Lightroom Bitesize: The radial filter

Another new feature since Lightroom 5 is the Radial Filter. This adds localised adjustments that can increase or decrease in strength either from the inside out or from the outside in. Multiple radial filters can be applied to the same image.

It's most obvious use is for off-centre vignettes to help guide the eye to the focal point of the image - but it can also be used to increase or decrease sharpening, saturation, clarity, and many other adjustments. Arguably, all of this could be done with the existing Adjustment Brush but the Radial Filter makes it easier and quicker when a simple localised adjustment is required.

Let's experiment using this image taken at a Victorian museum:

As it stands the eye drifts all over the image because there is no clear focal point and the scene is very 'busy'. What we are going to do is try and make the locks in the foreground and the pillar drill on the right stand out a little more.

In the Develop module, click on the Radial Filter button in the top toolbar just beneath the histogram. It sits between the Graduated Filter and the Adjustment brush.

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You will immediately notice a few things change:

- A new panel opens with various slider bars
- The cursor changes to a cross

The top part of the panel has 12 sliders controlling the effects that can be adjusted with the Radial Filter.
With the exposure, highlights and shadows sliders you are effectively dodging and burning the image but you can also adjust clarity, saturation and sharpness too.
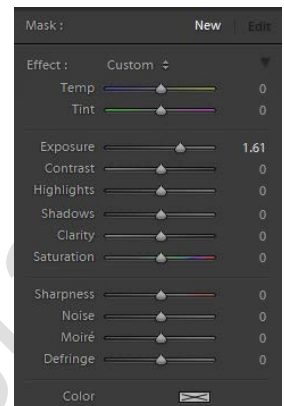
The Feather slider controls how soft the edges are. To make the adjustment have a harder edge reduce the slider - and vice versa
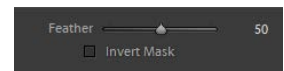
Unlike most image editing software the effect is selected from the centre. So click the cross in the centre of the area to have the adjustment and drag outwards - an ellipse will show the limits of where the adjustment will be made. The length and height of the ellipse can be changed merely by dragging sideways or upwards.


By default the Radial Filter applies the adjustment to the outside of the ellipse and leaves the inside unchanged. In this instance the locks remain with the same exposure but the rest of the room is now lighter. I want to darken the locks and leave the rest of the room unchanged.

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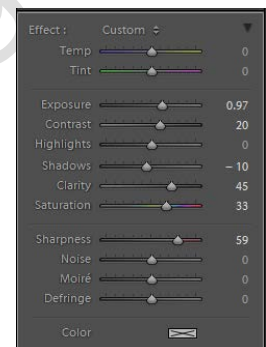This is simply done by checking the 'Invert Mask' box just below the Feather slider.
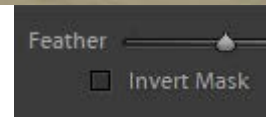
Now I can make an adjustment to the locks leaving the rest of the room unchanged.

You can play with the sliders all you want to get the desired effect. Here I have notably:

- Increased the exposure slightly
- Increased the clarity
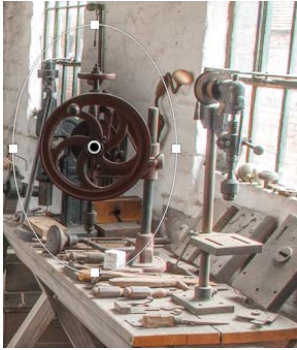- Increased the saturation
- Increased the sharpness

Already this has created a focal point in the foreground:

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I'm now going to carry out a similar exercise on the pillar drill to the right of the image. As before I will create an ellipse with the Radial Filter.

If you are unhappy with the initial positioning of the ellipse just move the cursor inside the ellipse until it changes into a hand and then click-and-drag into a new position.

You can also change the size and shape by dragging the handles (the white boxes).

Carrying our similar adjustments to exposure, clarity & sharpening creates a second focal point in the image.

The Radial Filter - a simple but effective way of making localised adjustments.

If you found this tutorial useful please let me know by leaving a comment on my Facebook page (or just 'Like' it) at https://www.facebook.com/johnhallettphotographs/ . Thanks