Lightroom's Radial Filter

by Doug Sloss

The new Radial Filter inside Lightroom 5 is a great tool for creating off-centered vignettes, highlighting important parts in your photos, and when used creatively, it can add more interest and clever flair to your underwater shots.

Like the Adjustment Brush and Graduated Filter, the Radial Filter is also designed for local edits, applying its effects in circular or elliptical forms, as opposed to painting in effects with a brush or laying them down via a gradient, like the other two tools.

Yet, while it differs in the way its effects are applied to a photo, you still have access to the same slider controls for creative edits once you open the tool's Effects panel.

But unlike the Adjustment Brush and Graduated Filter, there's no need to first guess an initial setting to see where an effect will be applied. Just click and drag out a shape on top of your photo and release the mouse. The filter lays down your initial shape, then leaves you with control points along the outside border you can push or pull into position, to further customize an on-image contour. This shape can also be rotated, and every filter you create contains a center pin, so you can reposition the effect or combined effects of various adjustments anywhere on your image.

And while plenty of keyboard shortcuts let you duplicate, delete, and shape filter effects to suit your needs, it's the slider modifications and their effects that give you the creative freedom to make your photos look more interesting, so lets look at a few examples.

Traditionally, photographic vignettes are used to draw a viewer's attention to the center of a photo. But what do you do when the point of interest in an image is off centered, like the rhinophores on the nudibranch in Figure One? Even though I carefully positioned my camera near the seabed floor, I was unable to capture a head-on portrait to highlight the rhinophores as I envisioned. And without the aid of a snoot to directly channel strobe light to just the front portion of the scene, this effort was the best I was able to achieve in camera at the moment.

But after adding a Radial filter to the image in post, I'm able to reposition, rotate, and extend its shape off the edge of the photo where needed, in order to target the front portion of the nudibranch to make a

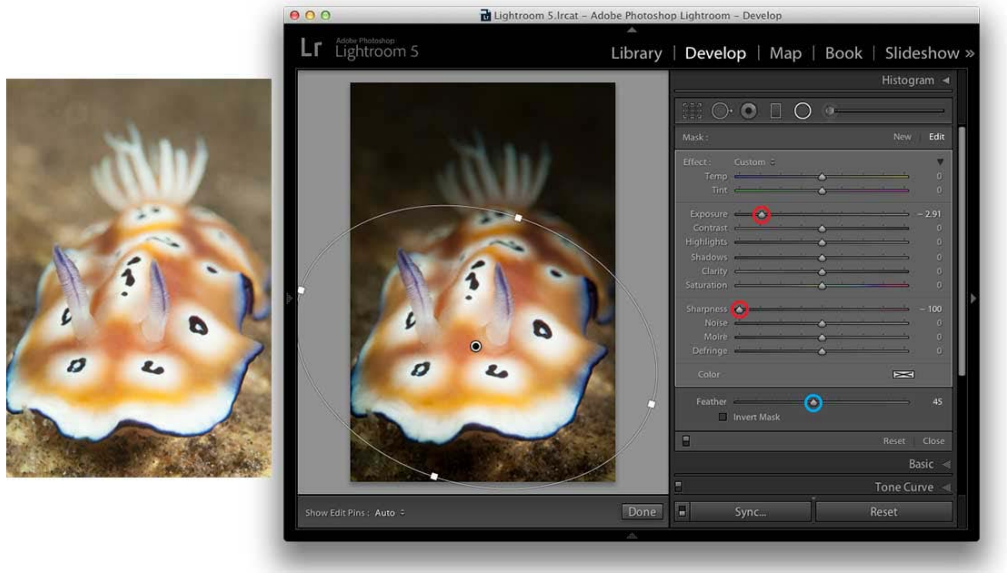


Figure 1: Slider adjustments can be used in combination to create desired effects. Here Exposure and Sharpness (both circled in red) were lowered to remove background distraction and focus attention on the nudibranch. The Feather slider (circled in blue) makes this adjustment believable.

creative adjustment.

By default, the Radial Filter is designed to affect the region outside the shape you draw. And once you put down a filter, any modifications you make to the sliders in the Effects panel are applied to that outside region, and your creative adjustments are then visible. Like Lightroom's other local controls, these effects can be stand alone adjustments, or combined with other sliders for a more complex and pleasing result.

For this pin adjustment, the exposure surrounding the nudibranch was darkened, and the sharpness of the background lowered to draw more attention to the foreground portion of the nudibranch. Feathering was also applied to the filter shape to soften the transition zone and make the edit believable. (Figure 1)

To surely steer the viewer's eye to certain areas in your photo, and attract even more focus, you can stack multiple filters over areas of importance and really grab their attention. Not only can multiple pins add a layering of separate adjustments over the same region, they can also be inverted so your creative enhancements affect the inside areas

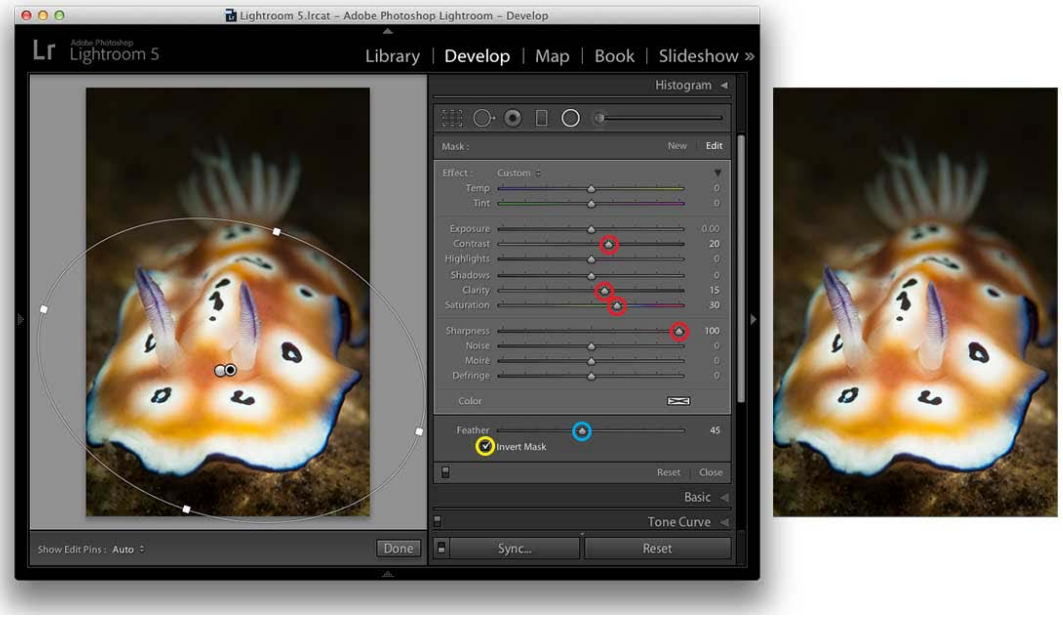


Figure 2: A second pin enhances the nudibranch. That mask is inverted (yellow circle) so pin adjustments (red) affect the inside portion of the filter's shape.

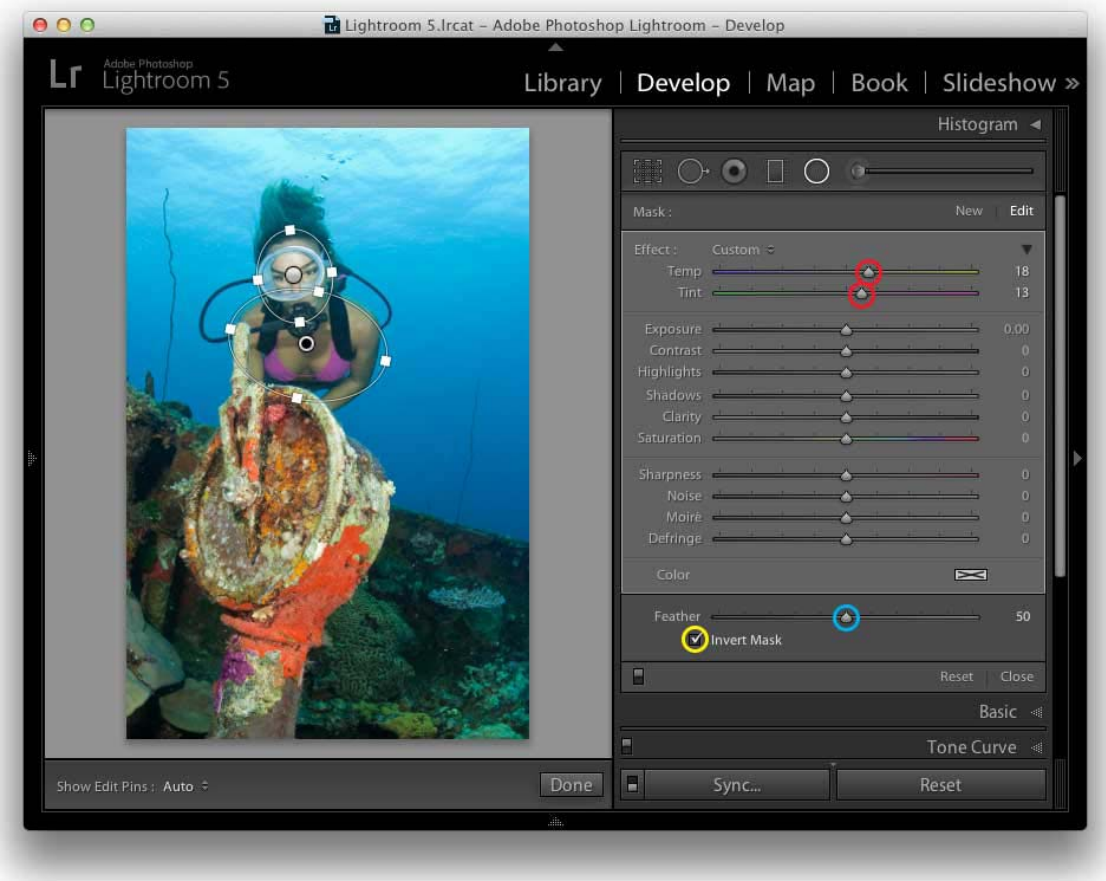


Figure 3: Two inverted filter pins warm the skin tones on the model's face and body. These adjustments carry identical Temperature and Tint values keeping changes to both regions equal. Note: For illustrative purposes, both filter pins are displayed in Figure 3. Normally, when working inside Lightroom, only one filter overlay is visible at a time.

of these circle shapes.

For example, to further optimize the front of this nudibranch, I first added a second filter pin to the region, then checked the Invert Mask box, so modifications to the sliders now affect the region inside the filter, the actual nudibranch itself. Next, contrast, clarity and sharpness were added to further define the rhinophores on this nudibranch. To attract even more focus to the area, saturation was boosted too. Comparing the before and after images in figures One and Two, shows the positive effect these filters have on the final image. (Figure 2)

While the Radial Filter is great for off centered vignette effects and optimizing regions both inside and outside of the filter borders, they can also be used more creatively.

For instance, in the shot of the diver exploring artifacts on the Fujikawa Maru in Chuuk, the light from my strobes wasn't quite able to fully reach and illuminate her face and body, leaving her skin tones a little too cool for the overall shot. But by adding two localized filters that each carried identical white balance settings, I was able to warm the tones of her face and body for a more pleasing shot. (Figure 3)

Lastly, the Radial filter can help make photos more interesting when they're used to enhance light beams or creatively build them from scratch. In Figure Four, we see how a thin elliptical filter helps strengthen the existing torch light, further defining the connection between the diver and turtle. With this improvement, the viewer's eyes wander back and forth between the diver and turtle more easily, helping to solidify the visual tension already present in the scene. This makes the image more dynamic

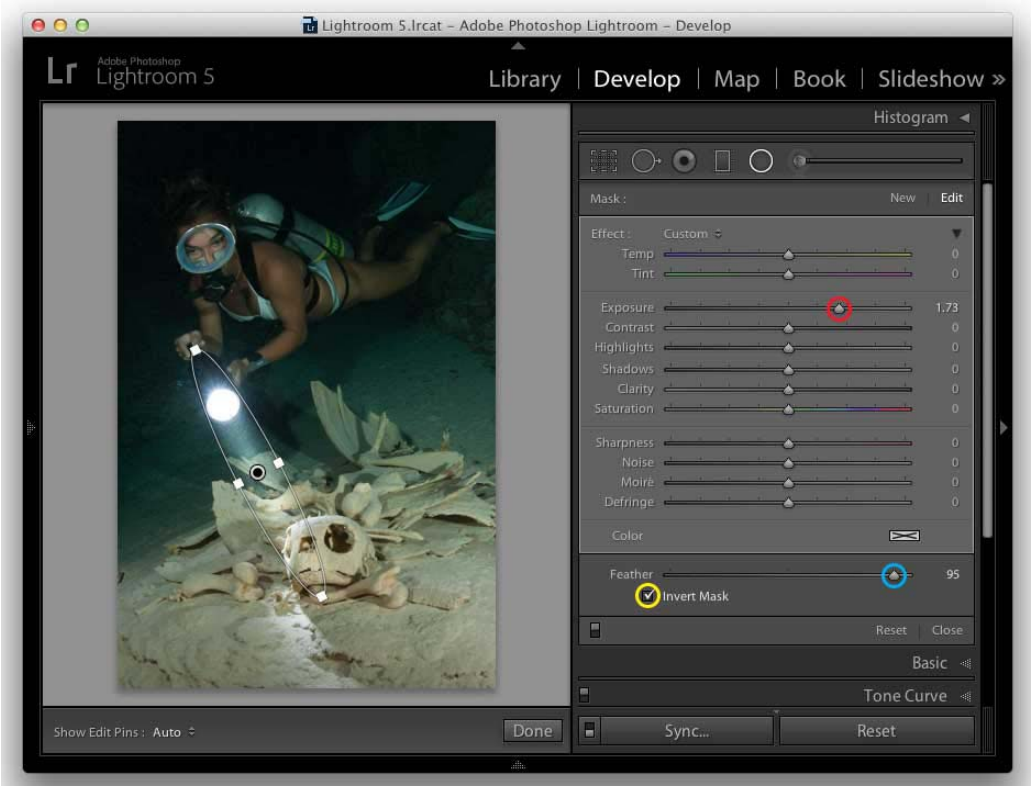


Figure 4: A thin elliptical Radial filter is used to create this torch beam. Heavy feathering (blue) makes this adjustment believable while varying Exposure (red) controls the beam's intensity.

and interesting to look at. (Figure 4)

With the radial filter Lightroom has given us another fantastic tool to make local edits, and one that does so much more than just simple vignettes.

To see more informative movies and to find out more on how Lightroom can help improve your underwater photography, please visit

www.underwaterlightroom.com

Doug Sloss

LIGHTROOM for the Underwater Photographer

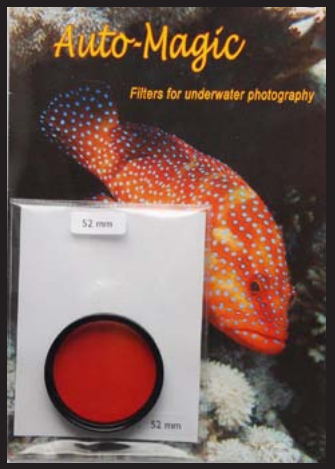
Free Bonus Video

For a more in-depth analysis and an exclusive look at Lightroom's Radial Filter and the techniques involved to create the final images in this article, please click the hyperlink below to watch a special 13 minute bonus video showcasing what the filter is capable of.

www.underwaterlightroom.com/bonus-movie

We've got you covered!

Magic filters are now available in 3 options. Original Magic for use in blue water with DSLR and compact cameras with Manual White Balance, Auto-Magic for compact cameras in automatic point and shoot mode. GreenWater Magic for use in green water with DSLR and compact cameras with Manual White Balance. Prices start at just £19.



The Auto-Magic formula is now available in a Plexiglass filter that can be added or removed underwater.

www.magic-filters.com