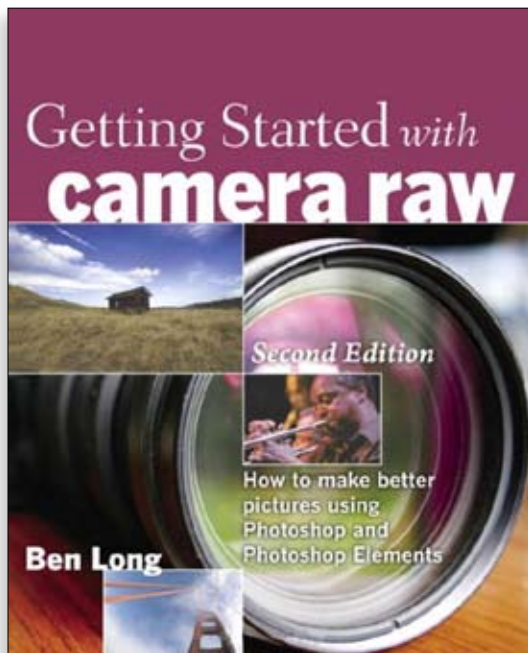


Getting Started with Camera Raw

Donna Kamper

This book is subtitled “How to make better pictures using *Photoshop* and *Photoshop Elements*.” Why is both the 800-pound gorilla (*Photoshop*) and its consumer-oriented version (*Elements*) mentioned in the subtitle? Because both products include Adobe Camera Raw.

So your first question might be, “What’s RAW?” (Hint: it isn’t shooting in the buff.) A RAW image is one the camera hasn’t processed, or “developed” into a JPG or TIFF format image. When the information hits your camera’s sensor (CCD) what happens depends on your settings and the manufacturer’s choices.



When the camera saves as JPG or TIFF, a majority of the information that was captured is discarded, according to how the manufacturer decided a JPG or TIFF should look.

Then, in the case of a JPG, even more information is tossed out to compress the file. There’s a lot missing from the picture the very first time you open the photo.

A RAW photograph, on the other hand, keeps all the

information originally captured. When you open from *Bridge*, *Photoshop* or *Photoshop Elements*, the image first opens in the Adobe Camera Raw (ACR) interface. This is your developing studio, a darkroom *sans* chemicals. Here you make the decisions about exposure, white balance, color tints, etc. – nondestructive decisions. Meaning that at any time in the future you can reopen that image, return it to its original state from the camera, and redevelop it to an entirely different look. And you can do it again and again.

It must be noted, however, that this book deals with a process performed in four different programs. It’s covering *Photoshop CS3*, *Photoshop CS4*, *Photoshop Elements 7* (Windows) and *Photoshop Elements 6* (Mac). The process in each of these differs slightly. The book succeeds in clearly pointing out if/which version contains the particular feature being covered.

It does, however, emphasize the capabilities of *Photoshop* versions to the relative neglect of what *Elements* can accomplish. Example: the author shows how to use the same photograph “developed” in ACR twice to achieve full details in both shadows and highlights. This involves using a layer mask; a one-click feature in *Photoshop*. The exact same result can be achieved in *Elements*. It takes a few more steps, but no mention that it’s even possible in *Elements* was made.

What this slim (250 page) soft-cover book provides is a process to follow from uploading your photographs to final output. Ben Long, the author, calls this a “workflow” and spends several pages explaining exactly what it is. He also points out why it’s important to everyone, professional photographer or weekend hobbyist, whether shooting JPG or RAW.

Simply put, a workflow is the succession of steps taken to get the best results possible. Precisely what those steps are depends on (a) what you’re shooting and (b) your intended outcome. By repeating these steps in a regular fashion, you streamline the process and avoid “surprises.” This book walks you through putting your own personal workflow into effect.

The layout of the book follows the author’s recommended workflow, the basic steps of which begin with **Transfer** – moving the photographs

from your camera or memory card to the computer. Users of *Photoshop Elements 7* (Windows) have *Organizer* available for this process, otherwise *Bridge* is used. Both are visual image browsers that add metadata (keywords, ratings, etc.) to images for quick sorting and finding later.

Once the new batch of photographs has been saved to your hard drive, and perhaps archived as well, the next step is **View & Select**. This is the evaluation process, picking out those worth saving and rating them. The book points out the various ways both *Organizer* and *Bridge* can help accelerate this process, an important feature when you may be dealing with hundreds of photos (or more) from a prolonged shoot.

When you've broken out the "selects," those images worth keeping and working with, **Initial Processing** comes into play – "developing" the RAW image and saving it in an editable format (PSD or TIFF). It's during this step that you open the image in ACR and develop it to your liking. The features available to you here totally depend on which program and version you work in.

Photoshop users have more choices available to them in ACR than do *Elements* users. *Elements 7* (Windows) offers the fewest panels and choices, and (unsurprisingly) *PhotoshopCS4* offers the most. The book breaks this subject into basic (for *Elements* users) and advanced editing (for *Photoshop* users) to cover all the possibilities.

After the photograph is "developed" in ACR, the **Editing** process is next – opening the image in *Elements/Photoshop* to bring it to its final stage. Excepting a single layer mask technique (mentioned above), you'll need another resource for how to work in *Elements/Photoshop*.

The photograph is perfect! Your next step is to **Output** the file (web, print, e-mail, slide show, etc.) and finally to **Archive** – saving the files for safekeeping. Aside from noting that resizing and sharpening is done according to Output, that subject is ignored. There is a short bit about what format to use (explaining the digital negative (DNG) format versus Camera Raw) and how best to save.

I found this to be a good introduction to working with Adobe Camera Raw. *Photoshop* users will get the most benefit. *Elements* users (particularly

those working under Windows) will need another source for full details on exactly what can be done in that program.

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