Lightroom Master Catalog

Managing catalogs while traveling

Overview

This workflow is for anyone who wishes to simplify their digital imaging cataloging by managing only one single "Master Catalog" for all their images. If you own 2 computers such as an iMac for your office and a laptop for travel, learn how to utilize a temporary catalog while on shoots, workshops or vacations and import that catalog into the master catalog.

Objectives

1. Organize all existing image files within a tree of folders: master images > year > shoot/location name.

2. Create a master catalog within the latest version of LR and modify preferences.

3.   Import all existing images into master catalog.

4. If you decide to travel with a laptop, create a temporary catalog and store it on a external hard drive during your shoot.

5. Import all images into temporary catalog and work on them during your shoot.

6. At end of shoot, merge temporary catalog with master catalog.

7. Backup master catalog and copy backup files to a 2nd drive.

The Catalog

The best way to utilize all the power of Lightroom is to maintain ONE catalog.
If you're like me, and travel, the only other catalog you will ever need is a temporary catalog for each shoot. The following instructions will give you all the information and necessary steps for maintaining one master catalog on your home/office computer and a second temporary catalog for each shoot while working on a laptop or second computer.

- I will refer to the home/office computer as computer #1 and the laptop as computer #2.

- I will refer to the temporary/shoot catalog as the temp, and the Master catalog as the master. I will refer to Lightroom as LR.

The temp is utilized only if you like to work on your images while traveling. If you do not wish to work on your images within LR while on a shoot or trip there is no reason for the temp catalog. You can simply save image files on the media cards and/or to the laptop hard drive and import them into your master when you're back home.

The master should contain "ALL" of your RAW digital image files, jpeg files and video files. I absolutely love having "ONE" catalog. This allows me to find all or any combination of images with only a few clicks/gestures of the mouse.

To create any group of images created over time, for various projects, I simply create a collection of images. Since collections are maintained within LR based on one specific catalog, it is a must that I am able to search all my images within one catalog to create collections of my work for specific clients and projects.

One tricky part in this whole process is migrating the temp into the master. The first step, however, is to verify a few preferences and catalog settings for your master.

Tree of images

My images are stored in a very simple tree formation, beginning with the parent folder titled "Master Images". Within the master images folder is each year. Within each year is a specific shoot or location title.

Here is what my "Master Images" folder structure looks like when viewed through the operating system in Apples finder window.

all image files are contained within one folder for entire shoot or location
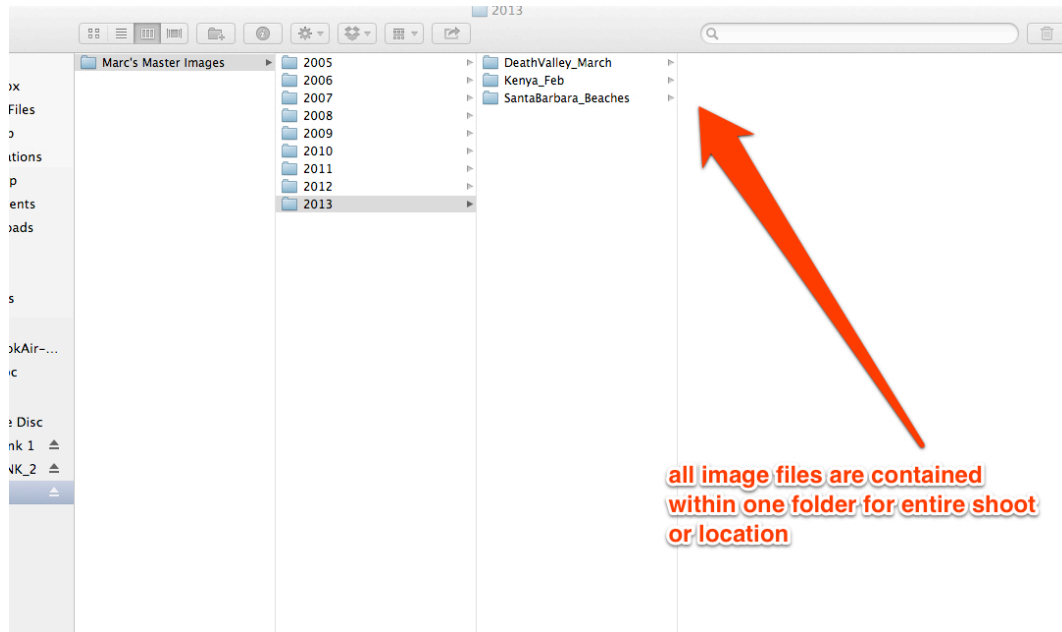
Note: If your images are not organized in a similar fashion, I HIGHLY recommend that you organize them before starting a new master catalog. Once you have done so, it is very simple to import the "Master Images" folder into LR again or to a new master catalog. Make sure you check the box in the import dialog for "include all subfolders". Also, you will be "adding" the files not copying!

Note: You should have .xmp files below all RAW files if you want the metadata and develop module settings saved, or convert all RAW images into DNG files. A DNG file simply contains all the metadata within the same format and can be opened by all RAW file converters. I do not convert all my image files into DNG while on a shoot because it takes twice as long to import.
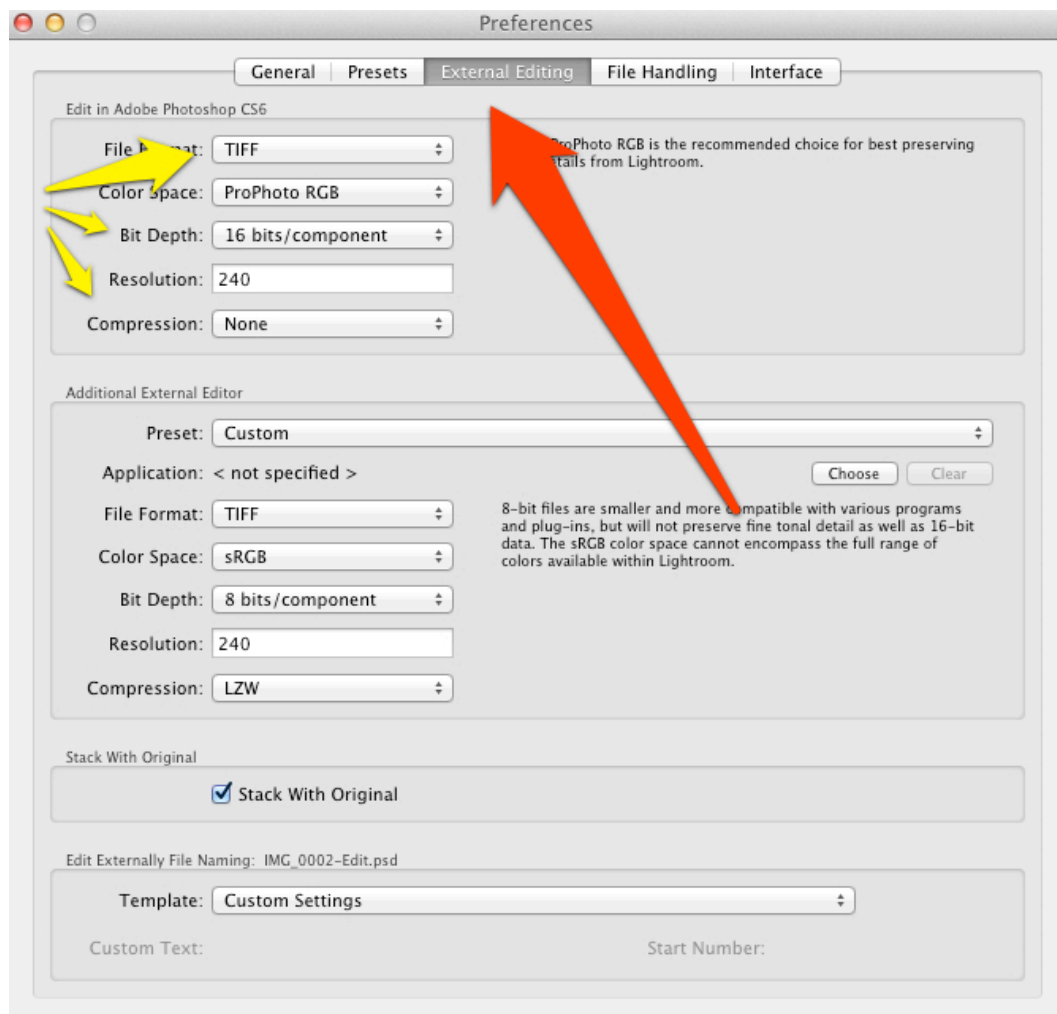
Lightroom Preferences for the Master catalog

There are several default preferences you should change.

Go to file menu, Lightroom > Preferences.

In the External Editing tab, choose your editor such as Photoshop and change the following pull downs:

1. File Format = TIFF
2. Color Space = ProPhoto RGB
3. Bit Depth = 16 bits/component
4. Resolution = 240 (same)
5. Compression = None

Go back to General tab and click on button in lower right corner,
"Go to Catalog Settings"
At the bottom of the dialog box under: Back up catalog, choose: "Once a week, when exiting
Lightroom"
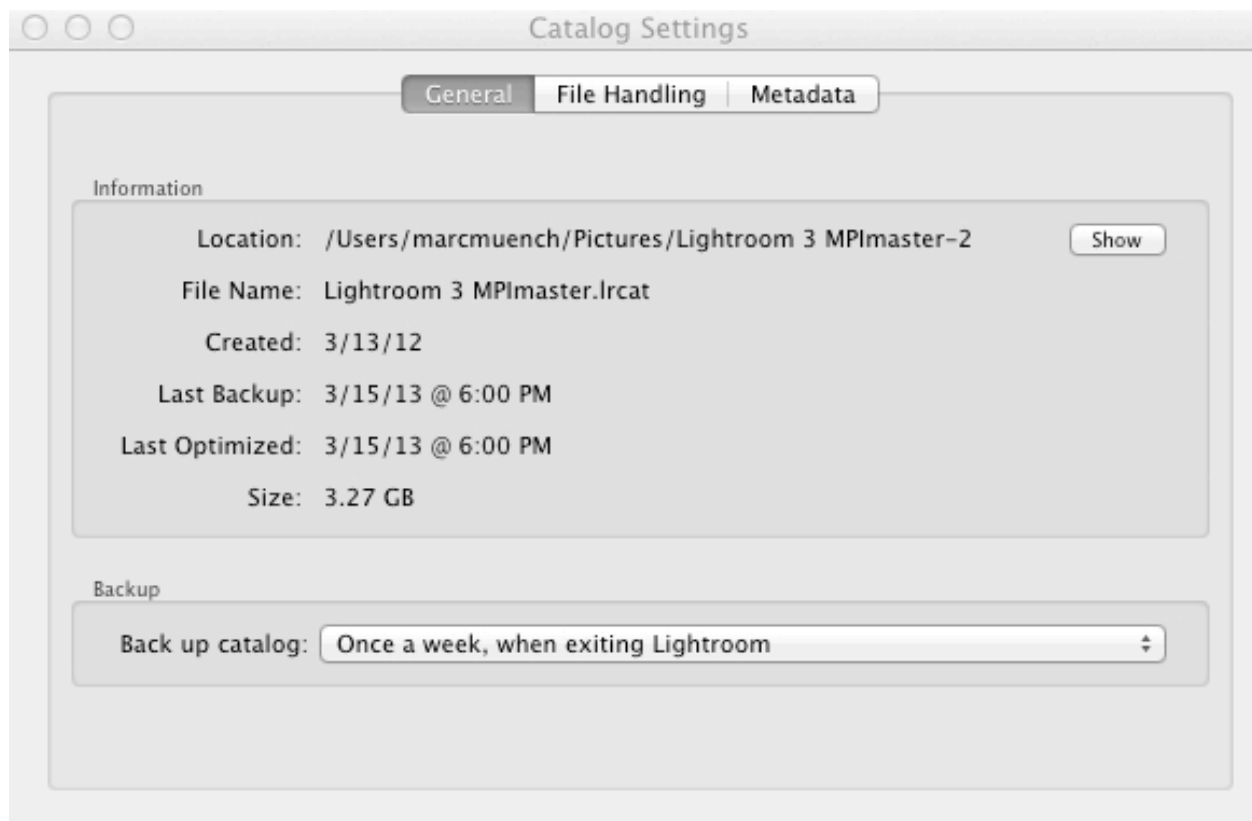
This is a personal choice, but I believe that backing up the LR catalog file should be based on
how much time you're spending in LR each day. For example, if I spend over an hour a day in
LR, I will back it up upon exiting that particular day.

In the Metadata tab, check the box: "Automatically write changes into XMP"
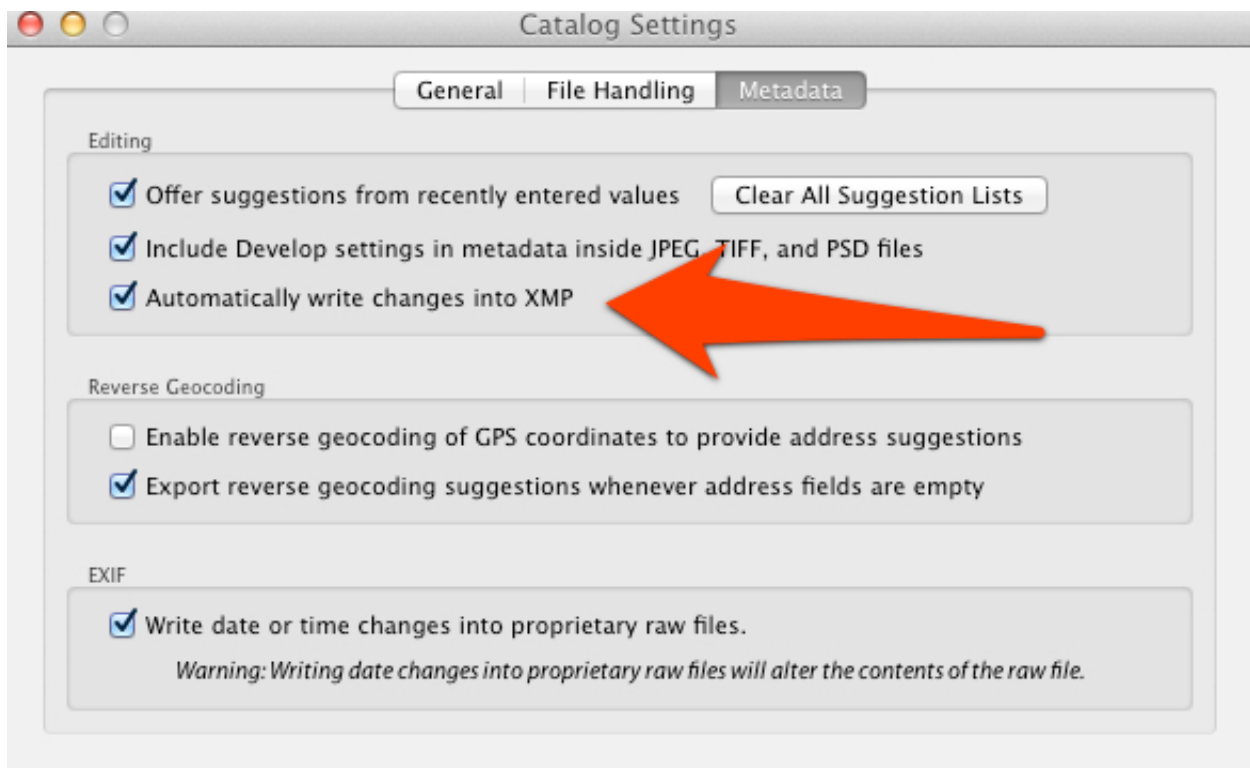
Note: This is very important if you are **not** converting your RAW files into DNG files upon import. For example, if you lost the catalog file, all of your changes to the image metadata and develop module updates made, would be lost. I do not convert my RAW files into DNG while traveling because takes twice as long. A DNG file includes all the metadata associated with the image file, such as the develop module edits and keywords. The RAW file format does not store this info so therefore you need the sidecar file or .XMP file.

Creating temp/shoot catalog

Attach the external drive to your computer #1

1. Create two new folders on the first level of the external drive. Title one, "Lightroom Catalog" and the other "Images". This is done in the operating system of your computer not within LR.

2. On computer #1 open your Master. From within the master, create a new catalog and title it the name of your shoot/vacation: file menu, File > New catalog.

3. Save the new catalog in the folder titled "Lightroom Catalog" that you just created on the first level of the external hard drive. Click "create" and the new "shoot/vacation" catalog will open. You can confirm this by looking at the top of the LR dialog box which always shows the name of the catalog currently open.

4. Close the new "temp" catalog and open your master. Go to File > open recent > choose name of "Master Catalog". LR may prompt you to save/backup the new temp catalog, I recommend that you skip this time, seeing that you do not have anything in it! LR will close and reopen your master catalog. LR will also prompt you that it needs to re-launch in order to open your master. Go ahead and click "reopen"

5. To save time making new Metadata Presets and Develop Presets I suggest you copy and paste the existing ones from your Master Catalog into your temp. Go to the folder titled Lightroom Settings located in the Lightroom folder within your Pictures directory. Inside the Lightroom Settings folder are both the Develop Presets and the Metadata Presets folders. Copy and paste the enclosed files into the same location of your new temp catalog.

If this is the first time you are attempting this workflow, I recommend you try it with a few test images. Follow all the steps below for both the test and subsequent shoots.

Temp catalog settings

1. If LR is open on computer #2, close it. Plug your external drive into computer #2 and double click the lrcat file. LR will open this catalog for the first time. For this tutorial I named the temp "Test". This is what your finder window should look like:
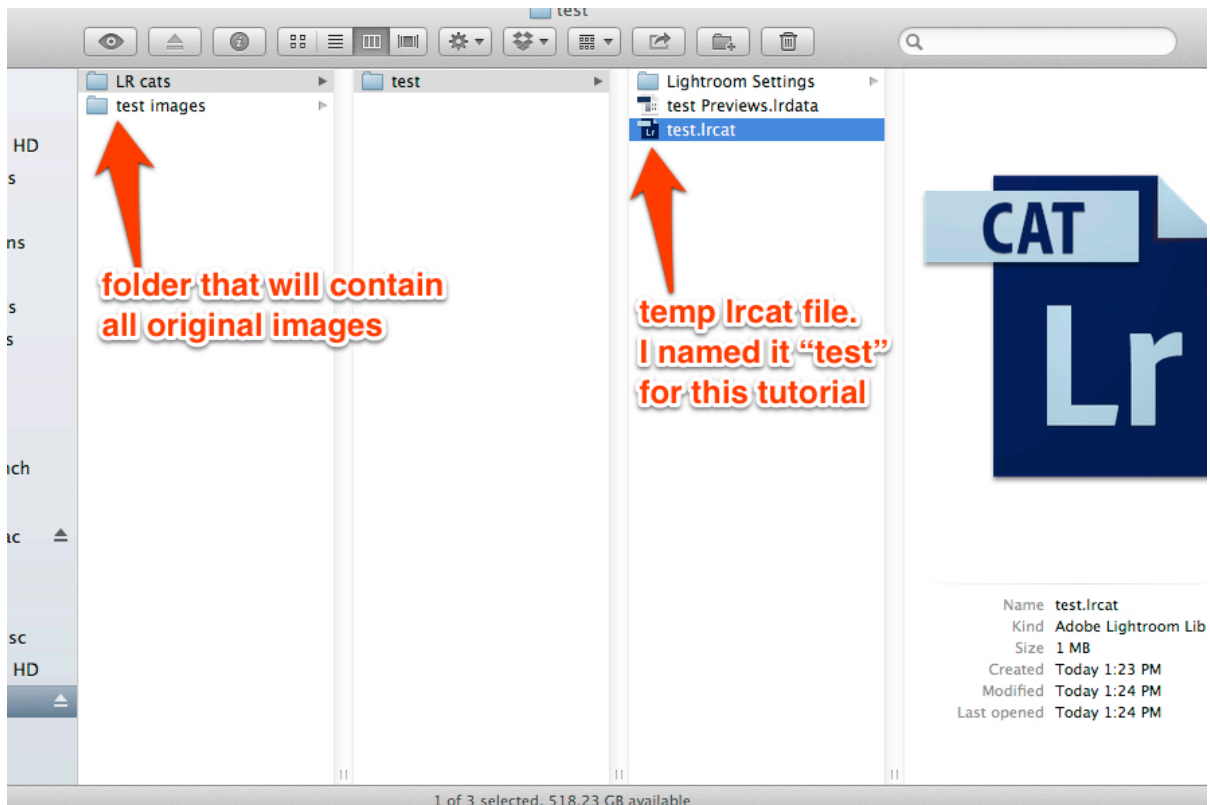

2. Update the Catalog settings > Lightroom > catalog settings

3. In General tab – at bottom of screen choose, Backup "Every time Lightroom exits". I do this because I assume I will be working on this catalog while traveling.

4. In Metadata tab – Check the box "Automatically write changes into XMP"

   a) Once again, this ensures that all the work you do in the develop module while on your shoot, is stored not only in the lrcat file but next to each image file as well, as an XMP sidecar file.

Importing into temp

While on your shoot/vacation you will import into the temp in the following way

1. From within the Library module, click the Import button in the lower left corner of dialog box.
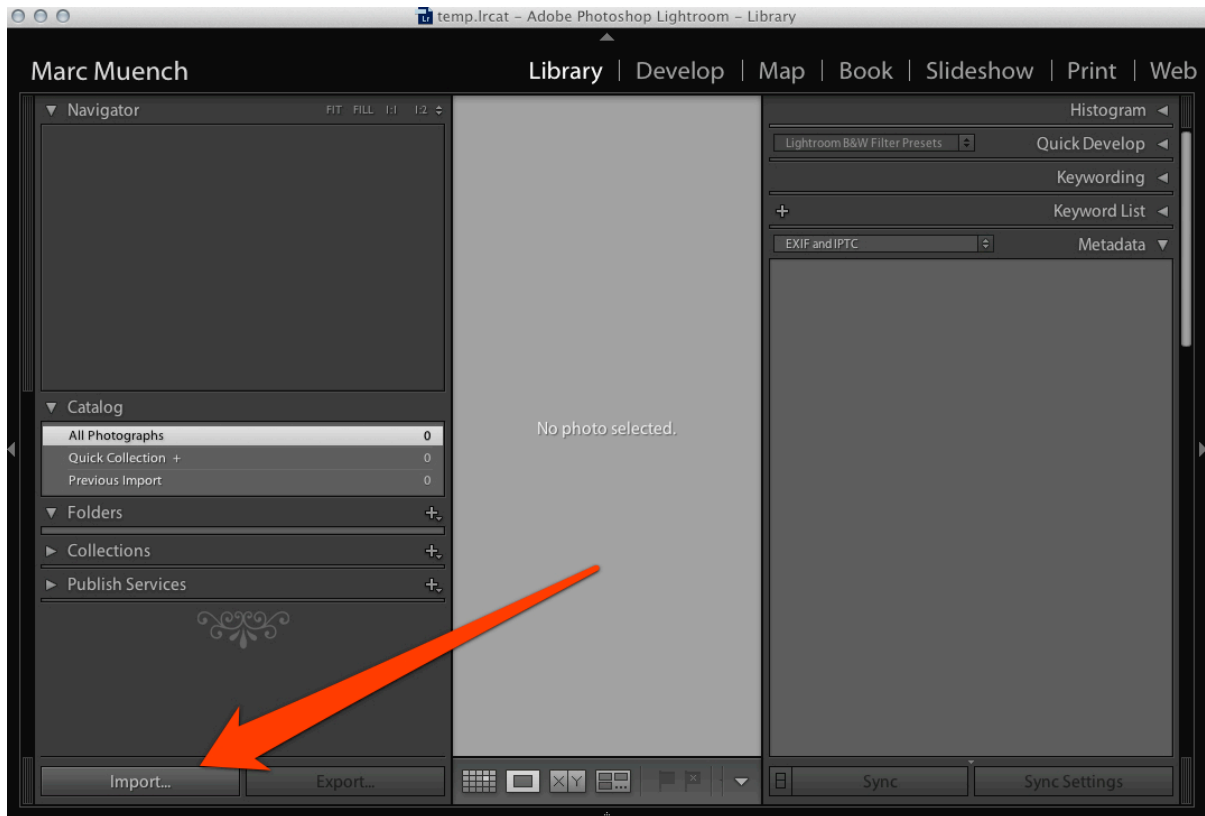

2. Choose the source of your images, located in the upper left corner of the dialog box.

3. Choose "Copy" from the top center of the dialog box.

4. Set proper location by clicking link in upper right corner of dialog box. Choose the "other destination" option. This should pop up with a finder window for you to navigate to the folder you created during step 2 of "creating temp/shoot catalog". Select the image folder and click "Choose"
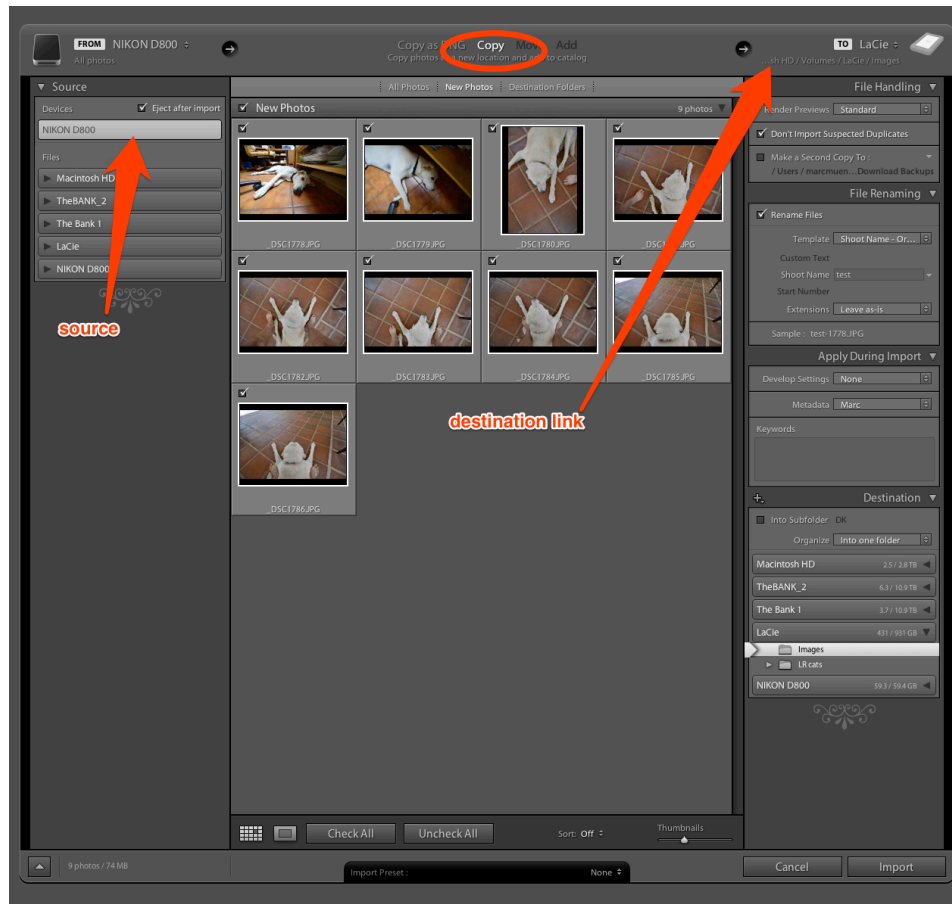
5. Check, "Rename Files" located in the File Renaming pull down on the far right. I use
    the Template "Shoot name – Original File Number". I often shoot with multiple
    cameras and this insures I will never have the same file name for a given image.
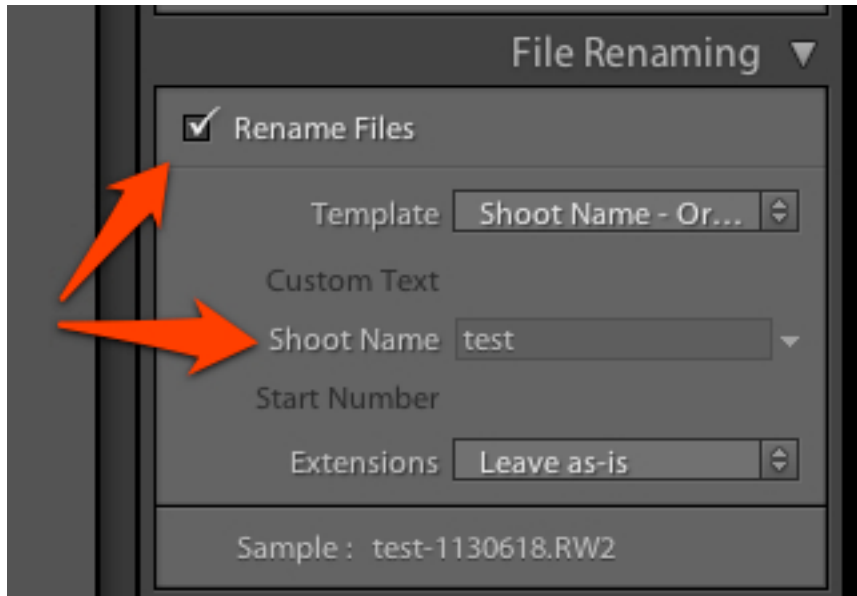
6. If you did not copy and paste a template from the Master Catalog "Metadata Presets" then you will need to create a personal metadata template within the Metadata pull down located within the "Apply During Import" pull down. This only has to be done once.

7. Choose "Save as" for the template and give it your name. It will now appear in the Metadata pull down for you to choose during all following imports.

8. Add your name as one keyword in the "Keywords" box. I add all image specific keywords later once imported.

9. Finally, verify that you DO NOT check the box "Into Subfolder". And verify that the "organize" pull down is set to "Into one folder".

Once you have verified all these details you are ready to import. If you have done everything correctly, all your images should be stored within ONE folder on your external hard drive, and in this case it will be called "Images".

Note: You can check this following your import by right clicking on a image in the Library module and choosing the option "Show in finder". This will bring up a finder window showing all the images in the folder.

The good news is, once all the details of a import are complete, LR will memorize everything for the next time. Your only job will be to verify that all is the same.

Importing temp catalog into master catalog

After your shoot or vacation is over and you have returned with hundreds or thousands of wonderful images, it is time to combine the temp with the master.

1. Attach external drive to computer 1.

2. Open master on computer 1.

3. Import temp from within Library module. File > Import from another catalog.

4. Choose temp on external drive and click choose

5. A dialog box will appear asking you what to do with the files and where to put them.
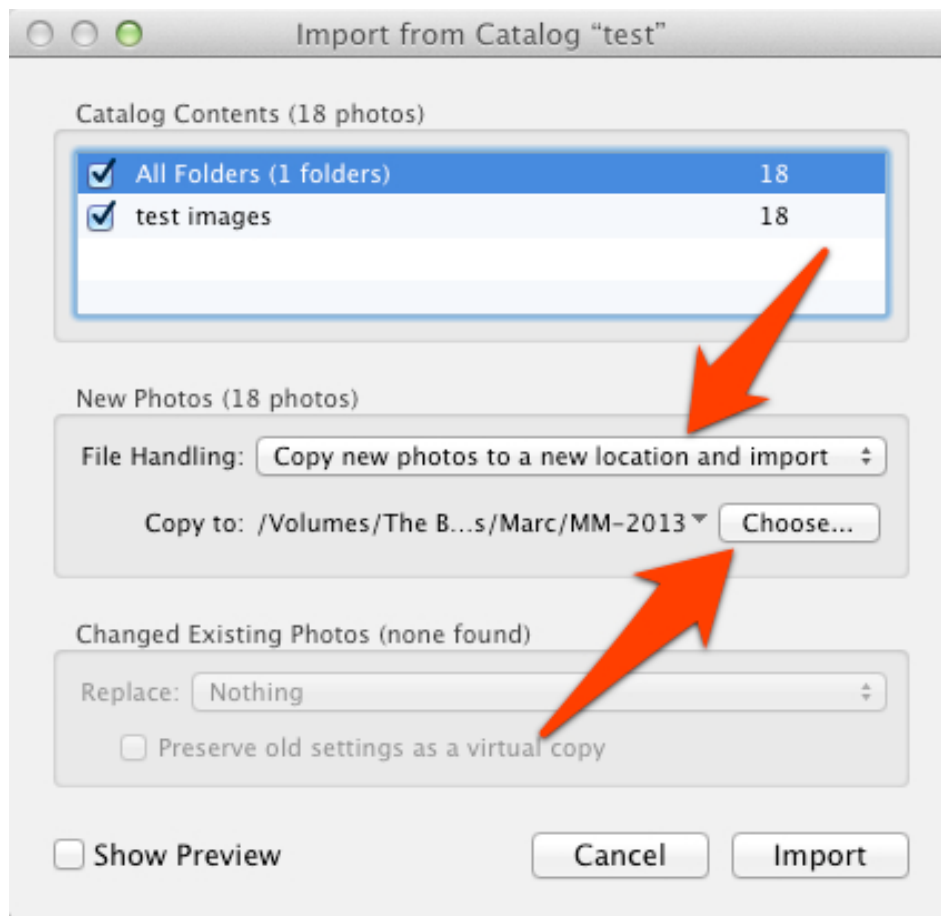
6. In the pull down "File Handling:" choose "Copy new photos to a new location and import"

7. Just below File Handling, be sure to click the button "Choose" and locate the folder for the current year that is on your "Tree of life" RAID or storage unit.

8. Click "Import"

9. This process will leave a folder in your tree titled "images" which also shows up in the "Folders" tab within LR. I highly recommend renaming that folder to the name of your shoot. Right click on actual folder within LR and choose "rename". Now type in the name of your shoot. Done!

Success!

You should now have all your new images, including edits, metadata and annotations saved to your master catalog. You can either delete everything on the external drive or keep as backup.

Speaking of backup, I usually backup my temp catalog to my internal drive on computer #2. This way it is on a separate drive. I also backup my master catalog onto my RAID or external storage device. Once again, this ensures it is on 2 separate drives.