Master Aperture's adjustments to create perfect pictures every time

Aperture's range of adjustment tools for your images mean you don't need to open Photoshop every time you want to make a minor adjustment.

Just a few years ago, if you were serious about digital photography, you used Photoshop to make all the adjustments to your images. Then Aperture came along. Based on its older sibling, iPhoto, but much more studious, Aperture was designed to help you to organise the huge number of photographs generated by digital cameras. However, as the software matured, a comprehensive range of non-destructive editing tools was added to its list of features, so you could also make adjustments as you went about organising your photographs. The result is that if you want to correct the white balance or the exposure of an image, you no longer need to fire up Photoshop.

In this tutorial, we take a look at three of Aperture's most useful image correction features for adjusting common imperfections in your photographs. The first is white balance, where you use a mixture of preset adjustments and manual manipulation to remove a colour cast. This is handy if, for example, your camera's auto white balance setting has incorrectly assessed the lighting situation for the shot or you forgot to alter your camera's setting from a previous shoot. Next, we'll tackle a photograph that was incorrectly exposed, salvage its detail and recover its highlights and shadows. Finally, we'll remove blurriness from an image by using the sharpening tools.

These techniques will work with both Raw and Jpeg images. However, you'll find that the Raw format allows you to perform more adjustments in Aperture than Jpeg. This is because the Raw format, as the name suggests, is raw data captured by the camera without any in-camera processing, so you're accessing unadulterated data. So to make the full use of Aperture's adjustment controls, we'd recommend shooting in Raw.

Jon Lysons is MacUser's production editor and has been using Macs since 1993. He freely admits that most of his budget is spent on camera equipment.
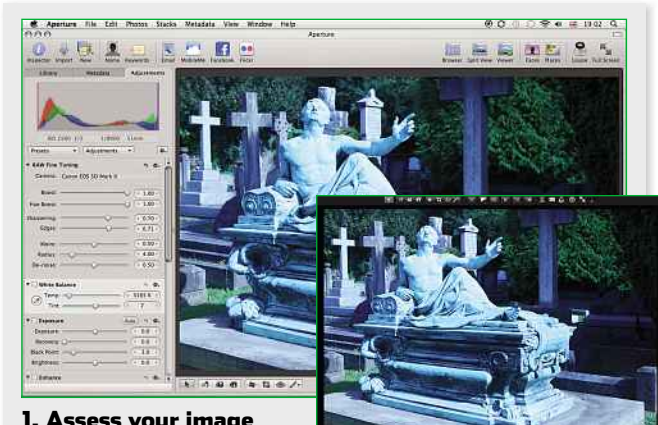
**Kit required** Aperture 3

FINAL RESULTS


Before

After

WHITE BALANCE

1. Assess your image
Here, we forgot to alter the camera's white balance setting and inadvertently used Tungsten, giving the image a blue colour cast (the statue should be green). We need to reduce the intensity of this colour. You can also use the full-screen mode to make these adjustments by pressing H to call up the Adjustments HUD.
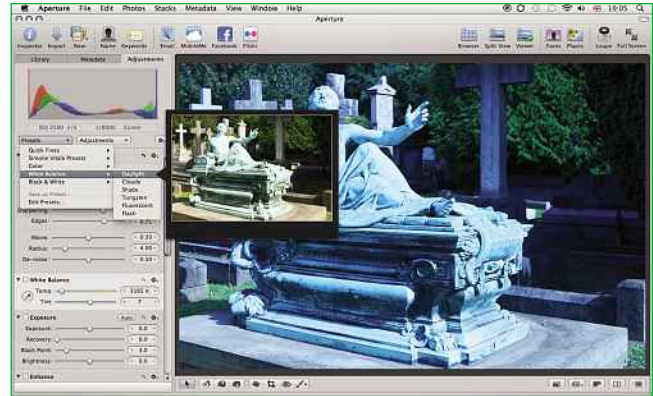

2. Using the White Balance presets
Aperture provides several presets that adjust the image to a series of colour temperatures. In the Adjustments palette, just below the histogram, click on the Presets drop-down menu to access the White Balance presets. If you mouse over the presets, Aperture shows you how a preset will affect your image before you apply it. Here, the Daylight setting appears to give the best result for our image.
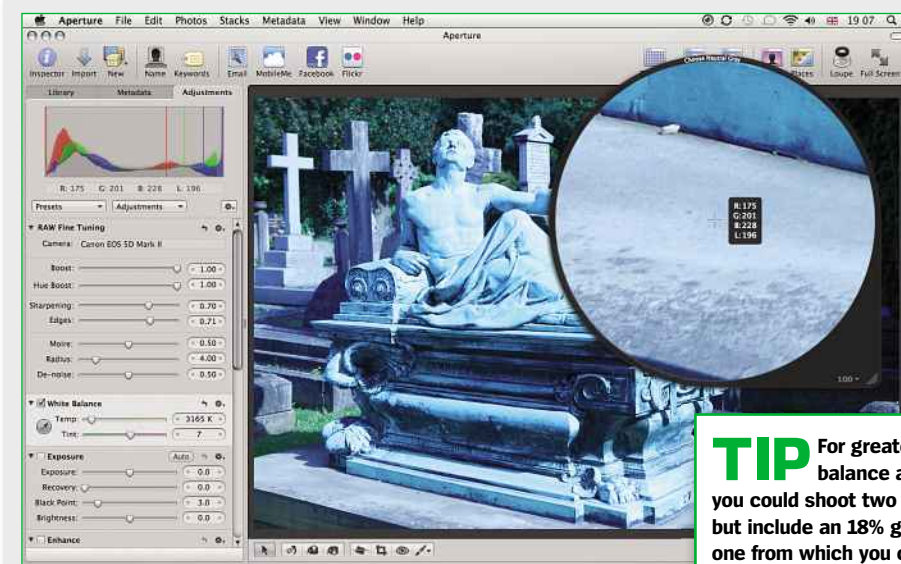

3. Choosing a neutral grey or pure white
Aperture also enables you to determine the neutral grey or white areas of your image, allowing you greater control over correcting an image with a strong colour cast. In the Adjustments inspector, click on the Eyedropper tool in the White Balance section. This automatically brings up a loupe, which is zoomed in to actual size. next, mouse over the areas of the image that are neutral grey or white with the Eyedropper, then click on a suitable area and Aperture will correct the colour cast.

TIP For greater white balance accuracy, you could shoot two photographs but include an 18% grey card in one from which you can obtain the best white balance setting.
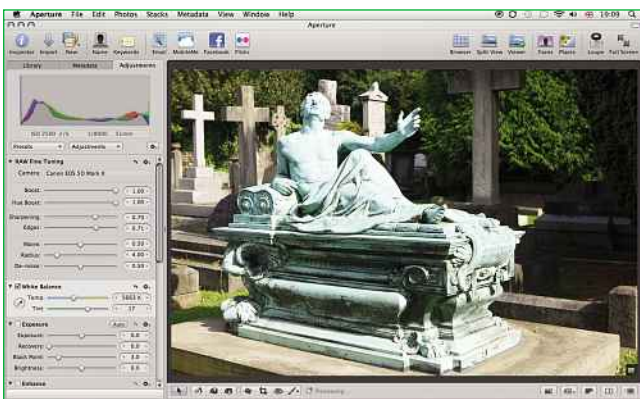
### 4. Fine-tuning the colour temperature
You can fine-tune the colour temperature by clicking on the Temp control. Here, because our image still has a blue cast, we can use this slider to add more yellow. You can also enter your desired colour temperature by double-clicking the box to the right of this slider and entering a colour temperature in Kelvins. The two arrows increase or decrease the figure in increments of 10.
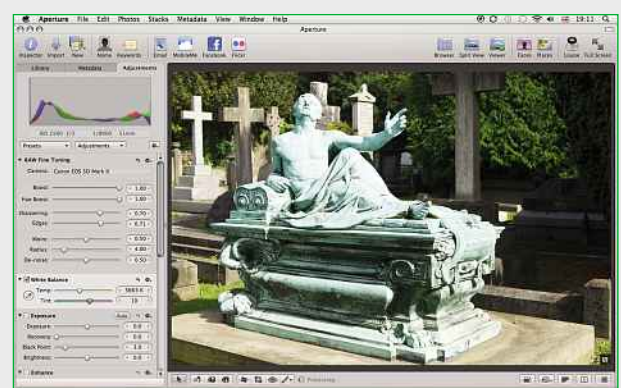
5. Enhance the colour by using a Tint
Once you've obtained the desired white balance for your image, the colours in the image can look muted. To rectify this, use the Tint control, which allows you to add magenta or green. Drag the slider to the left or right to apply the colours to your image. Again, you can manually enter a figure in the box to the slider's right.

EXPOSURE
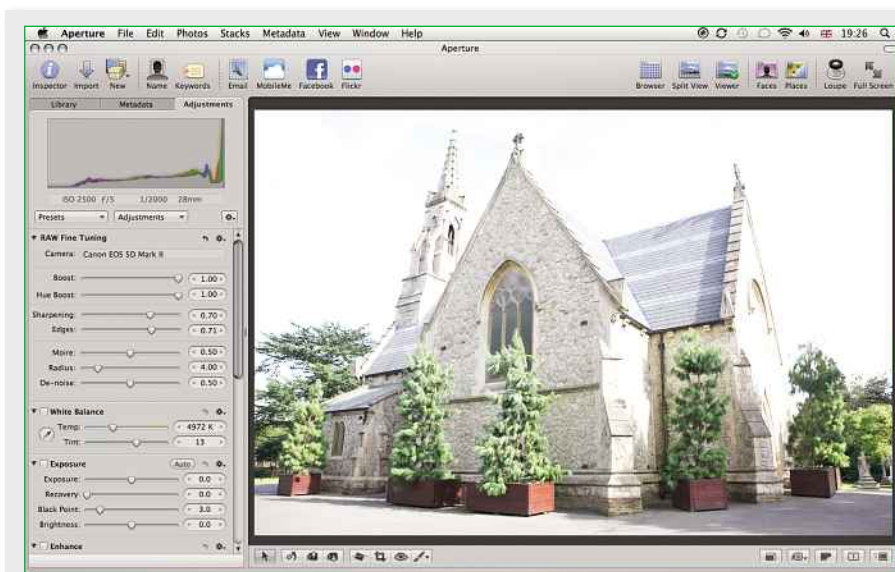
1. Assess the image

In this photo, the shutter speed was too slow, resulting in an overexposed image. Detail in the highlights has been lost, with some parts of the sky now completely white, while the shadows look far too bright for the scene. To correct the image, we need to darken the shadows and bring back some of the detail lost in the highlights.

With digital photography, it's much easier to correct overexposed images than underexposed ones because the detail has been captured by the sensor. Indeed, some photographers purposefully use this technique to gather as much data as possible, then recover the detail during the processing stage.


2. Using a Quick Fix preset

Just like White Balance, Aperture provides a series of presets that you can use to correct over or underexposed images. Under the Presets drop-down menu, select Quick Fixes to reveal the adjustments. You have seven options; mouse over each one to see how the effect would be applied to your image. Here, we've chosen Exposure (-1), which has darkened our image and recovered detail in the highlights.
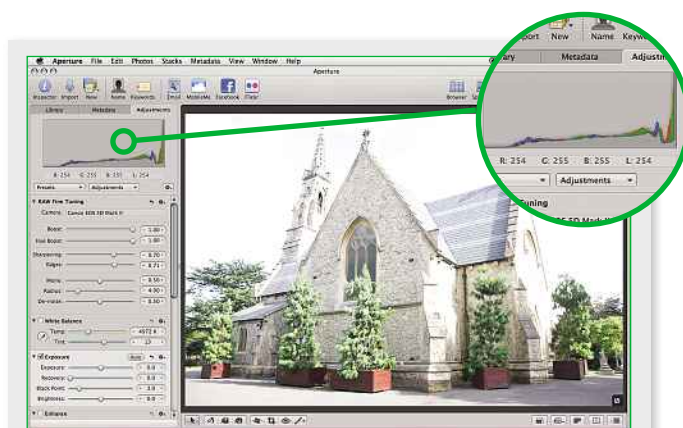

3. Understanding the histogram

At the top of the Adjustments inspector is a histogram. The left side of the graph shows the detail in the shadows, while the right reveals the amount of detail in the highlights. If the graph has more data to the left, then the image is underexposed; if it has more data to the right, then the image is overexposed.
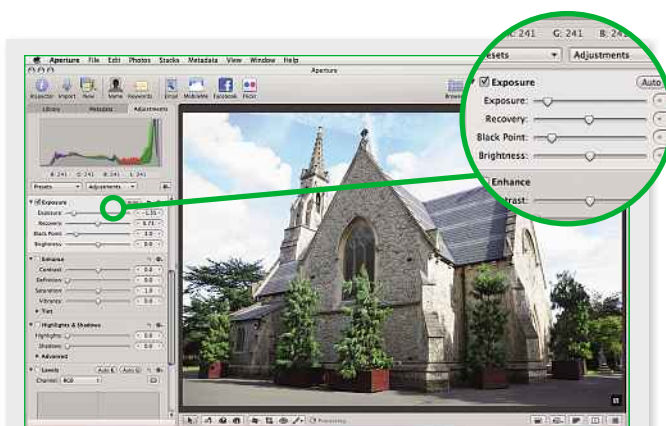
4. Fine-tuning the exposure

Go to the Adjustments inspector. First, we're going to use the Exposure slider. By comparing the histogram's data with the image as you adjust the slider, you can bring the exposure under control by brightening or darkening the image. The Recover slider enables you to bring back detail in the highlight areas of your image.
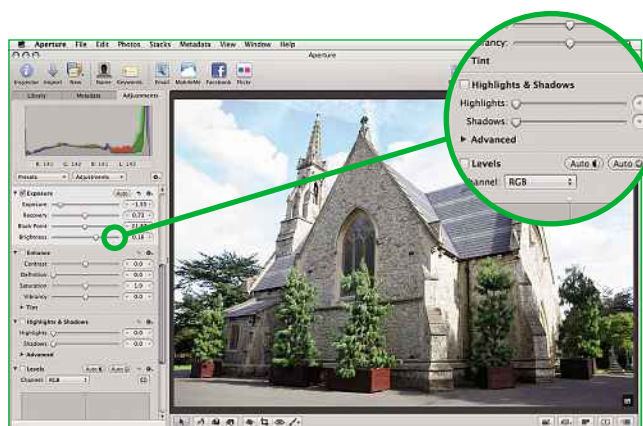
5. Boost the highlights and the shadows

The final two sliders that control the exposure are Black Point and Brightness. The Black Point slider adjusts the shadows and lower midtones. The Brightness slide is used for controlling the midtones in your image without affecting the shadows or the highlights. Click on this and slide it to the right to increase the brightness in your image, slide it to the left to darken the midtones in your image.

SHARPNESS

1. Assess the image
Here, the area of interest is slightly out of focus. This is a common occurrence when taking photos with a digital camera, but it's easy to sharpen selective areas of you image. You may find it easier in full-screen mode, so press F to bring up your image full screen.
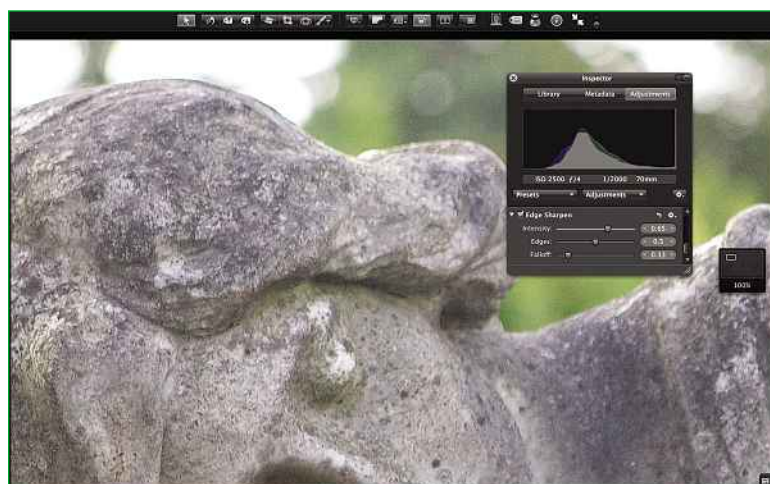
2. Boost the overall sharpness of your image
In full-screen mode, press H to call up the Adjustments inspector, then click on the Adjustments drop-down menu and scroll down to the Sharpen controls. These feature two sliders: Intensity and Radius' Intensity controls the strength of the sharpening adjustment: drag it to the right to increase the amount of sharpening; drag it to the left to reduce the amount. The Radius slider controls the area over which the adjustment is applied (the figure refers to the number of pixels). Drag the slider to the right to increase the area that's affected by the adjustment; drag it to the left to reduce the area.

TIP If any of the controls you want aren't shown in the Adjustments inspector, simply choose the one you want from the Adjustments drop-down menu.

3. Sharpen Edges
In full-screen mode, move the cursor point to the area that you want to sharpen and press Z to zoom in. Next, call up the Adjustments HUD by pressing H. Access the Edge Sharpen controls from the Adjustments drop-down menu and drag the Intensity slider to the right to increase the sharpening. The Edges slider controls which edges are affected, but without affecting the textures or noise in the image. The Falloff slider shows how much of the edge is affected, thereby allowing you to control how pronounced the sharpening affect is.

4. Selectively sharpen areas
If you only want to sharpen a specific area and keep other areas as they are, you can use a brush. Make your adjustments to the sliders and click on the cog wheel to access the fly-out menu. Select Brush Edge Sharpen In and then, using the brush, selectively target those areas of your image that you want to sharpen. This will also open the Brushes HUD, which allows you to adjust the brush attributes.

TIP Because all the adjustments in Aperture are non-destructive, if you aren't happy with them then it's simply a click to remove them. To do this click on the return arrow next to the adjustment.