Unlock the secrets to an efficient editing workflow with Rob Sylvan's expert guide on configuring powerful raw defaults! Discover how to set up a streamlined foundation that will accelerate your editing right from the start. Then, learn to design a personalized set of develop presets tailored to your unique shooting style. Whether you're using Lightroom Classic or Lightroom, this class will equip you with the tools and techniques to maximize your productivity and achieve stunning results with ease!

In this session we'll explore what a raw default means, some simple ways to explore the possibilities, and then dive deeper into greater customization options.
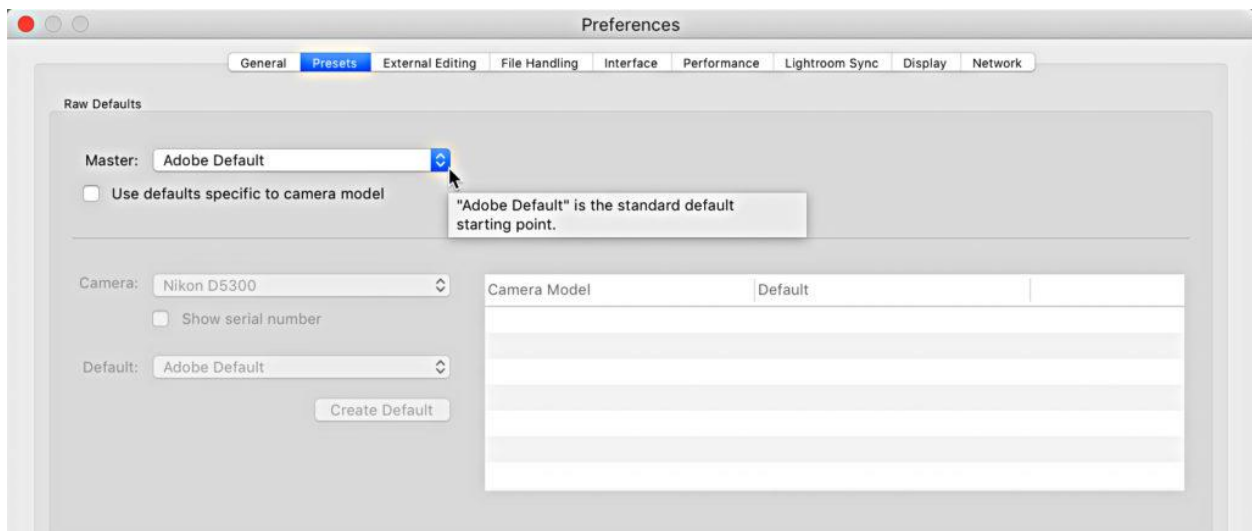
What is the Raw Default?
When you import raw photos into Lightroom Classic some settings must be applied to the raw data to serve as a starting point for your edits. The un-customized settings are called the Adobe Defaults, which applies the Adobe Color camera profile, zeros out almost all other settings, and applies a baseline configuration of sharpening and noise reduction in the Detail panel. Note, this only affects raw photos, so you won't see any changes to JPG, PSD, PNG, or TIF files (which do not have any settings at all applied to them by default).

There's nothing wrong with the Adobe Default settings, and there is nothing wrong with keeping them as-is. However, if you find that you always end up applying the same settings to all new raw photos (like lens correction or a specific camera profile or different sharpening settings), then you might benefit from customizing the defaults to include your preferred settings. All this does is give you a new, and customized, starting point for your raw photos. Note

Where is the Raw Default Set?
This is found under Lightroom Classic > Preferences > Presets (PC: Edit > Preferences > Presets). Here you will find a panel called Raw Defaults.


Within the Raw Defaults panel, you have three basic options for the Master control:

Adobe Default: The same Adobe defaults as we've had in the past. Adobe Color is the default profile, and most settings are zeroed out (except for the sliders in the Detail panel).

Camera Settings: The same as Adobe Default except that a profile will be selected to match your in-camera picture style selection (instead of Adobe Color). So, if you set your camera to shoot in B&W (monochrome), choosing Camera Settings would honor that and you will see that a monochrome profile has been applied. Note, unless you shoot with one of the Nikon Z series cameras, it just selects a matching profile and does not change any other settings. Nikon Z series owners may also see other settings in Basic and Detail panels change based on in-camera settings (hopefully we'll see this extend to other camera makes and models in the future). This is an exciting new development, and I hope we see this idea of Lightroom Classic doing a better job of emulating the in-camera settings continue to evolve.

Preset: You choose a Develop preset that will be applied by default to all raw photos from all cameras (or just specific camera models). You can include anything that you are able to include in a preset. You can also combine this with the Camera Settings option above.
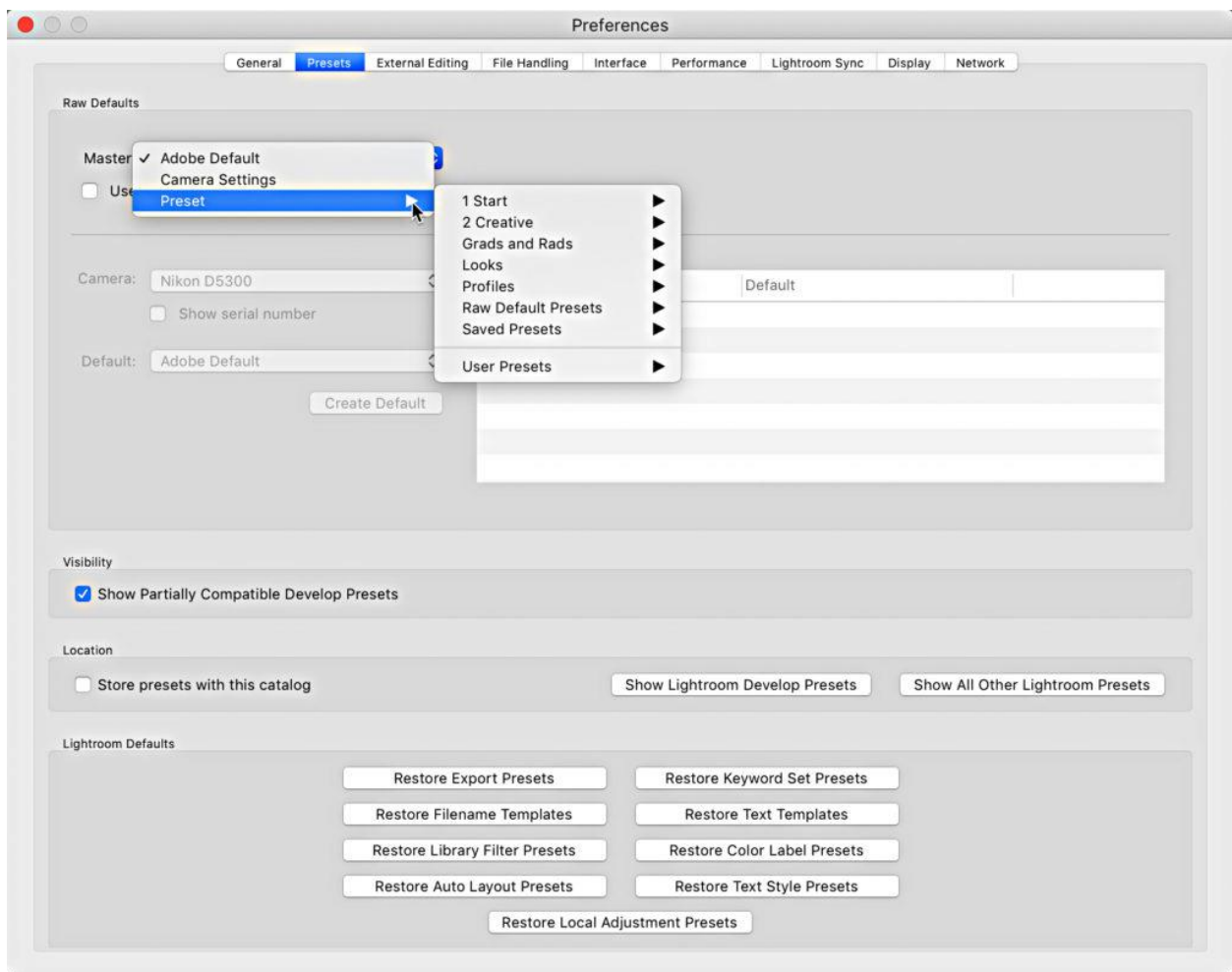
Set the Master Default
If you only have a single camera or want all raw photos from all camera models to have the same base default settings, then customizing the Master setting is the first thing to do. Let's imagine a few scenarios to help make sense of this.

Scenario One: You don't want to change anything at all. In this case, leave it set to Adobe Default.

Scenario Two: You want to experiment with letting Lightroom Classic change the profile for all raw photos based on the in-camera picture style you choose but leave all other settings the same as Adobe Default. In this case, choose Camera Settings from the Master drop-down menu.

Scenario Three: You have a preset that you always apply on import, and you want to make that preset the new default for all raw photos, or you want to create a preset for this purpose and make that preset the raw default. In this case, you would use the Preset option in the Master drop-down menu to navigate to and select the desired preset.
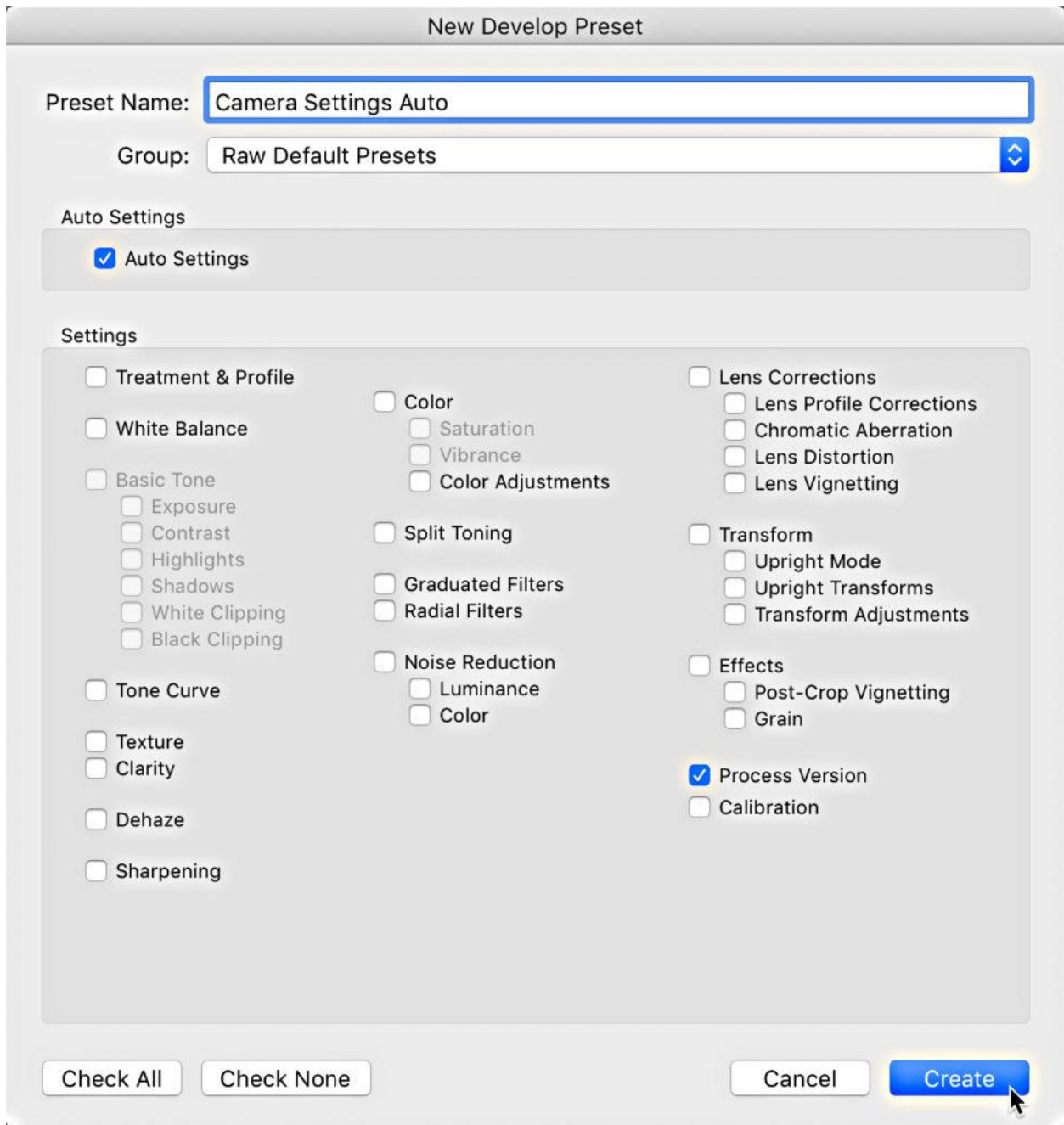
Create a Preset
For the sake of testing and experimentation … let's create a preset that simply enables the Auto settings function and leaves everything else at the Adobe Default, but also includes the new Camera Settings function for choosing a profile based on in-camera picture style. This is just an example, so feel free to include only the settings that make sense to your workflow. After you've gotten a feel for how this works I highly recommend you replace this preset with one that is tailored to your needs.

Step One: Select a raw photo and click the Reset button to ensure it is at the Adobe Default settings with everything zeroed out.

Step Two: Go to Develop > New Preset to open the New Develop Preset dialog box. Name this preset Camera Settings Auto (or whatever makes sense to you).

Step Three: Click the Group drop-down menu and create a new group called Raw Default Presets (or whatever makes sense to you).

Step Four: Click the Check None box, and then only check the boxes for Auto Settings and Process Version. By not checking the box for Treatment & Profile Lightroom Classic uses the previously mentioned Camera Settings function for choosing the profile (and if you are shooting with a Nikon Z series, possibly some additional settings). Then click Create to complete the process. The new preset will appear in the Preset panel within the group you designated.

Step Five: Go to the Presets tab of the Preferences, and click the Master drop-down menu, go to Preset, and select to the preset you created under the Presets menu (look for the preset group you designated). You should then see the name of your preset loaded in the Master drop-down menu.
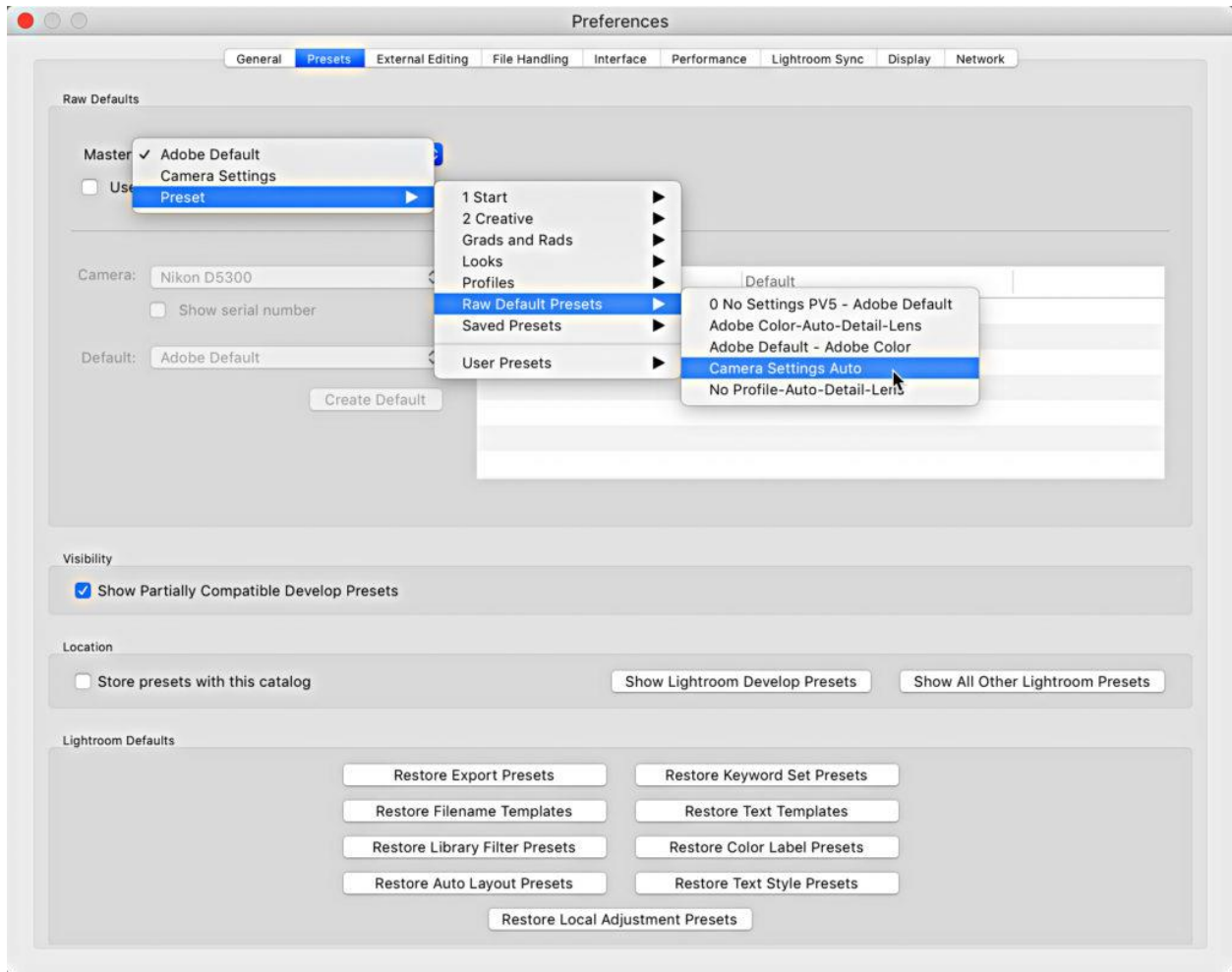
From this point forward, all newly imported raw photos will have the settings included in the preset applied to them by default. **Likewise, clicking the Reset button in Develop will reset to the new default settings** (for this reason alone I suggest you don't keep this as your final raw default). Take some test photos with different in-camera picture styles applied, and then import them and give your new defaults a test drive.

Updating The Preset
After doing some testing you decide that you want to stick with the Camera Settings option for choosing profiles, but you don't want to have Auto Settings applied AND you want to include a lens profile correction. Let's update that preset.

Step One: With a raw photo selected, click Reset to set to defaults. Then go to the Lens Corrections panel and check the boxes for Remove Chromatic Aberration and Enable Profile Corrections. Leave everything else at the default. Note, to the best of my knowledge all mirrorless cameras will automatically enable profile corrections from the start, so don't be surprised if that is already checked for your mirrorless camera.

Step Two: Right-click the Camera Settings Auto preset we created earlier (or whatever you named it) and choose Update with Current Settings to open the Update Develop Preset dialog box.

Step Three: Only check boxes for Lens Profile Corrections, Chromatic Aberration, and Process Version. Leave every other box unchecked. Click Update.

Go ahead and click the Reset button and the selected photo should retain the profile that matches the in-camera picture style, the tonal value sliders in the Basic panel should reset from Auto, and the boxes in the Lens Corrections panel should be checked. To update your default settings in the future, just update that preset. Note, be careful not to delete that preset or your defaults will revert to the Camera Settings option without telling you.

Make Defaults Specific to Each Camera

Now that you have a Master setting you like, what if you want to have a different default setting for one or more cameras you shoot with? In that case you'll want to check the Use defaults specific to camera model checkbox under the Master drop-down menu. Once enabled, it brings the bottom section of the new panel to life.
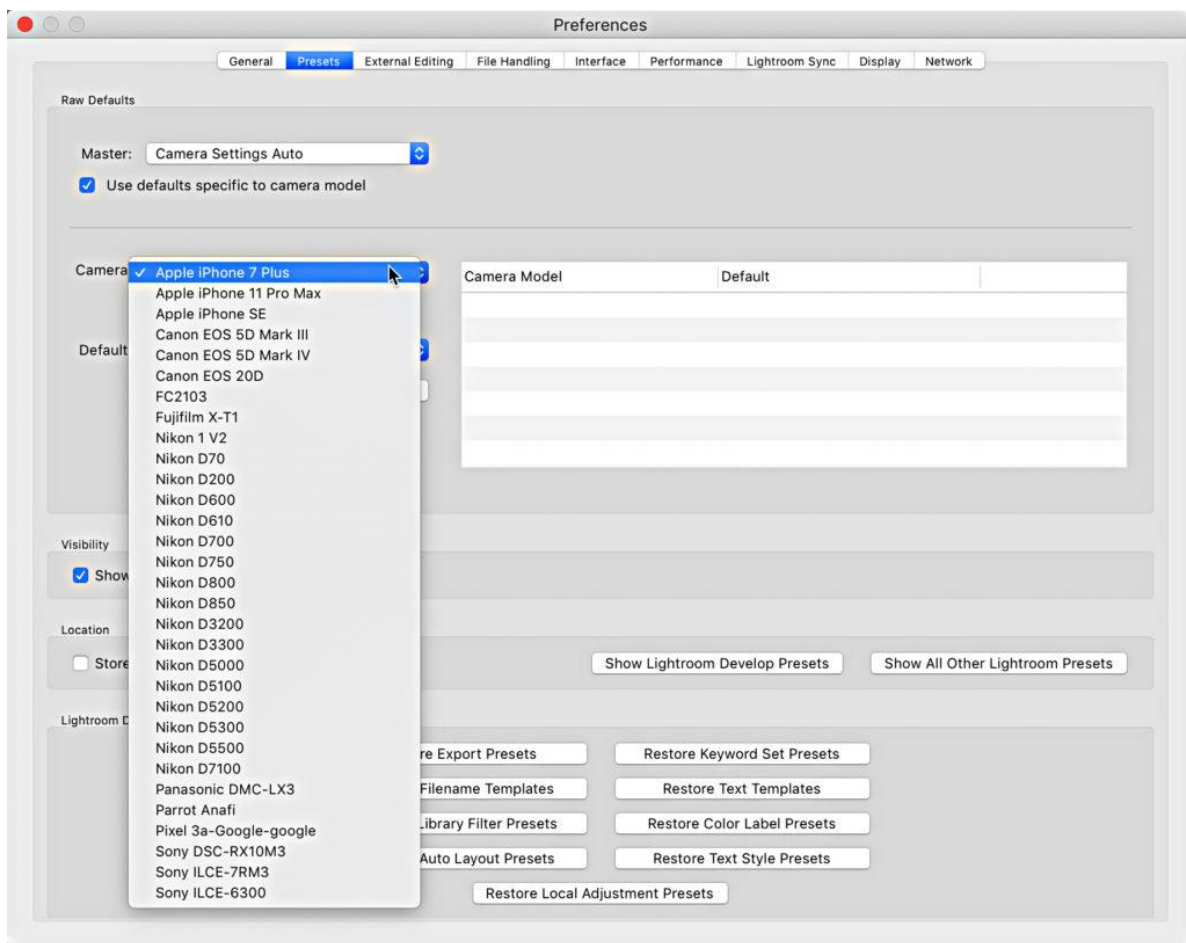
Using the Camera drop-down menu you can select the camera model you want to create a custom default setting for, then use the Default drop-down menu below that to choose from the same three options I outlined above, but for that specific camera only. Note, if at first you don't see the desired camera model listed, exit the Preferences and view a folder or collection containing photos from the desired camera and return to this Preference setting. Once configured as desired, click the Update Default button to add that configuration to the panel. Note, if you need to set your defaults based on camera body serial number, check the Show serial number box and you'll be able to choose each camera body individually.
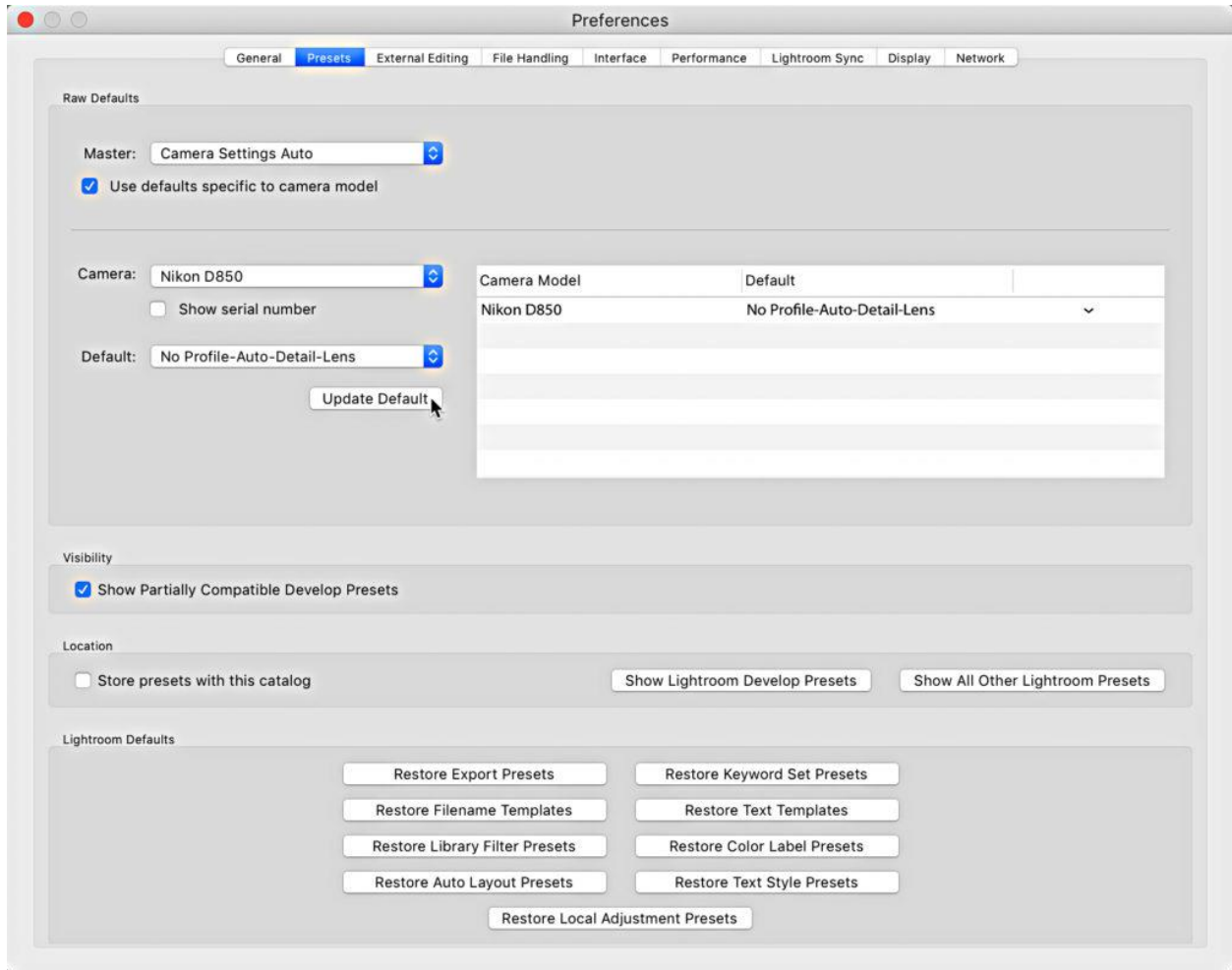
Once you've applied a camera specific default you can modify, update, or delete that setting via the drop-down menu at the far-right of the panel. Under that menu you will see options for choosing Adobe Default, Camera Settings, accessing all of your develop presets, or deleting that camera specific default setting.
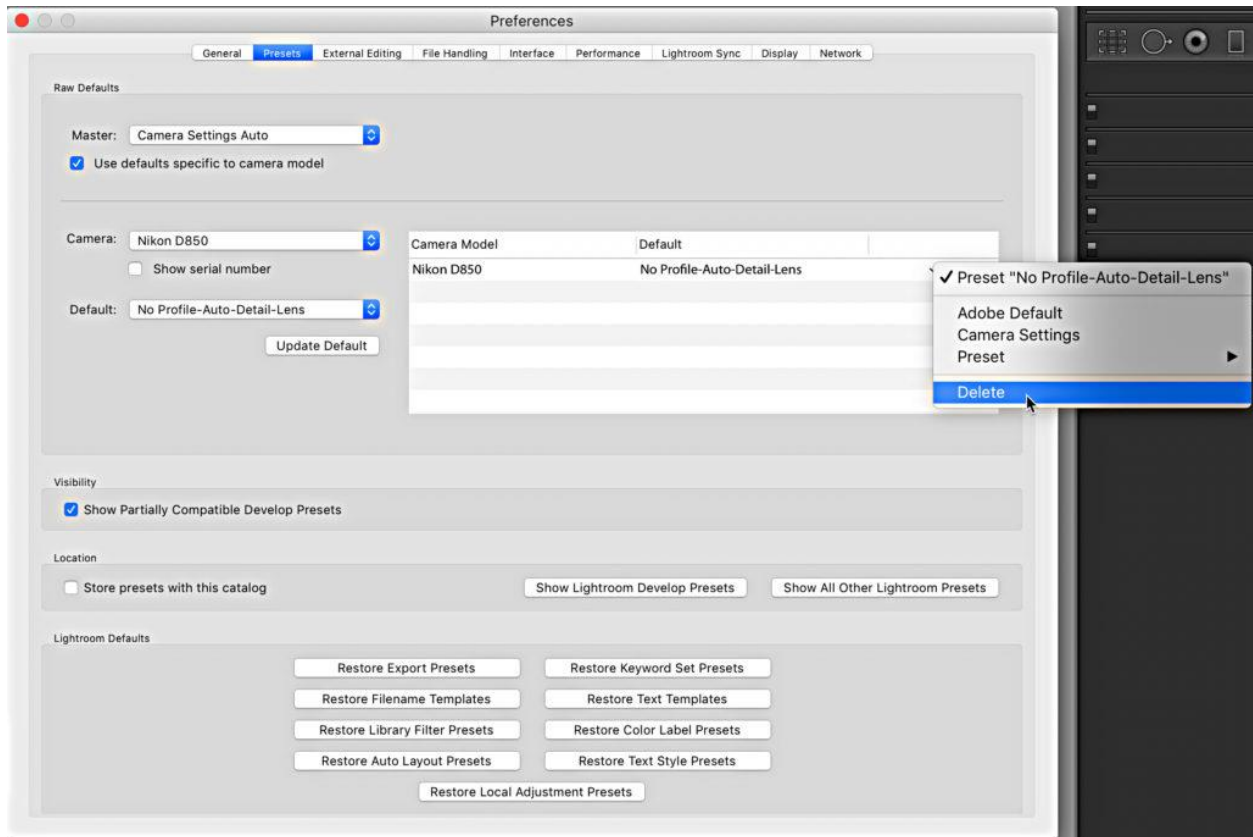
You can of course continue to apply a preset during import or when tethering or using Auto Import. The Raw Default setting you choose is applied first, then any import preset is applied on top of the default, and then anything you apply manually after import comes next. Think of the Raw Default as a time saving measure to get you to your preferred starting point. Think of import presets as creative or job specific additions to your default settings to get you to a different starting point. If all of this seems too overwhelming at first, just leave it at Adobe Defaults and do all your editing in Develop manually. There's no wrong answer, just a few options to consider.

To take it one step further you can incorporate an adaptive ISO preset into your default, and even do it separately for each camera. Adobe included some adaptive ISO presets for you to test under the Default section of the Preset panel. Adobe has also documented the steps for creating a custom adaptive ISO preset.

One final note, the old shortcut for resetting to the Adobe defaults (useful if you had a custom default setting using the old method) has been discontinued in this latest update. So pressing Command + Shift + R (PC: Ctrl + Shift + R) does the same as just pressing Reset, which is to reset the photo based on the settings you've chosen in the Raw Defaults section of the preferences. If you want a way to get to all zeroed settings and the Adobe Color profile, then you'll want to create a preset that does that, and just click the preset when/if needed, which we'll cover next.

Create a Reset to Zero Preset

An additional preset I've found useful on occasion is having a preset that just zeroes everything out. At the risk of stating the obvious, after setting a Raw Default it becomes your new default state for all raw photos. Meaning as you import raw photos they will automatically get those settings applied to them without you having to do anything else, which can be a real time saver. As such, while editing, if you click the Reset button all settings revert back to the Raw Default state defined by the preset you've configured. That makes sense when you think about it, but I have encountered situations where I've wanted to clear away all global settings for whatever reason, and for that you'll need to create a preset that contains all possible settings set to zero or disabled (depending on the setting in question). Here's how to do that:

Step One: Select a non-raw photo (JPG, PSD, TIF, PNG) that has not been edited in Lightroom Classic (LrC), and press D to go to Develop. Non-raw photos have a default state of no settings being applied to them, so that's a quick way to get the Develop module zeroed out (you can of course start with any photo and manually zero out all settings if you wish). Visually confirm this by looking at the settings in each panel before creating the preset.

Step Two: Expand the Presets panel and click the + sign to choose Create Preset and open the New Develop Preset dialog box.

Step Three: In the New Develop Preset dialog box, click the Check All box to include all settings. By starting with a photo that has no settings at all, then including all of those zeroed out states in the preset we'll have a one-click way to turn everything off at once (see caveats at the end of article).
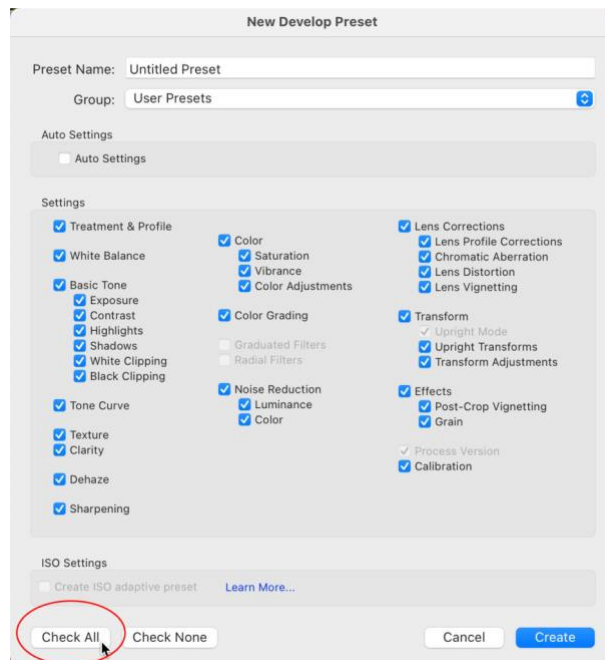
Step Four: Give the preset a meaningful name and put that preset in a logical group so that you can find it when you need it.
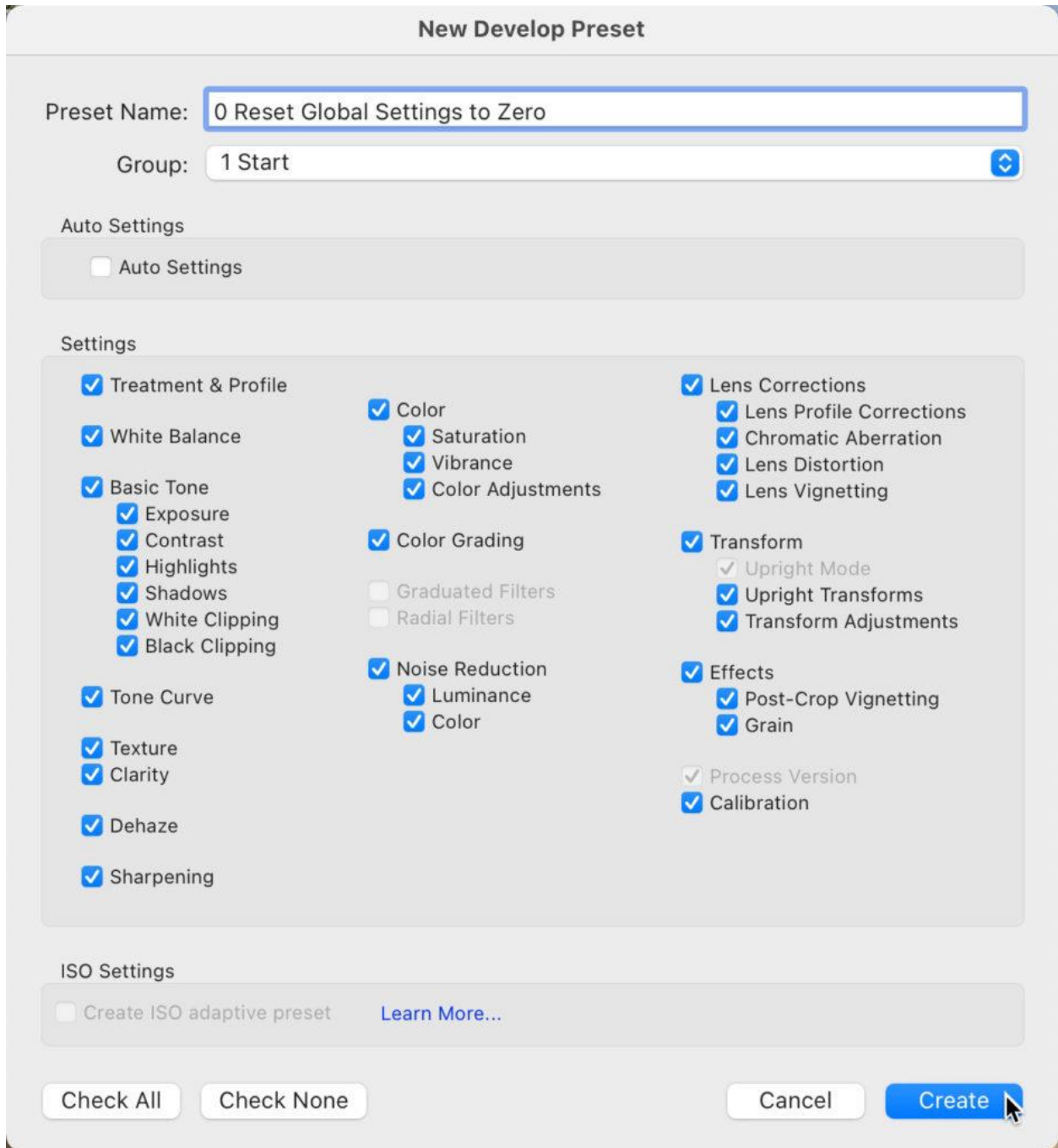
For me, I named it with a leading number (0 in this case) so it sorts right to the top of the list within its group. The added bonus of having it readily accessible is that you can preview the photo with all settings zeroed by just placing your cursor over the preset (the Before view only takes you back to import state).

A Few Caveats

There are limitations to what this preset can do and as such where the Reset button may also be required depending on your end goal. This preset will not remove local adjustments because while you can include Radial and Linear Gradients in a preset you can't include Adjustment Brush strokes or Spot Removal applications, so I just leave all of them out and work within the limitations. Along those same lines Crop can't be included in a preset, so applying (or previewing) the preset won't change the crop ratio applied. If you want to clear away all local adjustments and the crop to go back to the Raw Default state, click the Reset button. If you want to go even further after that to zero out all settings, use your new preset.

Admittedly, I only use this in rare situations where I want to compare the zeroed out state to my default or some combination of global settings, but since writing the article on creating a Raw Default I've been asked how to get everything to be set to zero, so now you know. I'd love to hear if you find this useful in other ways or if you use this for your Raw Default itself.

Adaptive Masking Presets

The updates to Masking have made making AI-based selections easier and more powerful than ever. In addition, our ability to incorporate those AI-based technologies into presets has evolved as well, and that's what I want to cover here.
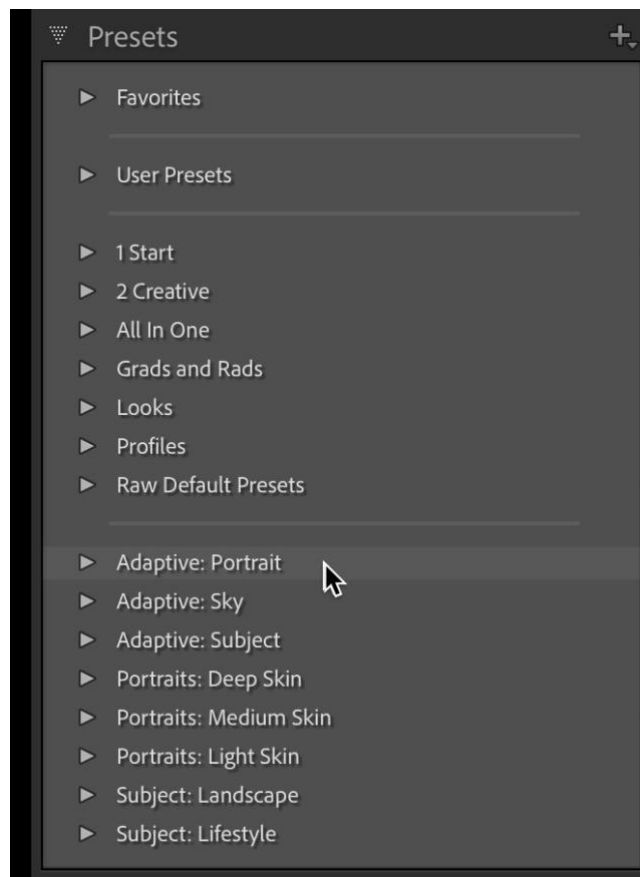
Exploring Included Adaptive Presets

You may have noticed new additions to your Presets panel in the Develop module that start with the word Adaptive. There are four Adaptive groups now, one for Portrait, one for Sky, one for Subject, and one for Blur Background. The presets in these groups were created by Adobe to give you a taste of what is now possible to include in a preset. We'll use these to understand how they work, then I'll show you how to create and modify your own.
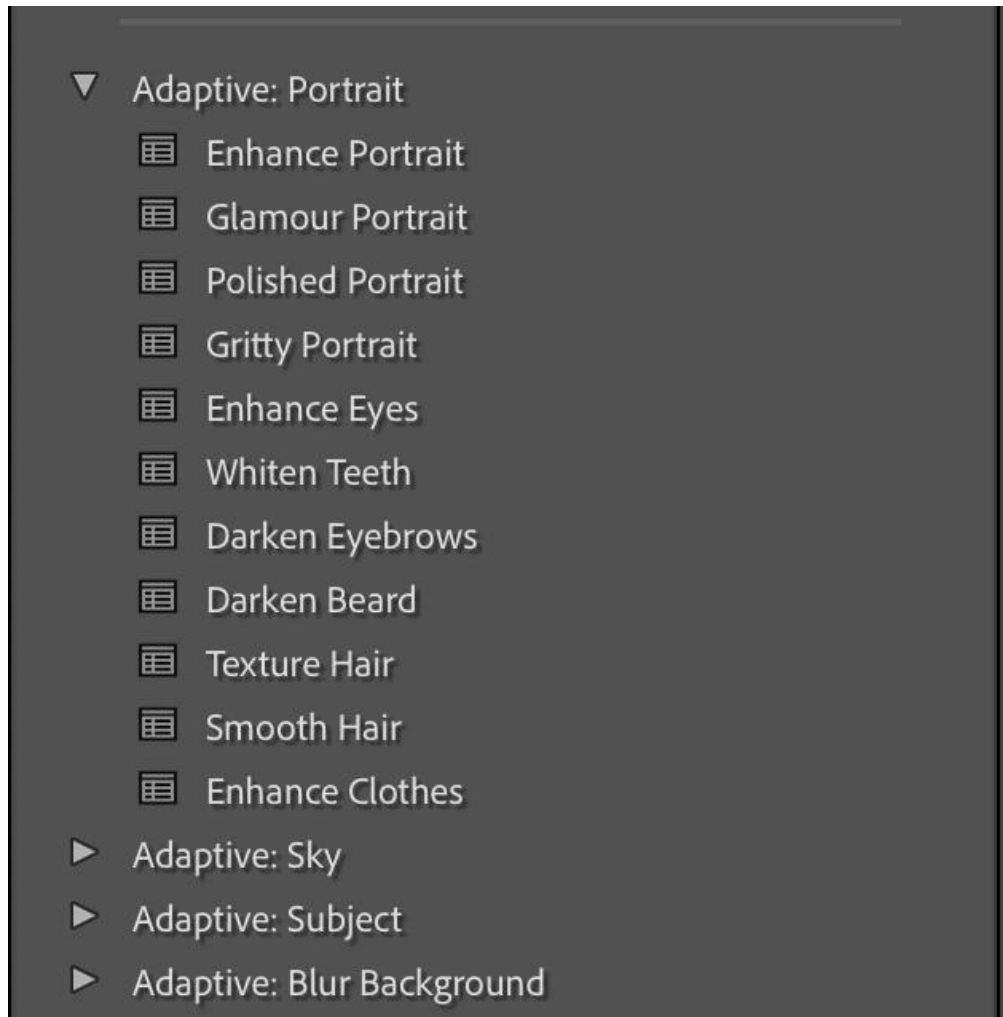

Let's expand the Adaptive: Subject group and see what's included. You should see names like Pop, Warm Pop, Soft, Cool Soft, and so on. What all the Adaptive groups of presets have in common is that they are designed to leverage one of the AI-based types of Masking tools to automatically detect either a person, sky, or subject respectively, then create a mask for it, and then apply the included settings to that mask. So, select an unedited photo that has some kind of obvious subject (I'm always curious to see if the AI thinks the subject is the same subject I expect), and move your cursor over each preset slowly (as it may need a moment to generate a mask on the fly based on the photo's subject), and you should see the look of the subject change based on the settings in the respective preset.
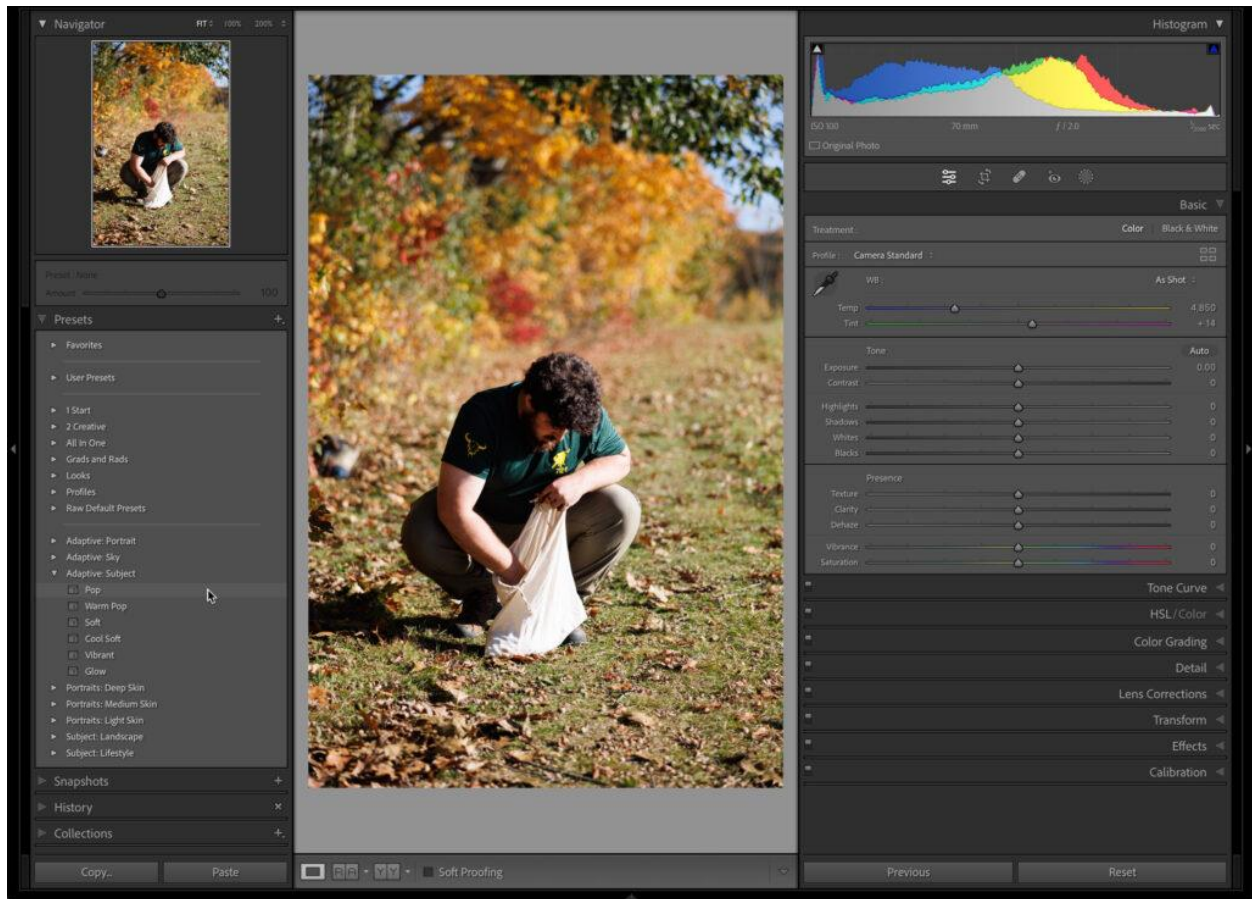
When you find a look that you are curious about, click on it to apply it to the photo. Then, click the Masking icon to open the Masking tools so you can select the mask it created and examine the settings. I clicked on the one called Pop, and I can now see it included settings for Exposure, Texture, and Clarity, which were applied to the mask it created for what it considered the subject (and in this case, I would agree).
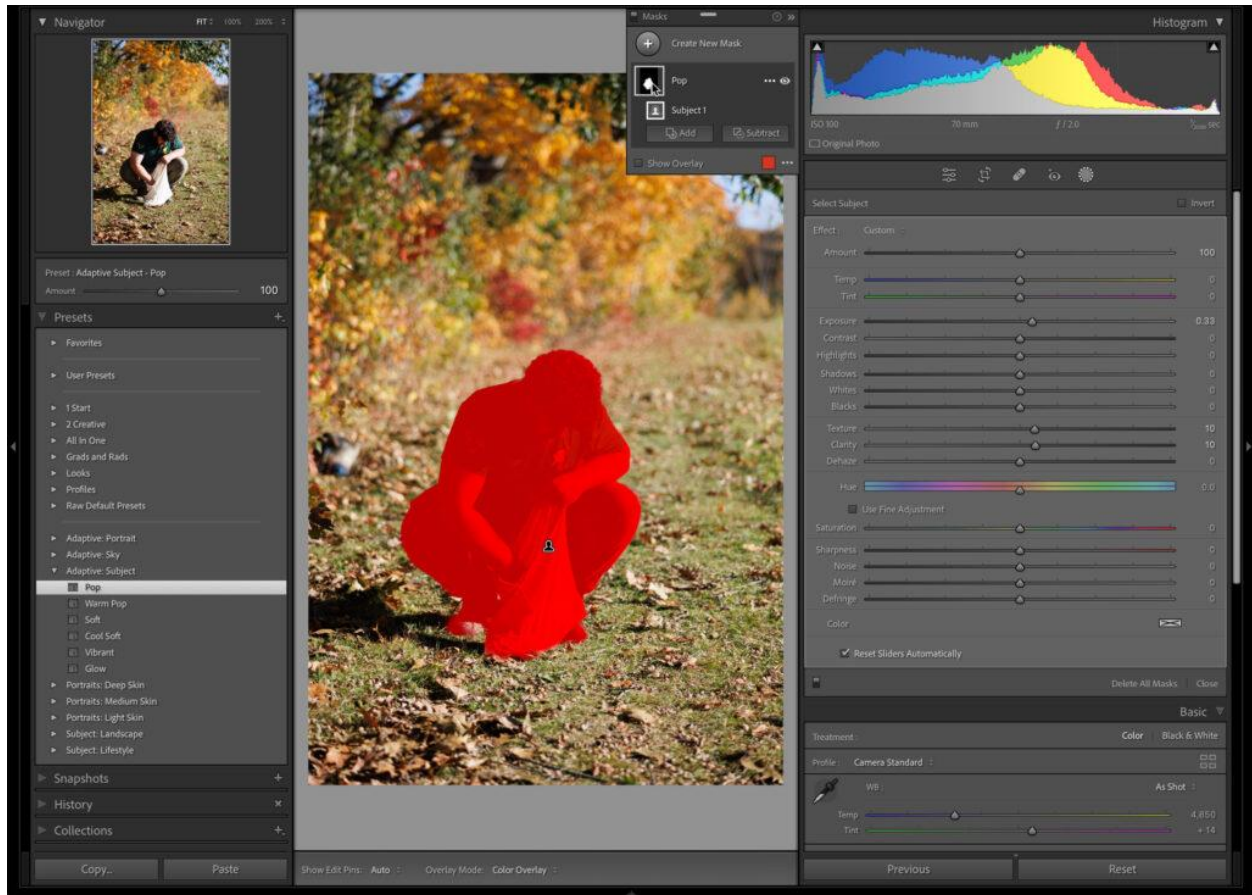
Now, you may or may not like the look of any of the included presets, but I highly encourage you to click on each one in the Subject group and examine what it masked, how well it masked, and what settings it used to get its look. As you explore those presets think about what you would do differently, what settings would you change, and what other mask types would you like to create.

Now, select an unedited photo of a person where you can see their eyes and teeth (along with the rest of their face). Expand the Adaptive: Portrait group to see the included presets and click the Masking icon to open its panel (there should not be any masks yet). Click the first preset, Enhance Portrait to see what masks are applied to your photo. You should see a mask for Teeth, Iris and Pupil, Eye Sclera, and Face Skin. Explore each mask's settings.
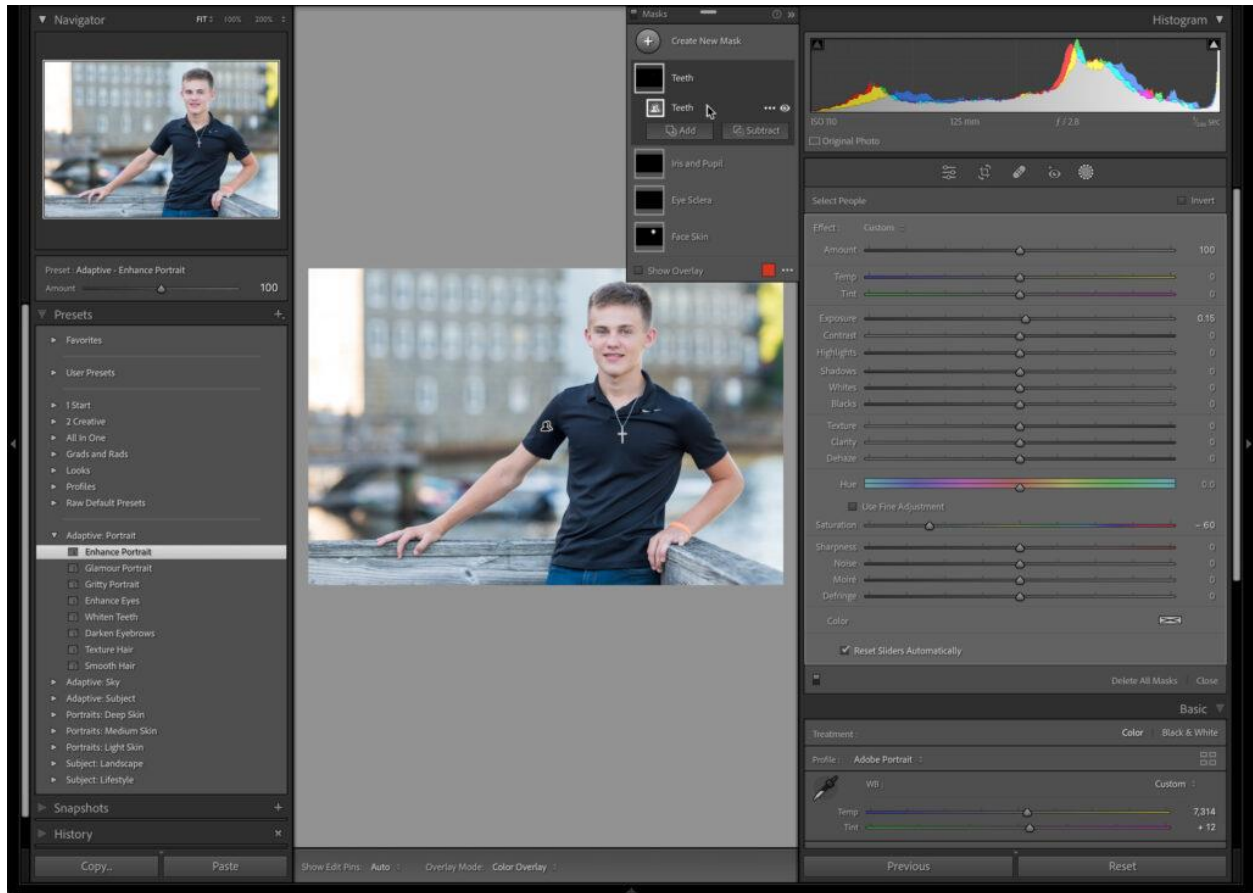
Now, in turn, click each of the other presets in the Adaptive: Portrait group to see those masks added to, and in some instances replace, the masks created by the first preset. By the end your photo may not look great, but that's not the point. The point is that because of the updates to how portrait masks can be generated it is now possible to automate the creation of masks (with settings) for individual features, such as hair, teeth, face skin, and so on. Furthermore, you can create an individual preset for each feature alone and know that you can later apply them all to a single photo and they will stack accordingly. This is incredibly powerful when applied to a single photo, but now think about applying presets to a batch of photos at once, and it just may change your workflow!
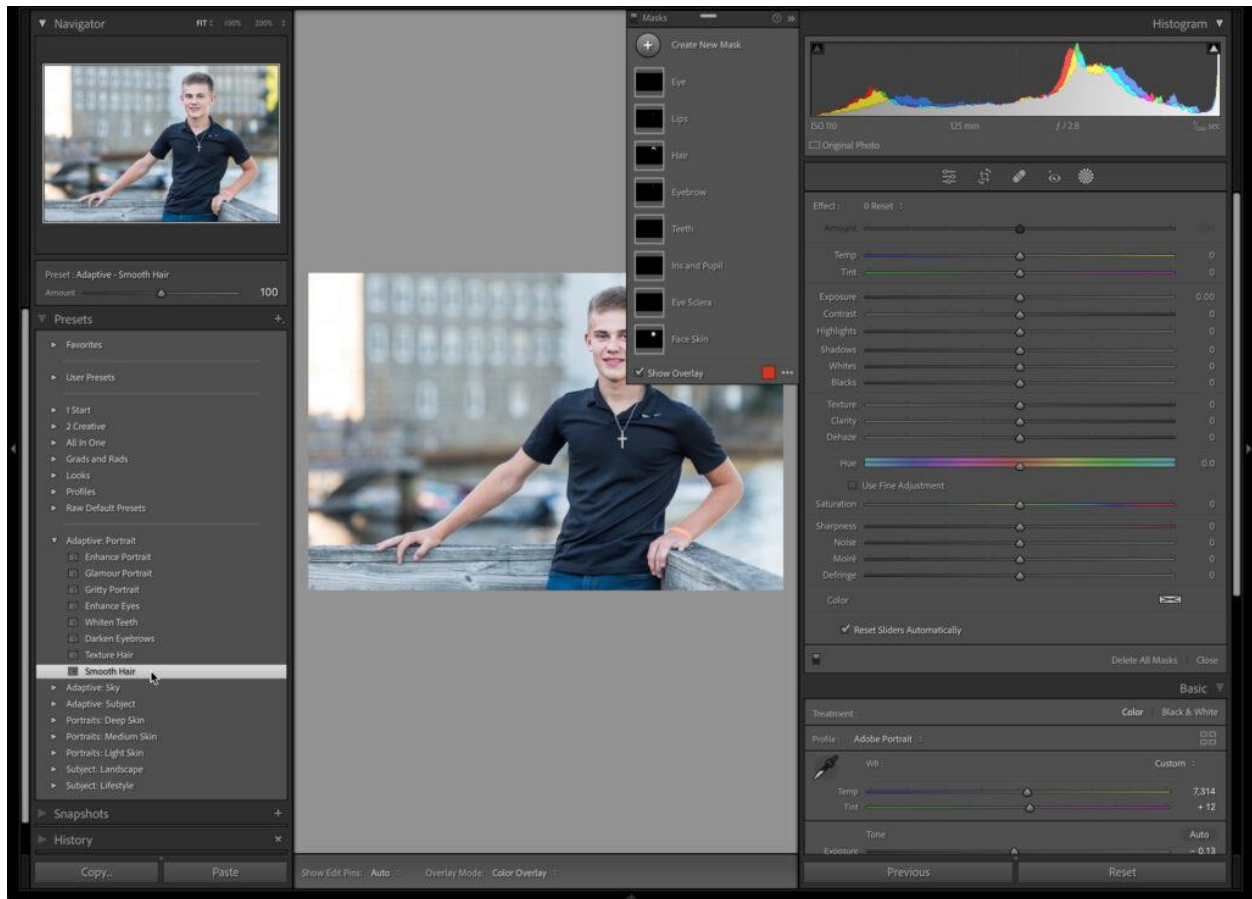
In addition, notice that at the top of the Presets panel the Amount slider should be enabled for all the included Adaptive presets, which means you can fine tune them after they've been applied for even more control. Let's say you apply the Smooth Hair preset, then move the Amount slider to 78, if you look at the top of the Masking panel, you'll see the Amount slider there corresponds to that same amount. If you apply Enhance Portrait and move the Amount slider to 150, then each respective mask created by that preset will see its settings moved to 150 as well, but without affecting any of the other masks created by other presets or manually by you. What amazing control!
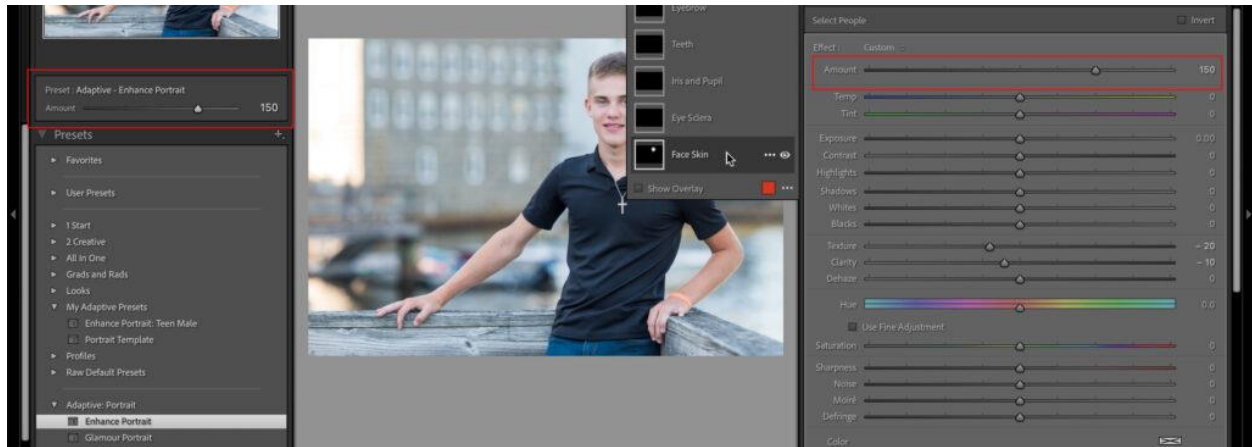
So that's just the presets provided by Adobe. Hopefully the creative wheels in your mind are turning now as you think about all the possibilities for customizing these to your own personal workflow and taste. Let's keep working with that portrait photo you have selected and click the Reset button to clear away any existing masks and settings. Click the Masking icon (if not still in Masking mode) and look for the People section under Add New Mask (at the bottom). Click the icon for the person shown to see all the individual features that can be detected and masked. Now, you could check Entire Person, and have a single mask for the whole person, but for this exercise, uncheck Entire Person and instead check each individual feature. Then, at the bottom, make sure Create 8 separate masks is checked and click Create Mask.
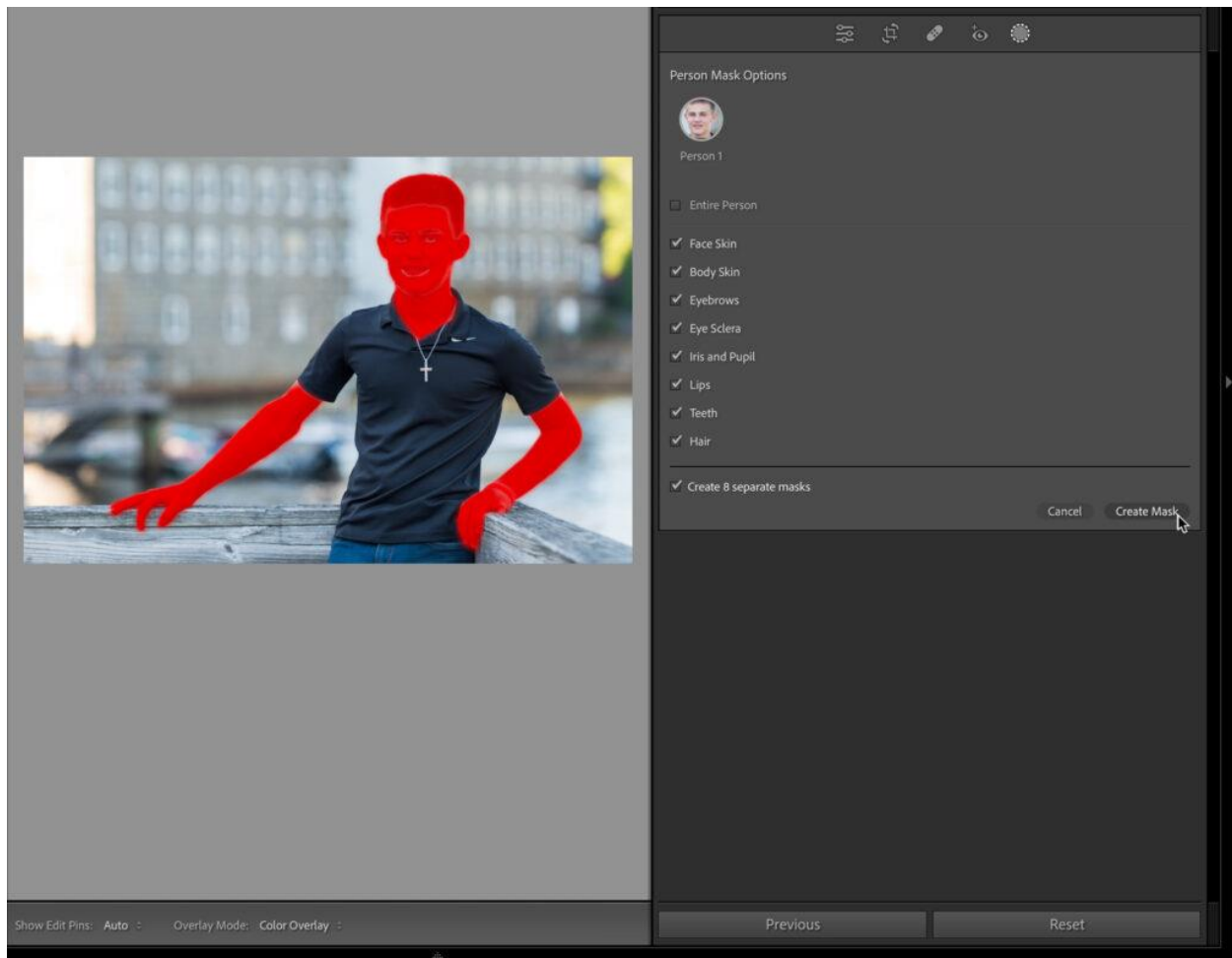
Eight individual masks will be applied to the photo, and at this point, each mask has no settings included. Think of it as a blank canvas awaiting your brush. You can make this a template that you can use to quickly make new presets down the road. In the Masks panel, double-click on each mask and rename the Mask Group to reflect the feature being masked (instead of Mask 1, and so on). When you're done your masking panel will be a lot easier to read what each mask is affecting.
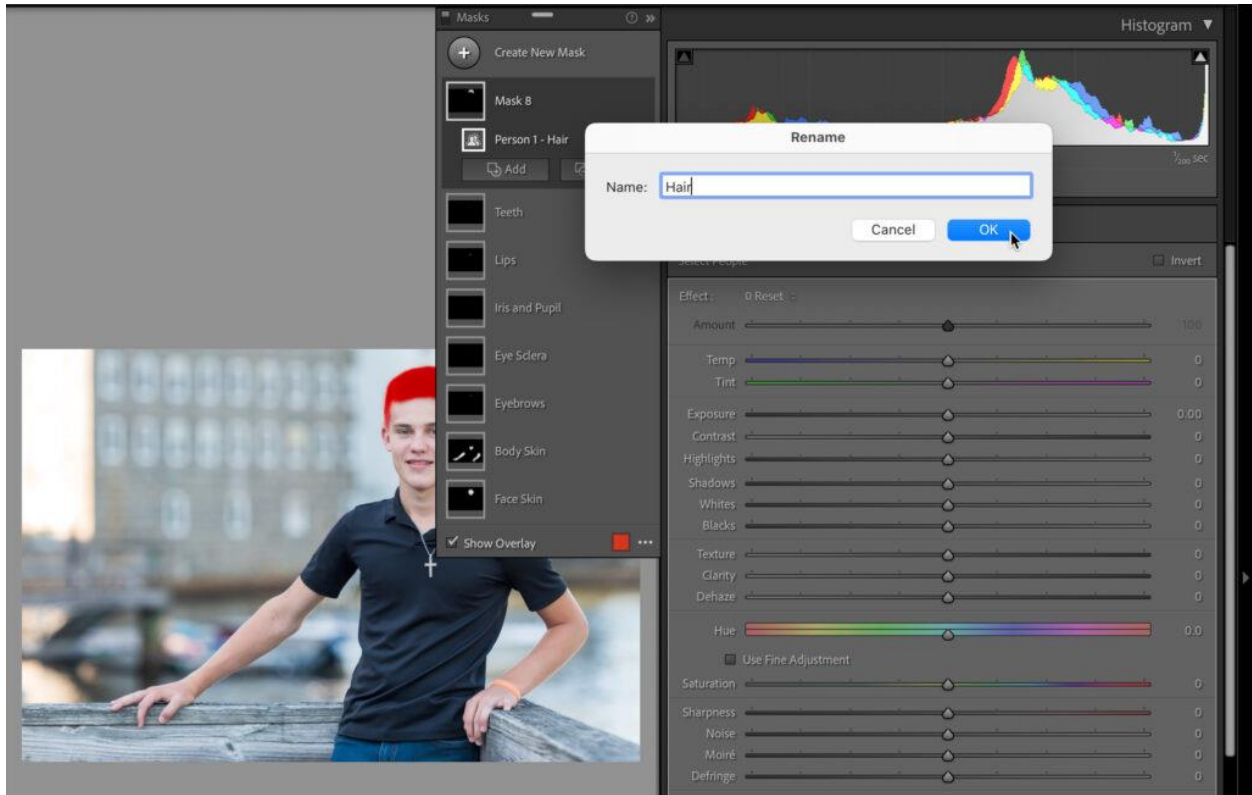
Let's save all that work as a preset. Click the + sign at the top of the Presets panel and choose Create Preset. In the New Develop Preset dialog box, click the Group drop-down menu, choose New Group, and name the new group something like My Adaptive Presets or whatever makes sense to you. Then click the Check None button at the bottom to clear all checkboxes. Under Masking, check the box next to each Mask Group name (this is why I had you rename those Mask Groups previously). I'd leave Support Amount Slider checked, but that's all. Give your preset a meaningful name, like Portrait Template, and click Create.
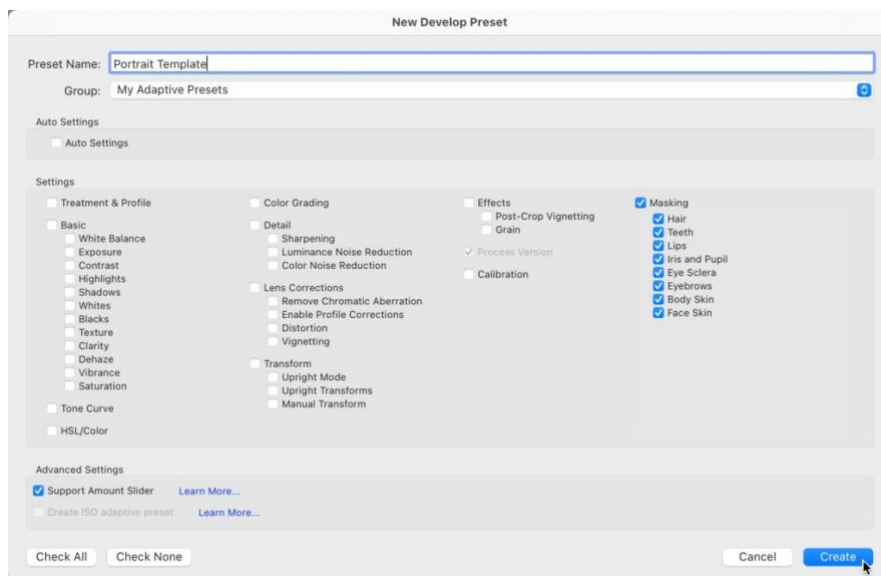
That will create a new preset group in the Presets panel and place your new preset within. Now you've got a powerful preset that does nothing except create masks for each portrait feature. Here's where you get to customize and play with settings. One at a time, click on each Mask Group and adjust the settings for that specific feature to make it look good to your taste. Don't worry about it being perfect for all photos, just tweak and adjust for this one. Once you've adjusted the settings for each feature, click the + sign above the Presets panel and create a new preset. Give it a meaningful name, in my case Enhance Portrait: Teen Male, make sure all the Masking boxes are checked (and support Amount slider), and click Create. The preset group you created previously should still be selected, but always worth double-checking so you can find it again.
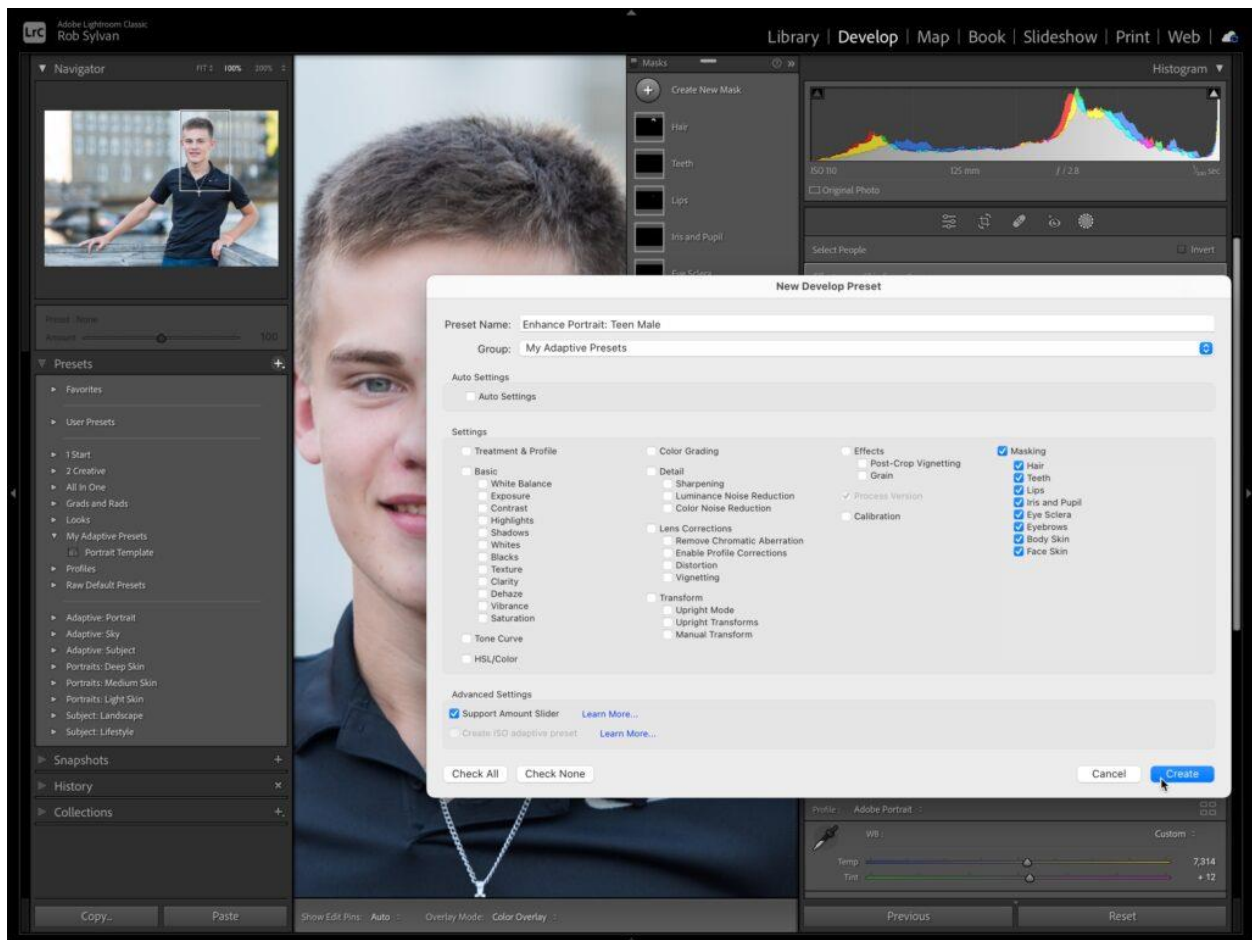
That preset will be added to your preset group along with your template. Now that you know how this works you can use your template preset as a starting point for creating new presets for different looks, and different portrait subjects. If you want to make presets for single features (like just hair), then only check the box for the Hair mask group. You can be as granular as you wish. If portraits are not really your thing, then try those same steps but with using a landscape photo with an obvious sky for applying the Select Sky masking tool. Or experiment with Select Subject and Select Background for automating the creation of masks for the subject in your photo with different settings for the background. Use the included presets for inspiration. When

you are comfortable with applying these presets to individual photos try selecting a batch of photos in Develop, enable Auto Sync, and apply one preset to all selected photos to really speed up your workflow (note, some time is needed to generate the masks in your batch, but once done you'll be further ahead). Then you can walk through each photo and tweak as desired. Have fun!

I hope you've found this session helpful, and with these notes you are in a great position to make the most of the raw defaults. Please also check out my weekly posts on LightroomKillerTips.com for new information. You can also reach out to me directly on Threads/Instagram @sylvanworks or robsylvan.com if you have questions. Finally, if you want a real in-depth resource on Lightroom Classic please check out my latest book, Lightroom Classic for Dummies (next edition coming out early in 2025).