

A Photographer's Guide to Lightbox 1.0.2

What is Lightbox?

Lightbox is a photo-cataloging tool for Mac OS X. It is designed to manage photos, not files. A photo is more than just a file on your hard drive. One photo might consist of a raw file from your camera, a converted image, the exposure information about the image, a note about where you took the picture, your custom stock-photo code, and more. Unlike many other cataloging tools currently available, Lightbox allows you to organize all of this information.

The Concepts

When you begin, images, which are photos that you have imported into Lightbox, are placed into albums. Consider an album as a collection of photos; however, you might have some images that are unfiled, such as a stack of pictures on your desk. Lightbox puts these images into a special album called “Unfiled.” Then, digital albums are stored in a folder on the hard drive—this is similar to storing your albums of slide sheets in a big binder on your shelf.

As in real life, you do not keep your slide sheets in just one binder. You might keep them in several binders, and the binders might be in different rooms. Similarly, in Lightbox, you can have lots of folders with your images. These special folders are called “image storage locations.” If you have used other photo management programs, you can think of a storage location like a photo library. Many people have multiple storage locations, such as having one on a PowerBook and one on an iPod. In real life, you will move slides between binders, perhaps even making a duplicate of an image and putting it in a different binder (e.g. you are going to take one binder with you on a trip and leave the other at home). In Lightbox, the “Move to Location” and “Copy to Location” commands are the digital equivalents.

No one looks at every binder with all of his slides at once, because it would be overwhelming! Lightbox follows the same idea by allowing you to load and unload storage locations (under Preferences). Generally, you do not want to view every storage location simultaneously. Loading and unloading a storage location is exactly like taking a binder off a shelf and putting it back when you are done looking at it.

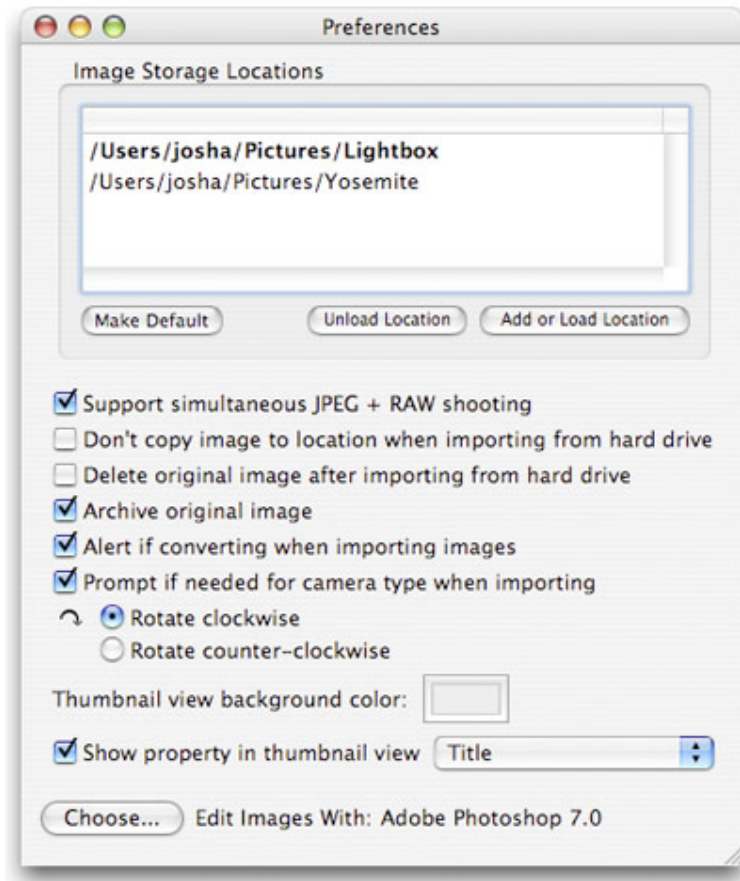
You should know that if you ever see “~” before the name of a folder, e.g. ~/Pictures, the tilde is just an abbreviation for your home directory. Your home directory is where you store all your documents, pictures, movies, music, and downloads, and Mac OS X uses the same abbreviation in other applications. For instance, if your name was Sam Smith, the folder /Users/samsmith/Pictures/California could be written ~/Pictures/California.

A Quick Explanation of Files

In the digital photo world, you will hear people talk about different types of image files. The first is a RAW file. This is similar to undeveloped film, as it has all the data, but you generally cannot edit the picture directly; you need to “develop” (or convert) it first. Another file type is JPEG (or JPG). A JPEG file is a compressed image, which means it

is relatively small, but its compression causes a loss of image quality. Every time you save and re-save a JPEG file, it loses detail. For most uses, especially digital point & shoot cameras, JPEG is fine. Some cameras will actually make a JPEG and RAW file when you take a photo so that you can edit and display it to others quickly using the JPEG file, but, when you want to print or take the photo into the “digital darkroom” (Adobe® Photoshop® usually), you can use the detailed RAW file. The last type is a TIF—a TIF file is an image that might be compressed, but its compression is almost always lossless. Generally, people will convert RAW files to TIF files when they are ready to edit them. Some people convert JPEGs to TIFs so that they can edit and re-save them without any more loss of detail, which is a good idea.

A Walkthrough of Your First Time Running Lightbox



When you launch Lightbox for the first time, you will see the preferences panel so that you can tell the program how you want to work with images and files. For now, having one image storage location is fine, but to add another location, just click “Add or Load Location.”

If you have a camera, such as a Canon® 1D, that lets you shoot JPEG and RAW at the same time, check that box makes, “Support simultaneous JPEG + RAW shooting” to have Lightbox support it.

If you have been shooting digitally for a while, you may have developed your own way of organizing your image files (e.g. the TIF,

JPEG, CRW files) that you want to keep. Lightbox will give you the choice of leaving files that you import where they are or having Lightbox copy them into a storage location and keeping track of the images for you. If you do not want Lightbox to copy your files into its storage location, check the box marked, “Don’t copy image to location when importing from hard drive.” This step is important, because copying all the files may use up too much hard drive space.

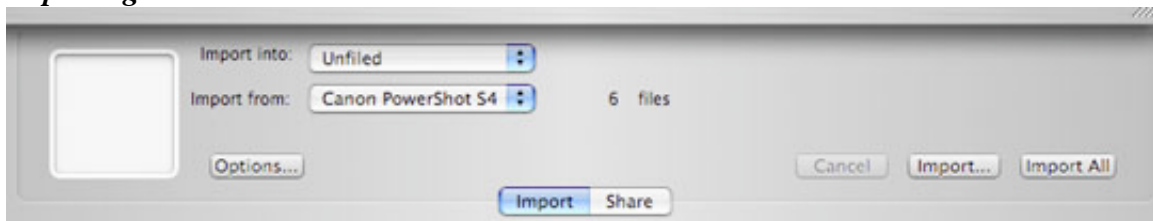
Consider this option as if you were getting some slides together for a portfolio. You could either put a duplicate of the images into a new slide sheet and use that slide sheet

whenever you wanted to see the images, or you could make a list of which images you want and where they are. In the latter case, you would have to go and find the original image each time you wanted to see it, and, if you accidentally moved it without updating your list, you would have a problem. Copying to a storage location (the default) is similar to the former, while not copying into the location reflects the latter case.

At some point, you are going to turn your original RAW file into a TIF file, or you might even want to convert a JPEG file into a TIF file later on. If you want Lightbox to keep track of the original file, select the “Archive original image” button.

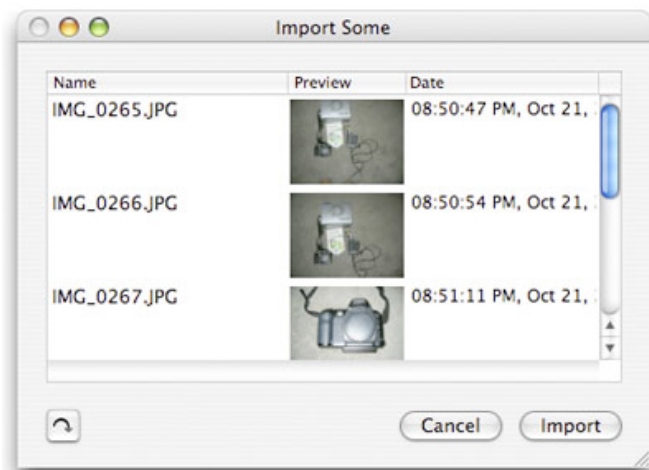
The thumbnail background color lets you set the color of the thumbnail view—this Lightbox can do more than white backgrounds!

Importing



If the Import/Share drawer is not visible, either click the folder icon on the bottom-left corner of the main window or choose “Import/Share” from the Window menu. Images can come from three places: a camera (or media card), your hard drive, or iPhoto. Think of this step as taking your slides from the box and putting them into a viewer.

To import images from your CF/Memory card, your camera, or your hard drive, first pick an album where you want them imported. To do so, select an existing album from the “Import into” menu, or, at the bottom of the “Import into” menu, select “Add album.” Either pick “Import All” to download every photo on your camera (or import every image in the selected folder), or click “Import...” and a window (screen shot below) will appear, allowing you to choose which images you want to download.



If you are importing the images from a hard drive or CD, you can also drag-and-drop them into Lightbox. Locate your images in the Finder and drag them into the thumbnail view or onto the album where you want them to be located.

If you have begun experimenting with digital photography, you probably have used iPhoto at some point. Lightbox will let you copy

those images out of iPhoto and will preserve your albums. Select iPhoto from the

“Import From” list and pick the images that you want to import. Images that you import from “Photo Library” (instead of importing from a specific album) will go into Lightbox’s “Unfiled” album. You can then move them to the correct album.

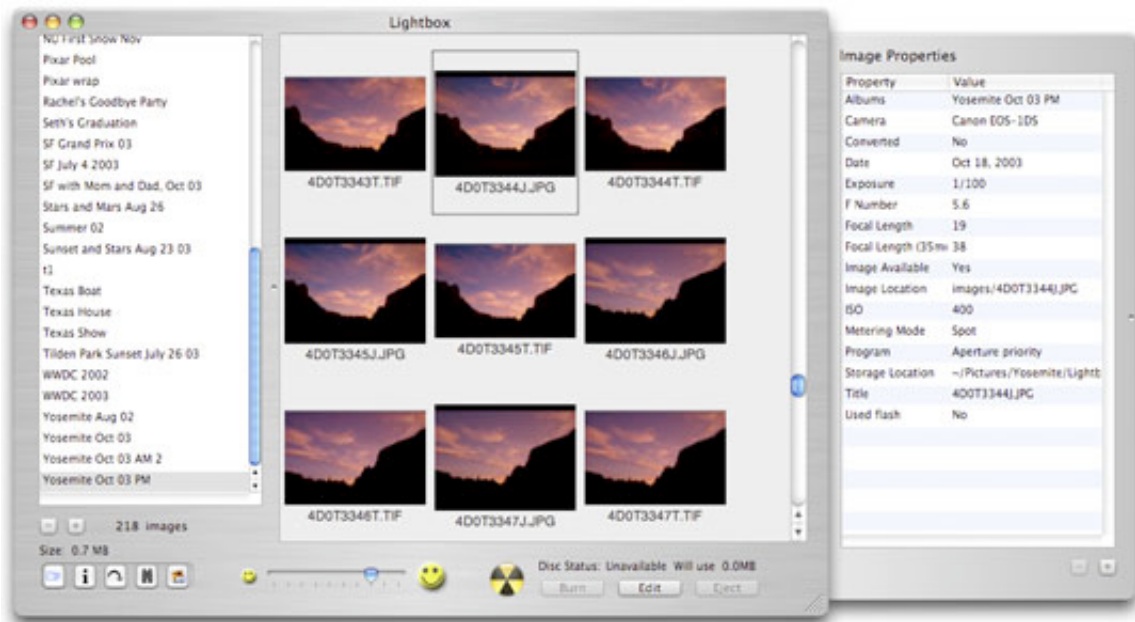
Organizing

Lightbox’s design allows you to organize your images intuitively. For instance:

- To select a photo: click on the photo
- To move around in an album: select the photos and drag them to the desired place
- To move to a different album: select the photos and drag them onto the new album’s name
- To preview a photo: double-click the thumbnail
- To open the photo in Photoshop: hold down option and double-click the thumbnail
- To search for a photo: click the binoculars in the lower left corner of the main window
- To resize thumbnails: drag the slider located between the smiley faces at the bottom of the window

The last set of images that you imported will always appear in the “Last Import” album so that you can find them quickly. Similarly, the results of your last search will always appear in the “Last Search” album.

If you delete an image from an album (by hitting delete on the keyboard), it will be moved to the Unfiled album. Once you delete the photo from Unfiled, it will be removed from Lightbox and put in the trash. Alternatively, if you hit command-delete from any album, you will put the photo in the system’s trash immediately, removing the photo from Lightbox without first unfiled it.



On the right hand side of the main window is the image inspector drawer. If you cannot see it, select it from the Window menu or click the button with the “i” in the bottom left corner of the main window. This shows you information about each image. If you want to add more types of information, select the image(s), click the “+” button in the inspector, and then enter the “field” and “value.” “Field” is whatever the general category is, such as location or stock code, and “value” is this specific image’s (or images’) information.

If you want to rename an image, double-click on the “Title” value. Remember, Lightbox manages photos, not files. For everything you do, the title is the name of the photo, but Lightbox does not actually rename the file! This function lets you title your photos however you like, but programs using the filename will be unaffected.



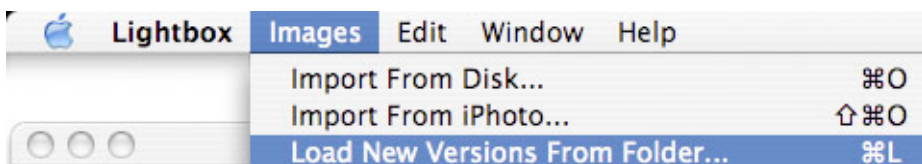
If you would like to rename several photos at once, select them, and then select “Retitle” from the Images menu. Enter the new name (“My Great Photo”), put a “#” where you want the number to go (“My Great Photo #”), and your images will be renamed (“My Great Photo 1,” “My Great Photo 2,” etc.).

When you double-click the image, you get a larger view, similar to using a loupe with a slide and lightbox. You can see the image at 100%, 50%, or 25% of actual size, or fit the image to the size of the window. Use the arrow keys to scroll through your images, as you would with the forward/back button on your projector.

Developing Your Images

Although Lightbox has a built-in RAW converter, the converter has a number of shortcomings. You will probably be happier using the Adobe RAW converter. If you need to use Lightbox’s converter, select your image and choose “Convert” from the Images menu.

Pretend you are using the Adobe RAW converter, which is built-in to Photoshop CS. In Lightbox, you can open a RAW image into Photoshop by either option-double clicking it or picking “Open in Adobe Photoshop” from the Images menu. Then, you convert the RAW file in Photoshop. Now you have a dilemma—you have a new file, but it would be nice if there were a way to let Lightbox know that the new file is the “developed” version of the RAW file you just opened. Lightbox removes the dilemma! Save the new image



into your “Lightbox Updated Images” folder (inside of the

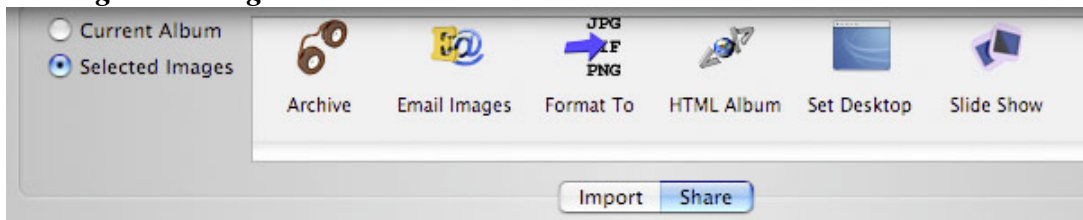
Pictures folder in your home directory), but do not give it a new name. Back in Lightbox, select “Load New Versions From Folder,” make sure you are in the “Lightbox Updated

Images” folder (which is the default), and click “OK”. This command will automatically associate the new, “developed” file with the original RAW file.

Here is a different way to think of this step. Imagine that you have a photo album with one picture’s negative on a certain page. You get a print of this image made after the negative was developed. You then “update” the photo album with the new, printed version by storing the two images together on the same page. That way, when you are paging through the album, you see the photo, but all of the negatives are still there. Lightbox works exactly this way. You are just doing it with computer files instead of paper and film.

Keep in mind that if you are not converting a RAW image in Photoshop and are just editing an image, you do not need to do any of the above—just save the file and go back into Lightbox. If you significantly changed the image (e.g. made it black & white, changed the colors, etc.), you will want to recreate the thumbnail (so that it looks like the changed image, too). Select the image and choose “Rebuild Thumbnail” from the Images menu.

Sharing Your Images



Half of the fun of photography is letting other people see what you have created. Lightbox provides a number of ways to share your images. For instance, you may want to create a slideshow. To make one, select the images you want displayed (hold down shift when clicking to pick a range, or hold down command while clicking to toggle selection). Then in the Import/Share drawer, click the tab labeled “Share” and then “Slide Show.” You can set basic options (e.g. manual or automatic advance) plus a few extras. You can also play some music in the background or have slides fade into one another.

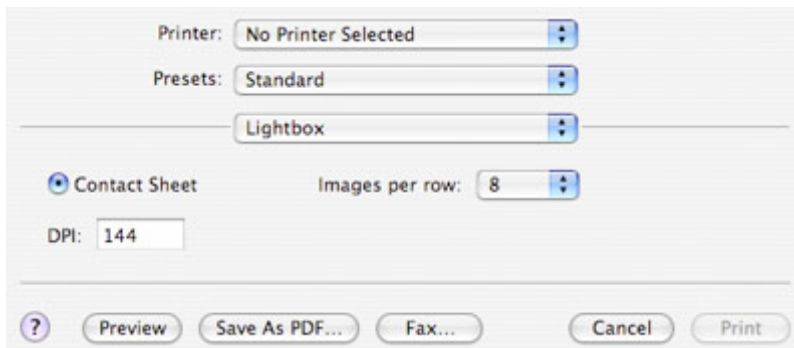
You may also want to email your pictures to someone, but some of your image files may be too large. When you email pictures with Lightbox, it allows you to make them smaller to send them quickly! Select a few pictures and click “Email Images.” Choosing “Convert to jpeg” will make the image a lot smaller. Generally, setting the larger side (height for a vertical, width for a horizontal) to about 500 pixels is a good size. A 500-pixel wide image will appear to be 6” wide on a Mac monitor and 5” wide on a PC monitor. The default quality setting of “70%” provides a nice balance between size and quality.

Lightbox can create a webpage with your images as well! Select the images and click “HTML Album.” On the right hand side of the HTML window, the Images section lets you make your images smaller, similar to the email plugin. The HTML Layout section

on the left hand side lets you set your page's background and text/foreground color. "Number of rows/columns" tells you how many rows and columns of your images will be displayed (e.g. a typical slide sheet is 5 rows x 4 columns). At the bottom of the window, you can set the page title and the block of text that appears on top of the web browser's window. Click "OK" and pick a place to save your website (such as on your desktop)!

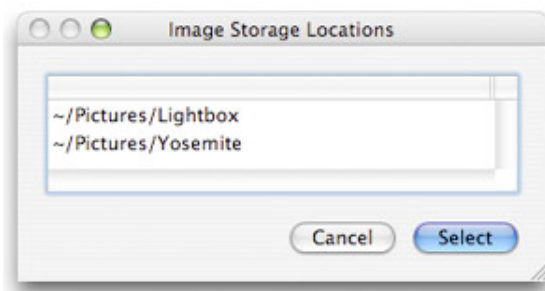
Printing Images

Lightbox makes it easy to print contact sheets. Pick the album you want to print by selecting it in the album list, and choose "Print Contact Sheet" from the Images menu. In the popup menu on the print panel, select the "Lightbox" menu item (shown below) to change the image resolution and the number of images per row. Once you're ready, just click "Print!"



Multiple Storage Locations

Earlier, we discussed keeping different binders of images in different locations in your home. Image storage locations are similar, except each represents a different place in your home as a different folder on your hard drive. To create a new image storage location, which is like getting a new binder, open up the Lightbox Preferences window (under the Lightbox menu) and click "Add or Load Location." Pick your desired location (you can even create a new folder for it by clicking the "New Folder" button) and click "OK."



When you want to move images into the new storage location, select those pictures, go to the Images menu, then Image Storage Location, and click "Move to Location." Lightbox will ask where you would like to move the images. Select one of the options, and Lightbox will transfer the selected photos (and all their files) to the new location. If you click "Copy to Location,"

it is like making a duplicate of the image.

Now, you may want to do the equivalent of returning the binder to the shelf. From Preferences, select the storage location you just made, and click "Unload." The images will disappear from sight, but they will still be on your hard drive. Later, if you want to

“take the binder off the shelf and look through it,” click “Add or Load Location” and select the location. The images will reappear in Lightbox.

Backing Up Images

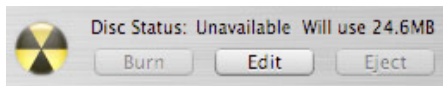
As much as we would like to think computers are perfect, they sometimes have problems. Making two backup copies of your valuable photos is very important, and Lightbox makes this step easy.

One quick method is making a new storage location, as was discussed in the previous section; however, you should create the location on an iPod or other external hard drive. Then, copy your images into that location.

Lightbox can also compress and backup your photo to a single file outside of a storage location. When you backup a photo, you want to backup the original version, the current version, and the metadata. If you select an image and choose “Backup...” from the Images menu, Lightbox will compress all those files into one file. To restore an image from its backed up version, click the image and select “Restore From Backup” from the Images menu. If you accidentally delete an image but want to reload it from a backup, choose “Load Backup File...” from the Images menu and pick your backup file.

Lightbox backs up to the Mac OS X standard .tar.gz file format. In other words, if you stop using Lightbox, you can still recover your images by using Stuffit® Expander (or similar software). You would simply open your backup file with Expander, and it will expand your image to your hard drive.

Burning a CD/DVD



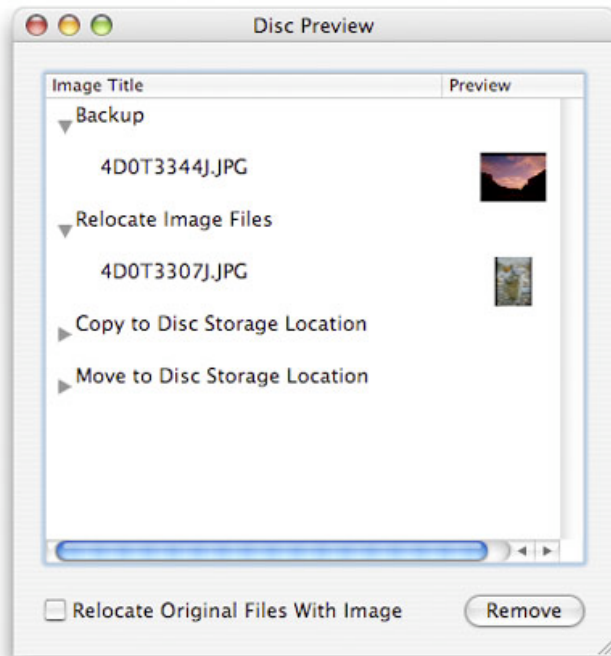
Backing up your photos to a hard drive works for some photos, but sometimes you would like to make a backup CD, too (burning a DVD requires the same

steps). You may want to go beyond just backing up your images up to the CD. For instance, you may want to relocate the image file to the CD, but keep the thumbnail and metadata on your hard drive. This way, you can search for an image and see its thumbnail, but the image is not on your hard drive taking up space. You may also want to make a new storage location on the CD and either move or copy your photos into it. All of these operations are quite easy to perform in Lightbox.

In the bottom right hand corner of the main window, Lightbox has three disc buttons. “Burn,” “Eject,” and “Edit.” The program also tells you how much space on your disc will be occupied.

The easiest way to make a disc is to click “Edit” and drag photos from your albums into the Disc Preview window that appears. If you want to make a backup of the photo onto the CD, drag the photo underneath “Backup.” If you want to copy it to a new image storage location on the disk, drag it underneath “Copy to Disc Storage Location,” etc. If you make a mistake, in the Disc Preview window, either drag the image to the correct location, or select it and hit “Remove.”

If your photo has a converted and original version, and you want to relocate image files, you can also relocate the original file to the CD by clicking the “Relocate Original Files With Image” button. That way, the only data left on your hard drive when you relocate an image is the metadata and thumbnail. The image file and original file will be on your disc.



When you are ready to burn, simply insert a blank disc and click “Burn.” Once the disc is burned, Lightbox will automatically load the disc’s image storage location. When you want to eject the disc, you will need to unload that storage location first.

Sample Workflow

Here is an example of putting everything you have learned together.

You are on a trip and shoot many images each day. Connect your camera (or CF card) to the computer, pick one album where you want the images located (or make a new one by picking “add album” from the “Import Into” menu and typing in a new album name) and click “Import All.”



Once the images have been imported, double-click on the first one to open it, and start editing. If you like the image, click the down arrow to go to the next image, or click the trashcan to delete the image. You can adjust your zoom level by using the menu on the

bottom right corner of the preview window. To see information about the image, click the “i” button in the top right hand corner.

When you have more time, you may open some of the images in Photoshop, convert them from the RAW file format, save them into the Lightbox Updated Images folder, and load the new versions into Lightbox. You may also make a new album and copy your best images from your trip into that album. That way, you can quickly show people your best photos, and all of the photos you might want to email someone or make a webpage out of are in one place and making a slideshow is easy.

When you have a blank CD ready, open up the Disc Preview window (click the “Edit” button by the disc burning icon in the bottom right of the main window) and drag your images under “Copy to Disc Storage Location.” Burn the disc, unload the disc storage location, and put the CD away for safe keeping.

When you get home, you can copy these images to your external hard drive. Just plug in your other hard drive, create a new storage location on it, and copy your images there. Now, with all of the time you have saved by organizing your photos with Lightbox, you can go shoot some more!

Credits

Text written by Josh Anon. Thanks to Eric Gold and Ellen Anon for their editing skills.