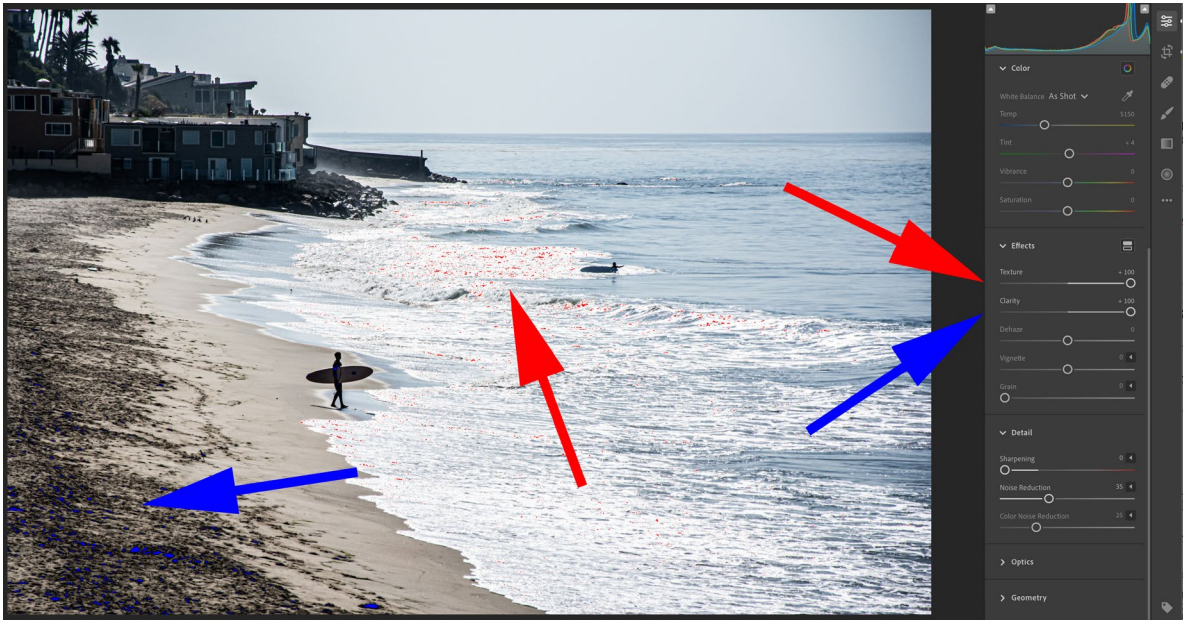


Image 010 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

'Texture' is a new tool added to the Adobe editing products after the Fundamental Editing guide was written. It works similarly to Clarity but affects the picture in slightly different ways.

Note: My technique at this step is to first max out the Clarity slider and see what it does to the picture before resetting it to 0. I then max out the Texture slider, review it, and return it to 0.

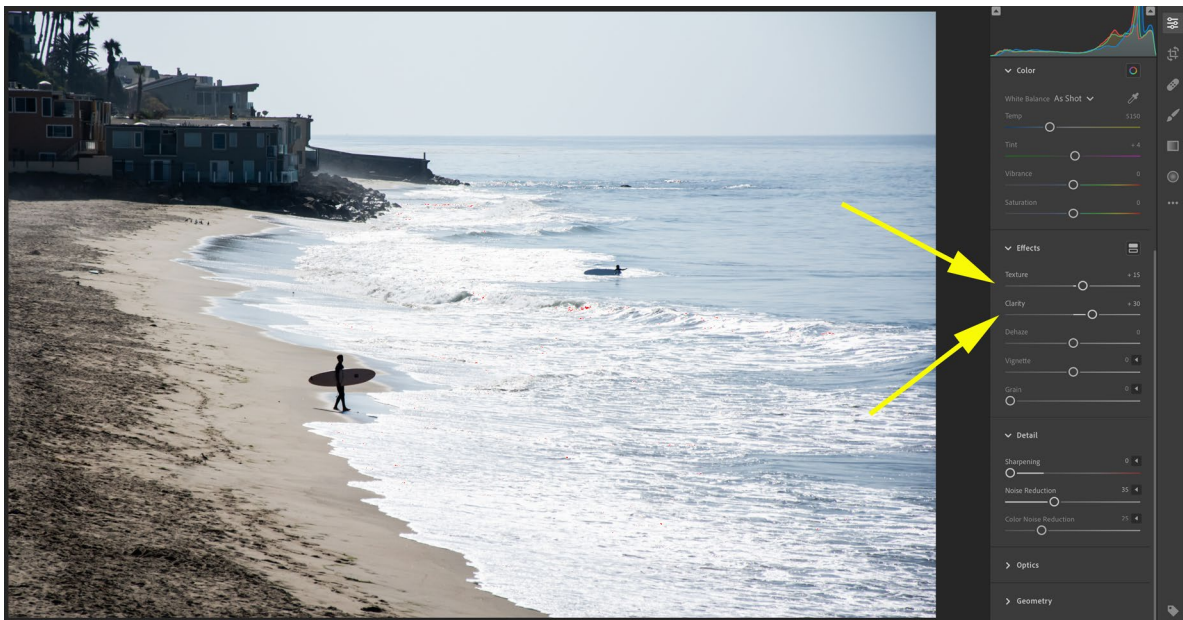


Image 011 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Now that I have a reference as to how each slider is going to affect the picture, I adjust them accordingly.

Clarity increased the contrast in the buildings as well as in the sky and distant areas of the water.

Texture added to the three-dimensional quality of the sand and surf.

My final settings were Clarity +30 and Texture +15.



Image 012 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Vibrance and Saturation are also closely tied together, just like Clarity and Texture. I apply the same technique of maxing out each setting, noting what they do to the picture, returning them to 0, and then adjusting them in unison.

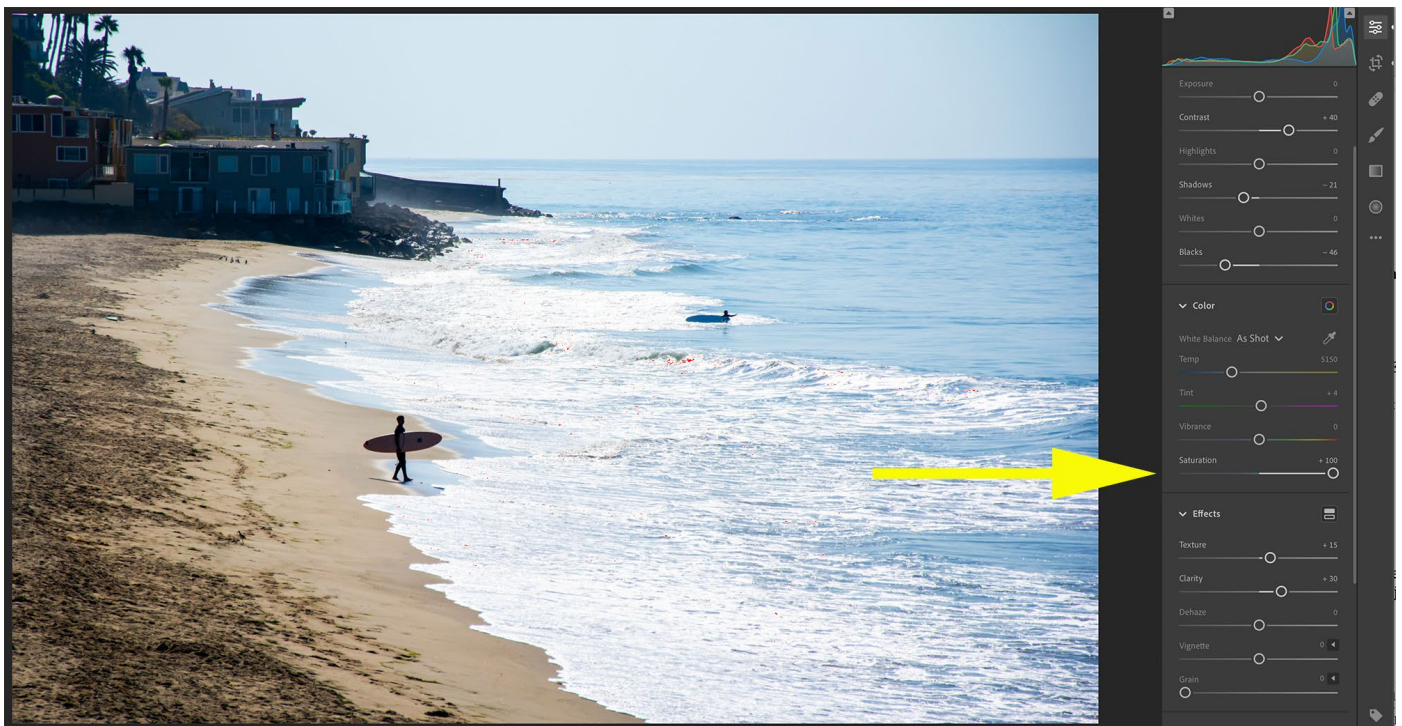


Image 013 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Image 012 depicts Vibrance maxed out, and Image 013 depicts Saturation maxed out.



Image 014 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Setting the Vibrance to +30 gave me the gentle blue hues that I was looking for without affecting anything else.



Image 015 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

The next step in the Fundamental Editing list is the use of a Vignette. For this shot, I don't like how the vignette looks, even at a shallow setting, so I'll leave the Vignette setting at 0.



Image 016 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

The Dehaze slider is a global adjustment. I don't like the effect here, even in a minimal setting. I'll leave Dehaze at 0.

Note: Some photos just do much better with localized editing versus global editing, and this is one of them.

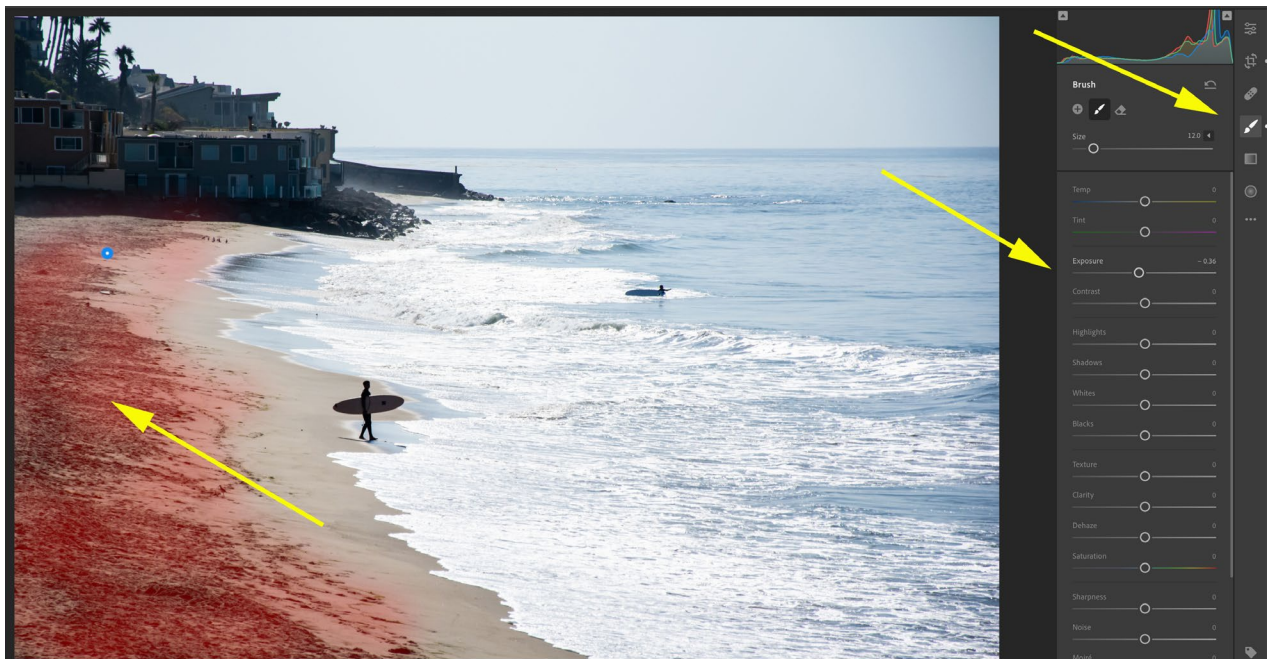


Image 017 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

As I begin the localized editing process with the Adjustment Brush, my first step is to enhance the composition path by reducing the Exposure level of the sand to the left.

This edit will force a viewer's eyes towards the right, and thus creates a layering effect, which adds more visual weight to the subject.

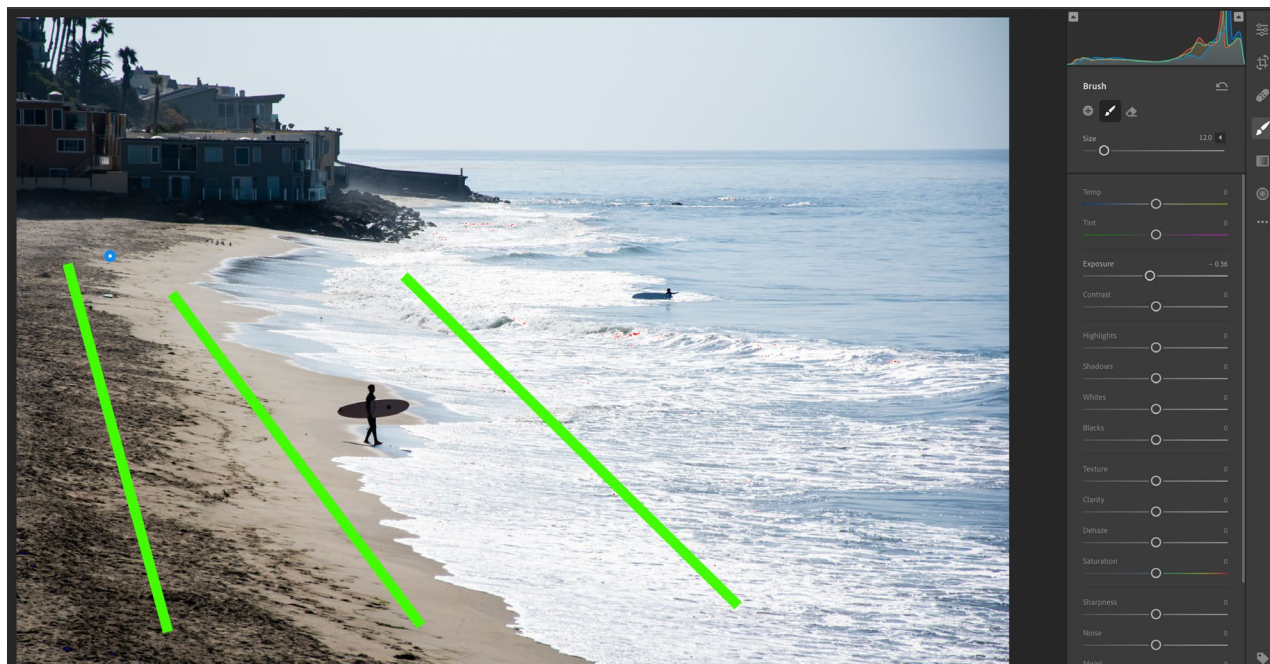


Image 018 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

The sandy beach area to the left has been reduced in Exposure by -0.36. This creates a layering effect that emphasizes my intended path.

The green lines show the layering left, central, and right.

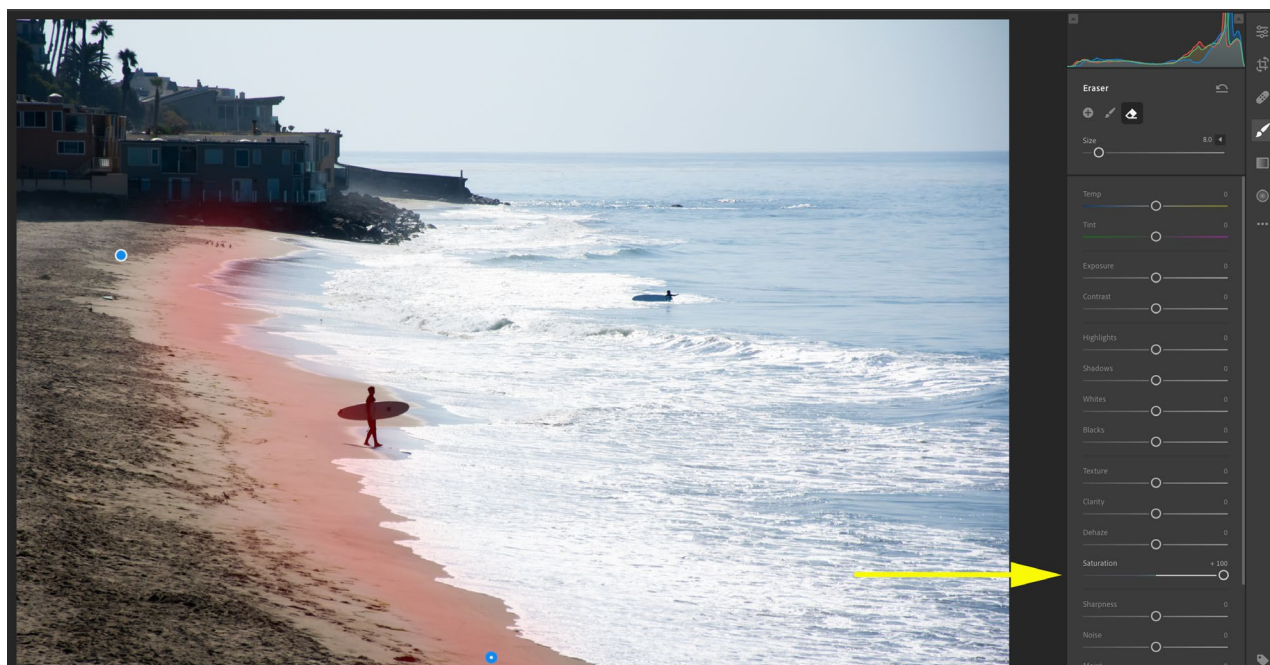


Image 019 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

To bolster the visual presence of the central layer and create as much color contrast as possible between the sand and the water, I increased the

Saturation of the Adjustment Brush to +100. As a localized edit, this doesn't affect the rest of the picture.



Image 020 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I want to make sure that there is a robust Black Point set upon my subject surfer. After placing my Preview to 400%, I could see that this desire needed a little help.

With the Adjustment Brush, I created a mask that affects only the surfer, and I reduced the Exposure by -0.20. Take notice that I didn't include the surfboard.

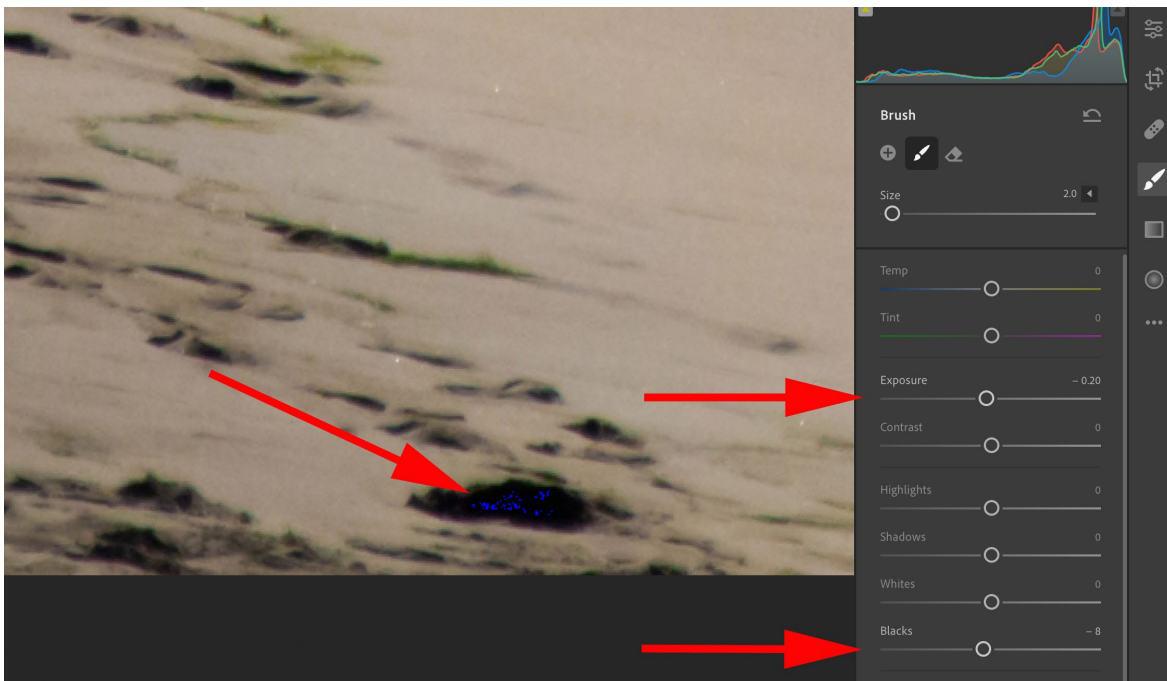


Image 021 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

At this point in my workflow, I have decided to use the Black Point as an emphasis on my intended path. Step one is to deepen the tone of a shadow area in the foreground.



Image 022 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Next, I want to add a Black point to my second surfer, the focal point, but just to him and not his surfboard. I want him to attract attention, but not overwhelm the subject.



Image 023 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I have made a flock of shorebirds in the background a Black Point as well.



Image 024 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Then, I decided to also darken a foreground shorebird.



Image 025 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

Finally, I carefully placed several Black point areas in the architecture in the background.

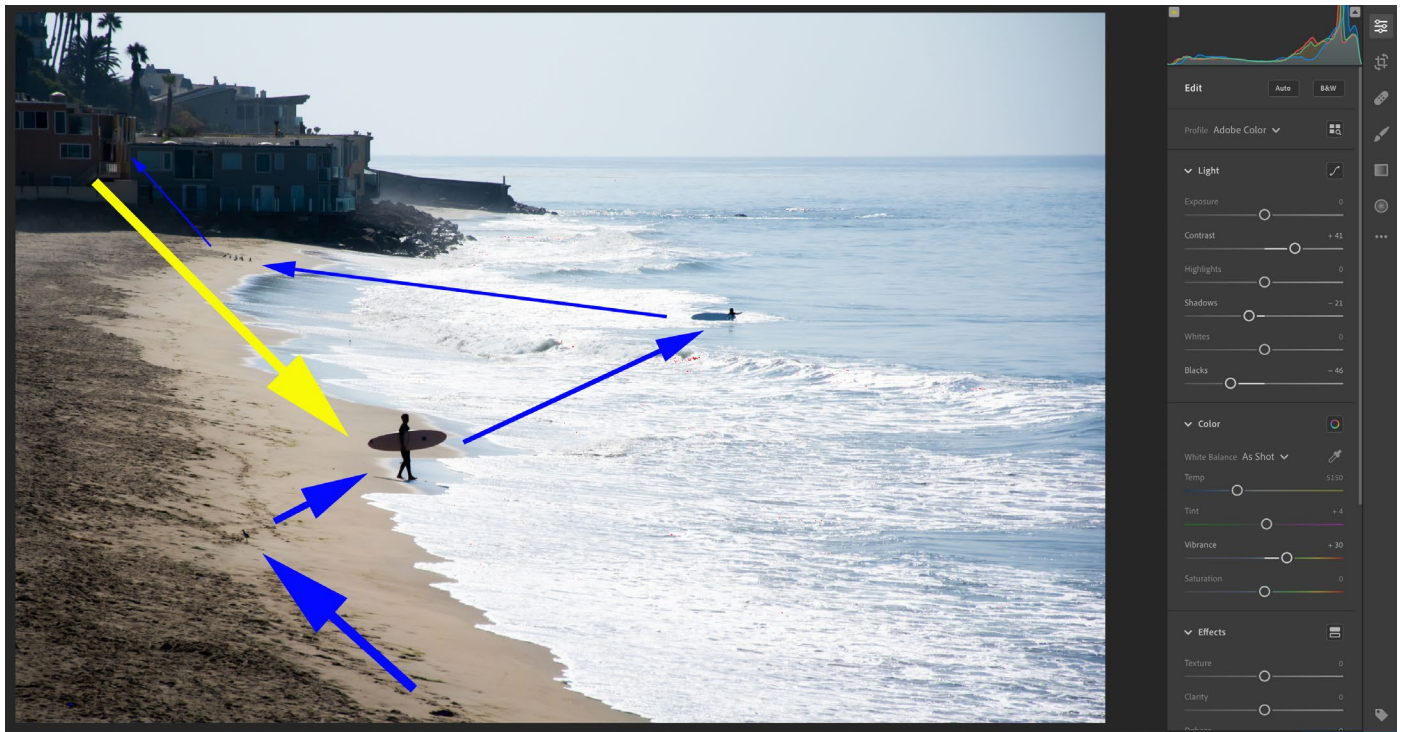


Image 025a – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

The set Black Points create a visual path, as indicated by the blue arrows. The yellow arrow shows how the eyes will make their way through the path but return to the subject.

Note: Once the path leads the eyes to the background, why do they return to the surfer in

the foreground? That's an important question. The eyes return back to the surfer because it is the point of highest contrast and the most defined shape within the frame. The more tools of composition that you can pile onto your subject, the more robust your photograph will be!



Image 025b – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

It is my habit to sharpen an image as little as possible.

If I use global sharpening, it's kept to a minimum setting.

I like to locally sharpen around the subject using the Adjustment Brush. For this photograph, I locally sharpened the subject surfer and the surf line.



Image 026 – Screenshot by Kent DuFault

I never use the Healing Brush to fundamentally change my photographs. I use it to remove objects that I feel could draw attention away from my subject.

The original photo had a boogie board lying in the sand, so I removed it (Image 026).



Image 027 – Photograph and Editing by Kent DuFault

The original image is on the left, and the Fundamentally Edited version is on the right.



Image 028 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Here is my final edited photograph!