

THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF VIGNETTES

INTRODUCTION

As photographers, we carefully select our subjects and create the ideal composition. We often spend considerable time in post-processing refining that vision and creating the “perfect” image (well... at least in our eyes, right?).

But there is one step that many people forget, or if they do remember, is frequently overdone. The final step in the post-processing journey *should* be adding a Vignette for the finishing touch. It's such a simple task, yet it can add so much to your photo!

This guide will take a look at why you want to add a Vignette, the different types available in ON1 Photo Raw 2020, and a few “Do’s” and “Don’ts” along the way!



Yes, there is a Vignette applied to this image. Did you catch that? No? Good, because that's exactly what we want...A subtle application of the Effect to help draw the eye to the subject.

DO: ADD A VIGNETTE TO YOUR PHOTO!

Let's just get this out of the way. I add a Vignette to around 99.9% of my final images, and you probably should as well. Yes, they *are* that important! And it really doesn't matter what your preferred type of photography may be - landscape, people, macro, travel or street. All can, and will, benefit from the addition of a Vignette!

So, for those unfamiliar, let's explain what a Vignette is. It is a darkening (or in some cases, a lightening) around the edges of a photo. It helps to draw the eye towards the main subject and is especially useful with wide angle images. A Vignette can also add drama to the photo, particularly when applied to black and white images.

Now sometimes in the process of taking a photo we will experience a "natural" vignette. This happens when a filter or lens hood sneaks into the edges of the frame and you'll see some black or dark areas, especially in the corners. Some lenses may also show a type of natural darkening as well.

However, this guide will specifically deal with adding a Vignette during the post-processing phase, probably the easiest way to create one and definitely the easiest to control.

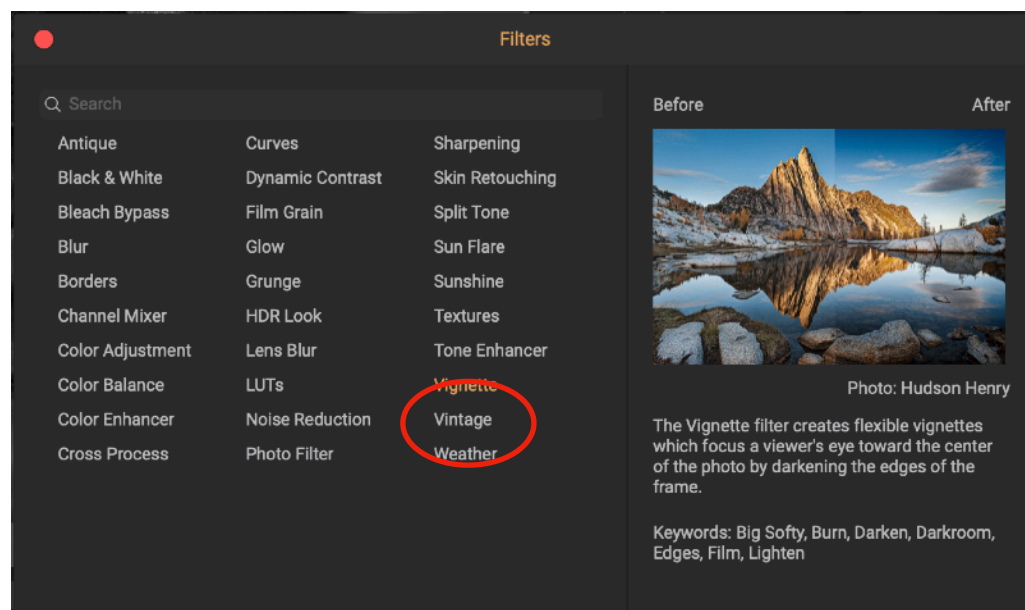
So, let's get started, shall we? Time to fire up ON1 Photo RAW!

DO: LEARN THE VARIOUS TYPES OF VIGNETTES AVAILABLE

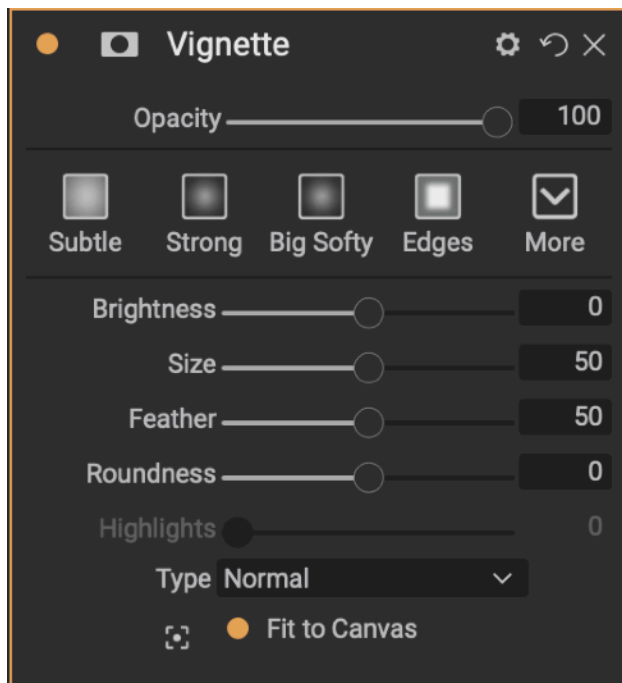
ON1 PR offers users a variety of different Vignette options, but you have to know where to find them in order to use them!

Once you enter the "Edit" module (either by clicking on the icon on the right menu bar or "D" on the keyboard) you'll see the "Effects" tab as one of the four options under the "Layers" heading. Click on that (or hit "S" on the keyboard).

Next, click on "Add a Filter" and a pop-up window (shown below) will appear listing each of the available options (another way is to use the left menu bar and choose the "Filters" button at the top, but I typically keep that panel closed during editing so I can view the image as large as possible).



The filter options are listed alphabetically, so "Vignette" is near the end, in the bottom right column.



Once the effect is added, you'll see the full menu of options. The first thing that should catch your eye is a list of the different Vignette options.

The ones shown here are the “most popular” options, and are:

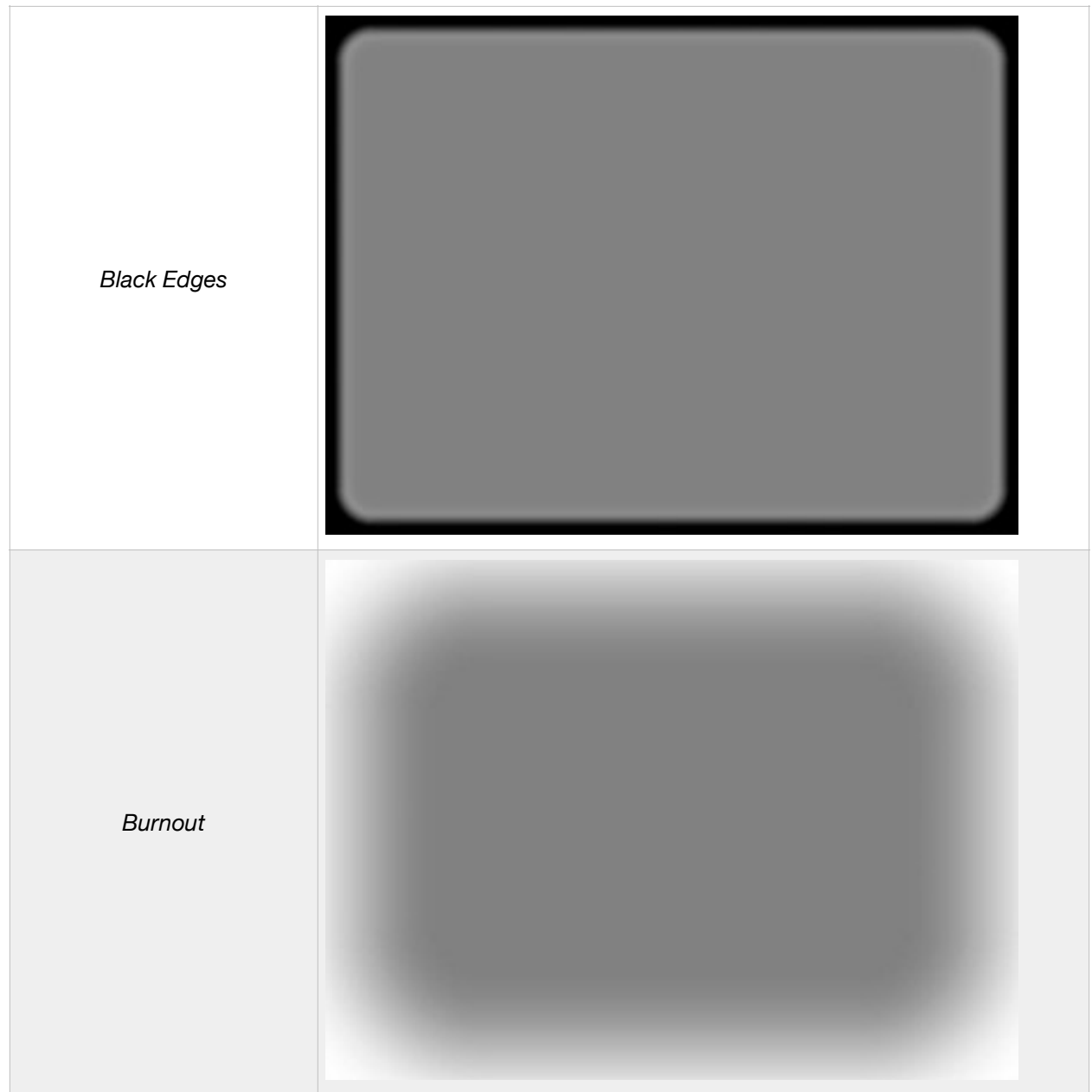
- **Subtle**
- **Strong**
- **Big Softy** (hint: remember this one!)
- **Edges**

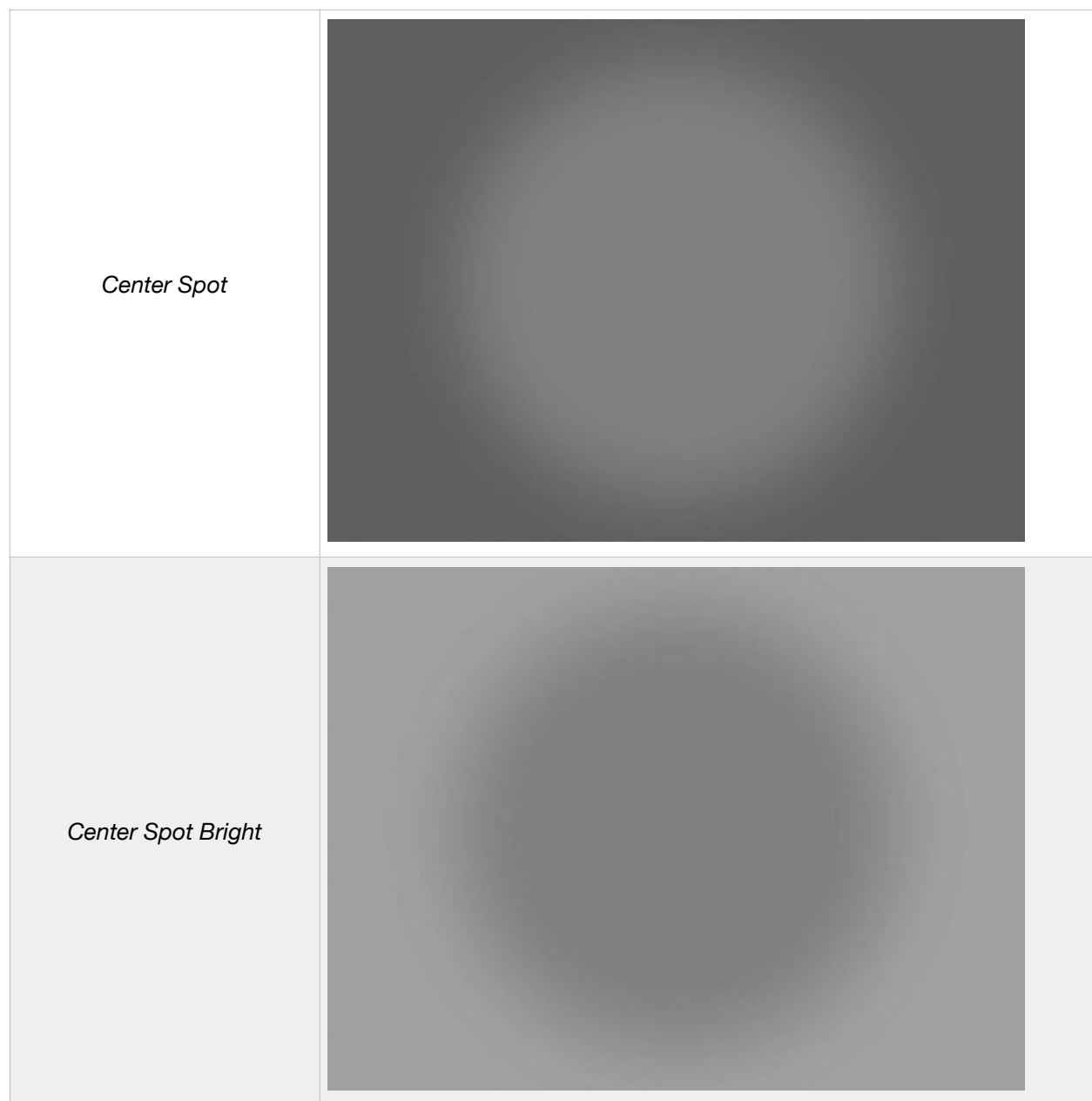
Notice that there is also a “More” icon on the edge with a downward arrow. If you click on that you'll find... Wait for it... More Vignette options!

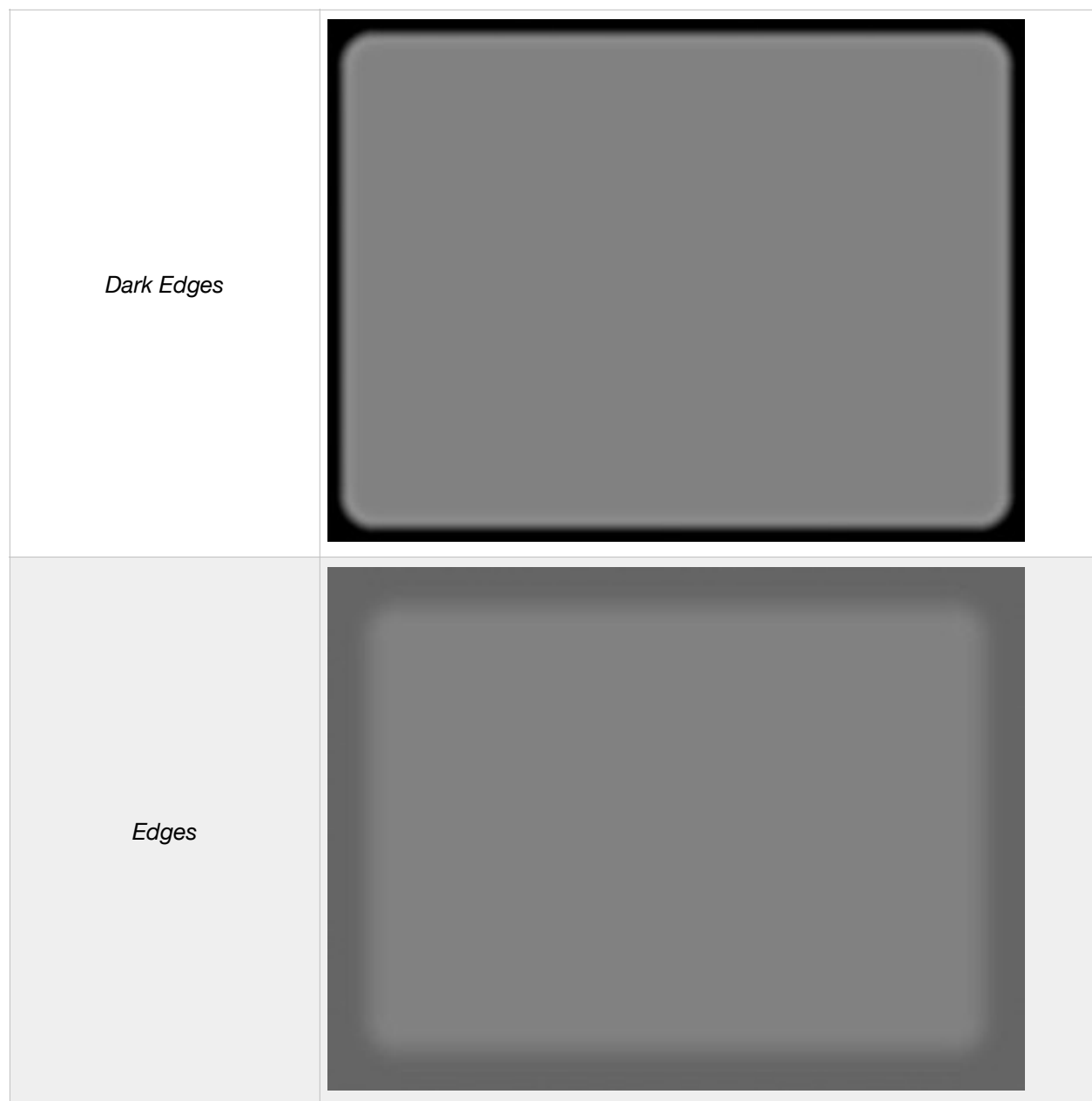
Under this menu is the full list of all 12 available Vignettes in alphabetical order. This includes those above, and eight additional Vignettes. You can see in the table below exactly what each does to your image.

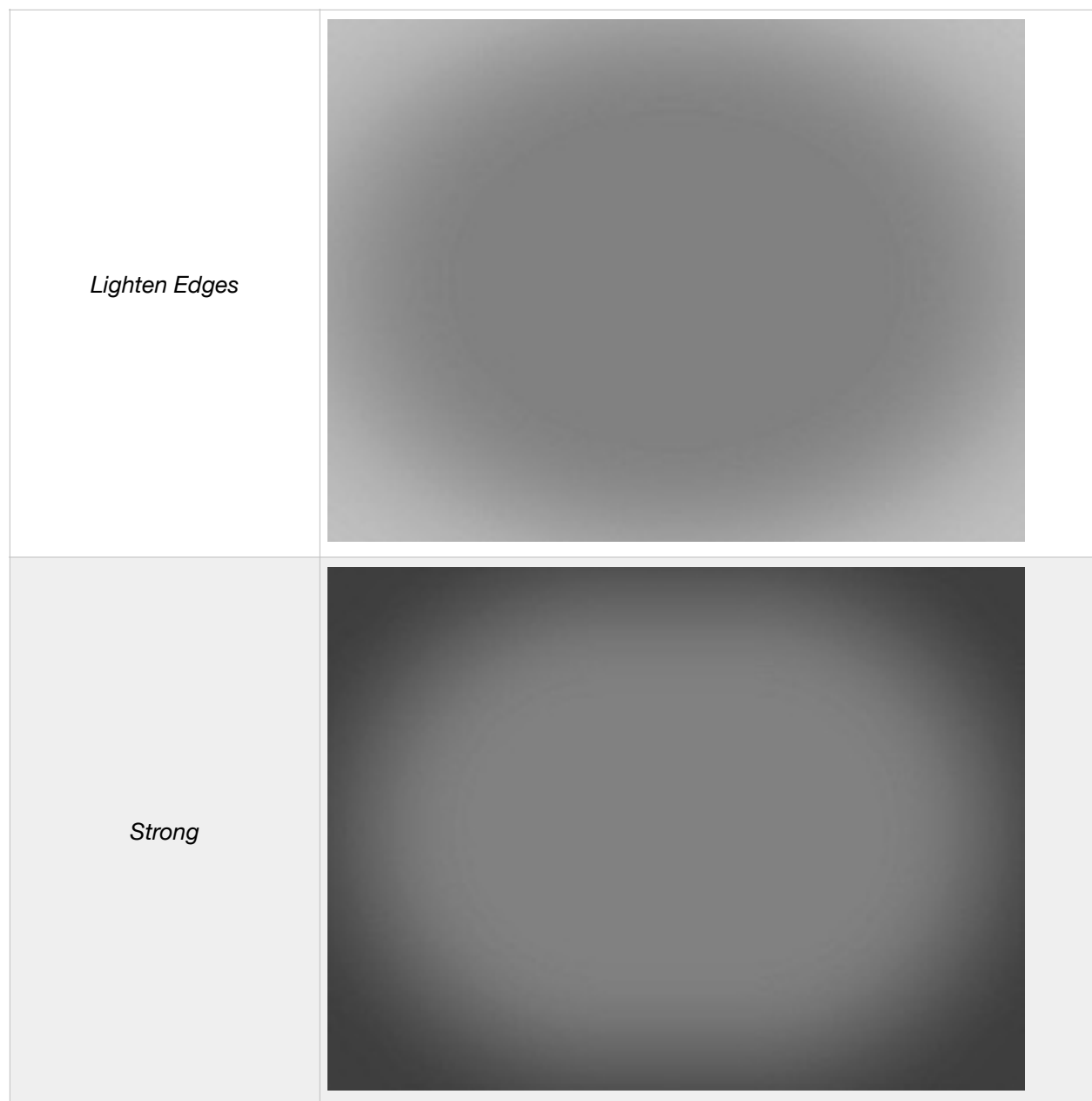
All examples below are placed on a 50% grey background for easy comparison.

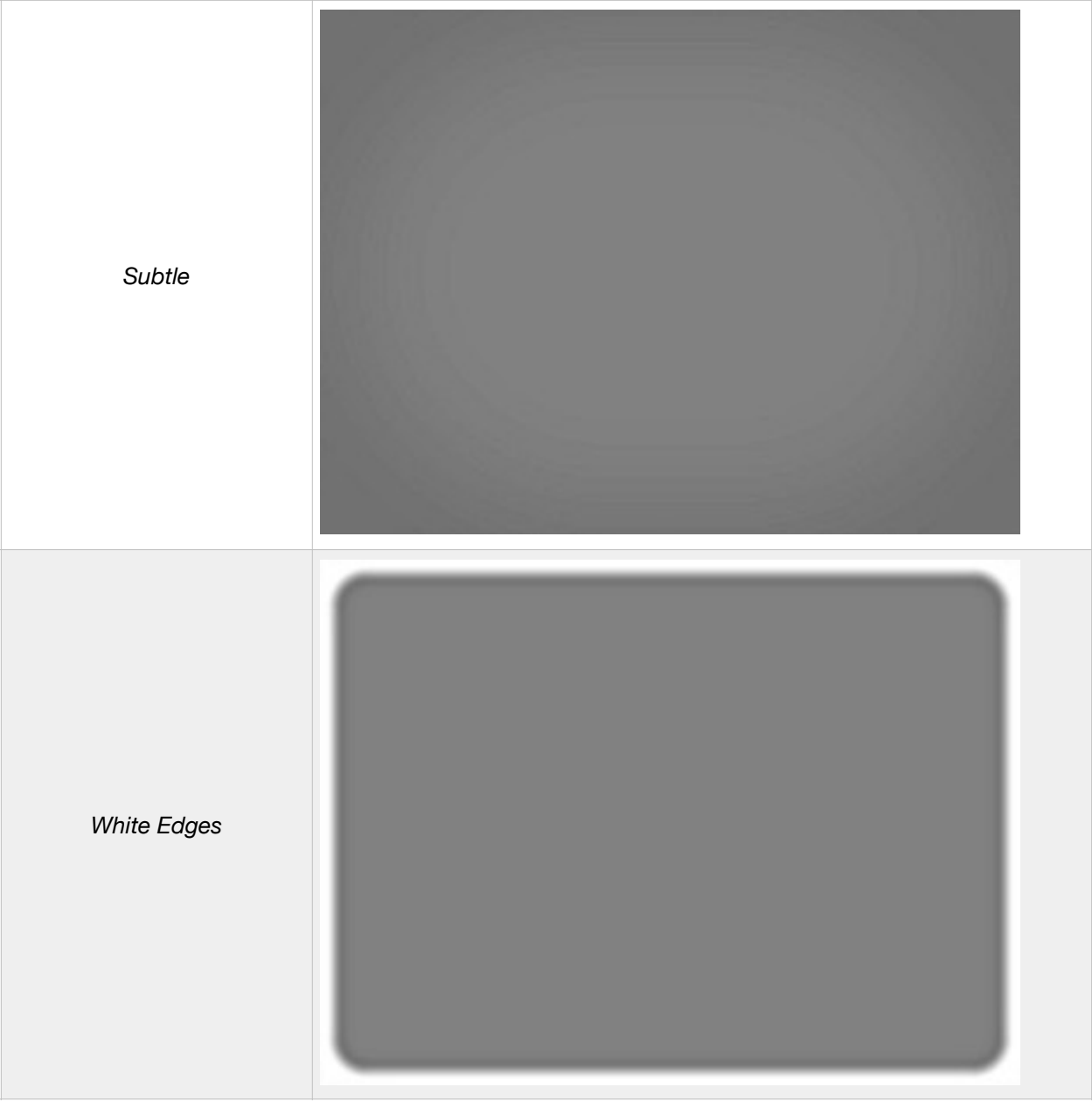
<i>Vignette Name</i>	<i>Vignette Example</i>
<i>Big Softy</i>	

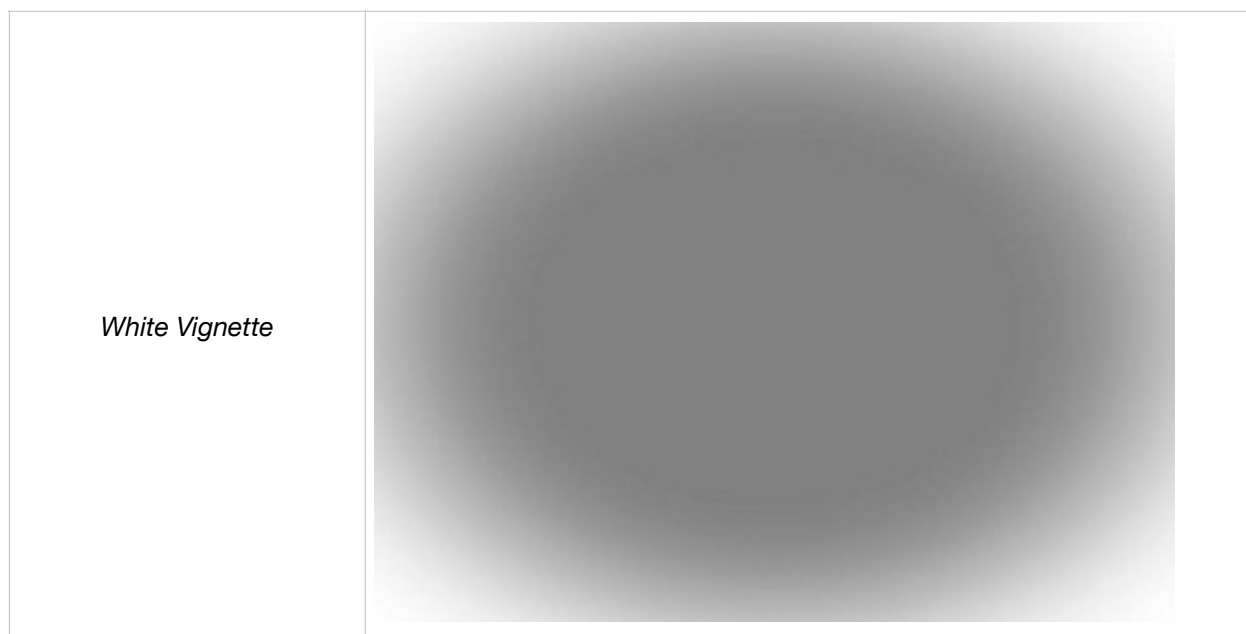












DON'T: CLICK TO ADD A VIGNETTE AND JUST MOVE ALONG.

DO: USE THE OPTIONS TO CUSTOMIZE THE EFFECT

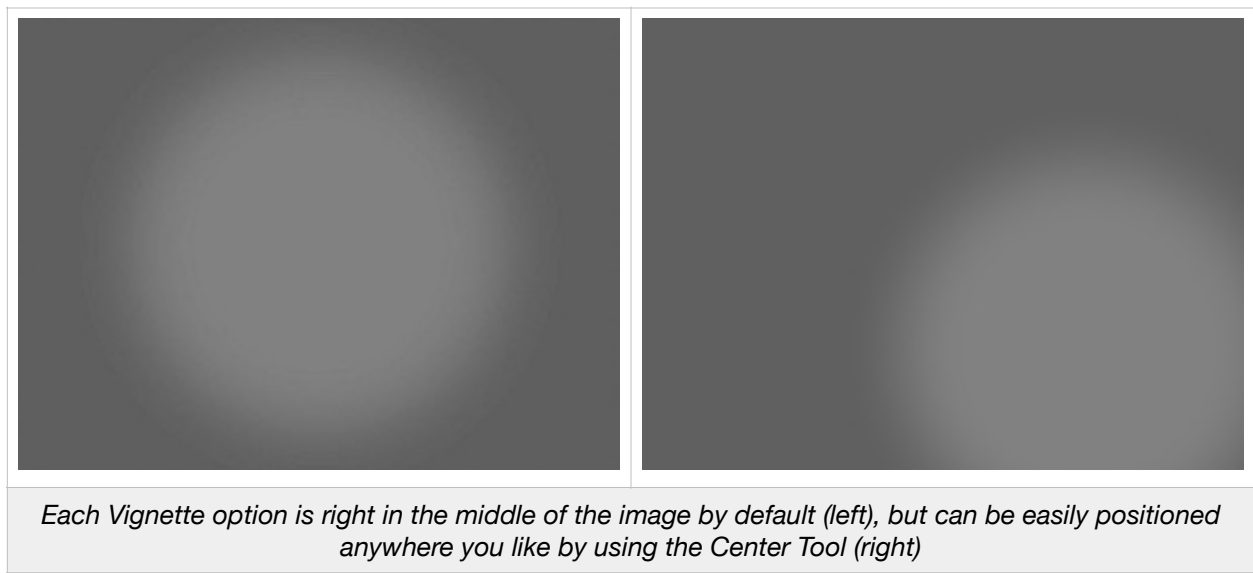
Like all the ON1 PR Effects, the Vignette module offers many ways to tweak the outcome, so don't just click and use the default settings.

Among the different things that can be changed are:

- **Opacity:** From 0 to 100. The darkest setting is 100, or basically on full blast!
- **Brightness:** From 0 to 100. I've found that the Brightness and Opacity can almost be used interchangeably and affect the Vignette in a very similar manner. However, careful observers will notice that the brightness goes from -100 (full black) to 0 and then climbs up to +100 again. Once you go from the negative (black) numbers you can change the Vignette to a white on the positive side of the slider.
- **Size:** The changes how large, or small, the Vignette will be on the image.
- **Feather:** Adjusts how hard or soft the edge of the Vignette will be. A feather setting of 0 will produce a very sharp edge, while 100 will create an extremely smooth transition.
- **Roundness:** Adjusts the Vignette from rectangular in shape to a circle.
- **Type:** This drop-down menu lets you select a Normal, Subtle, or Soft vignette effect. The Priority option will let you preserve highlights (using the Tone & Color pane in Develop or the Tone Enhancer filter in Effects) when applying the vignette.
- **Fit to Canvas:** This automatically adjusts the Vignette to whatever size and crop was applied to the image. It is checked on by default, and probably best to leave turned on.
- **The Center Tool:** This icon sits at the bottom of the panel looking like it doesn't do much, but is one of the most powerful tools available! The icon looks like a small dot with four corners.



To use the Center Tool, click on the icon (it will turn to your menu color when activated), then hold down the left mouse button on the image and drag the Vignette around to where you want it applied.



DON'T: APPLY TO VIGNETTE TOO STRONG!

OK, so here's the thing about Vignettes... If you can easily see it on the image, in most cases you are doing it wrong!* A Vignette should be subtle, and subtly draw the eye towards the subject without the viewer realizing it.

And that's where many people get Vignettes wrong. They tend to go too dark, and that results in it being too obvious! And when it is too obvious, it actually detracts from the photo as that's what people notice, and not your glorious masterpiece.

Honestly, I would say that most of the ON1 PR Vignettes are *far* too strong when applied at the default settings. Personally, I prefer to adjust the Brightness of the Vignette (moving it closer to 0), but you can use the Opacity slider just as effectively to reduce the strength.

*There are some artistic reasons to apply a heavy hand to the Vignette, and these exceptions to the rule are approved!



Remember this image from before? Shown on the left is the shot with the Vignette. On the right is the same image, but without a Vignette. See how the eye is drawn towards the center of the image to the figure and setting sun?

Shown below is a photo taken at the ghost town of Leadville, California. The image with the Vignette is on the left, and with on the right. In this case it helps draw the eye towards the building.

The one thing they both have in common is the Vignette effect is subtle, but it makes a difference. Especially when the image is viewed larger than these small thumbnails!



DO: USE THE BIG SOFTY!

Recall how way back on page 3 I mentioned to remember the Big Softy? It's because that's the Vignette that I use on 99.9% of my images (yep, the same 99.9% that get a Vignette). And I'm not alone. If you polled the ON1 Developers and Gurus you would probably get a similar answer. Yes, it's *that* good!

The Big Softy offers such a pleasing, even fade and is so versatile it can be used across nearly all photo genres. However, it's not perfect, and you should make some changes from the base settings.

Keep in mind that the default Brightness of -100 it is far too strong for most images. I find that somewhere in the range of -60 to -20 (or even less in some cases!) seems to work the best, depending of course on the brightness of the image itself.



The Big Softy Vignette is so perfect in most every way, but the default Brightness of -100 (left) is almost always too heavy handed and obvious. On this grumpy Eurasian Eagle-Owl, changing the Brightness to -15 makes a much more pleasing image.

DO: MOVE THE VIGNETTE TO HIGHLIGHT YOUR SUBJECT

Compositionally speaking, our primary subjects are not always perfectly centered in the frame each and every time. Yet the default Vignette settings in ON1 PR treat it as such.

Use the Center Tool (as described on page 9) to grab the Vignette and move it so that your primary subject is highlighted, wherever it may be in the frame. And while we are at it, don't also simply assume that the default size is right for your image as well.

One trick I use is to pull the feather all the way down to 0 so there is a very hard edge to the Vignette. This easily lets me see not only where to position the Effect so that it is over the subject, but also quickly adjust the size and shape as needed. Once in place, slide the Feather back to soften the edges where you like.

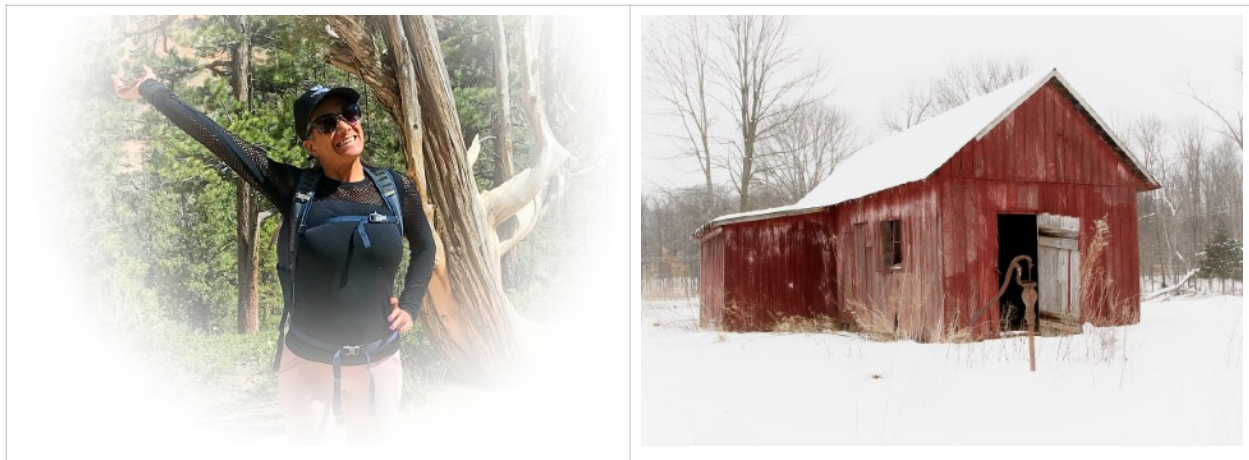


When sizing and positioning the Vignette, a helpful tip is to pull the Feather back to 0. This gives a hard edge and makes it super simple to see the Effect size and position. Once correct, just slide it back towards 100 to make the Feather smooth again.

DON'T: USE A WHITE VIGNETTE!

So, I say this a little tongue in cheek... Let's just agree that for most images, a white Vignette is just not a good look. There was a period of time when portrait photographers used a very heavy white Vignette to fade out, but thankfully that time is (mostly) behind us.

However, if you do have an image that is extremely light, or white around the edges, this *could* be a good option to try.



White Vignettes are generally a poor look, unless you are trying to recreate a bad portrait style from a time best forgotten! However... In some instances, such as a high-key image or one with a lot of bright elements (like snow), they can actually be effective. This image of the barn has a Big Softy Vignette set at +12 for a very light (pun intended!) transition.

DO: USE THE MASK IF NEEDED TO MODIFY THE VIGNETTE

When applying a Vignette, it pays to watch the corners of the frame. There may be times that the Vignette darkens the image in an unacceptable manner, such as making a blue sky look wrong (for landscape photographers it can be similar to how a polarizer filter can sometimes alter a blue sky unnaturally in the corners and make it tonally uneven).

Fortunately, the same Masking options are available in the Vignette section as with any other Effect. You can use the Masking Brush to paint out any areas where the mask is too intrusive, dark, or changes the color in a way that doesn't look natural.

Not sure how to use the Mask? Teaching that is a bit beyond the scope of this Guide, but fortunately the ON1 Learning Center has [almost 150 videos on Masking](#) alone. Click the link to learn more about this essential post-processing technique.

DO: ADD A VIGNETTE TO BLACK AND WHITE IMAGES

Oh yeah, BW photos and a Vignette go together like peanut butter and jelly! Especially shots with heavy dark and light elements. It just tends to make them more moody, and adds drama.

Again, be careful and watch your image. While you *can* push a darker Vignette onto a BW photo, you'll want it to still look natural. You can push it too far!



For a really moody look, add a Vignette to your black and white images. This one has a Big Softy at -90 applied. This heavy application shows how BW photos are one genre where you can go darker!

DO: USE LOCAL ADJUSTMENTS IF YOU NEED A NON-STANDARD VIGNETTE

There may be times when you need a Vignette that simply does not fit the standard round or rectangular shapes found in the Effects tab. Fortunately you can bypass this and create a Vignette by hand using the Local Adjustments.

Add a new Local Adjustment, and grab the Local Adjustment Brush ("K" on the keyboard). I prefer to pull the Exposure well past where you will end up, but an Exposure setting of -2 or -3 will typically be plenty dark and allow you to see exactly where you are painting in the adjustment.

Once you are happy, it's easy to adjust the Exposure level back to where you think it looks best, or you can adjust the Opacity slider.

DON'T: FORGET ABOUT THE BLENDING MODES!

Many users completely overlook the small “Gear” icon that is available on every Effect. It's on the right side, up at the top, and when clicked will open up a wide range of “Blending Options” for that effect.

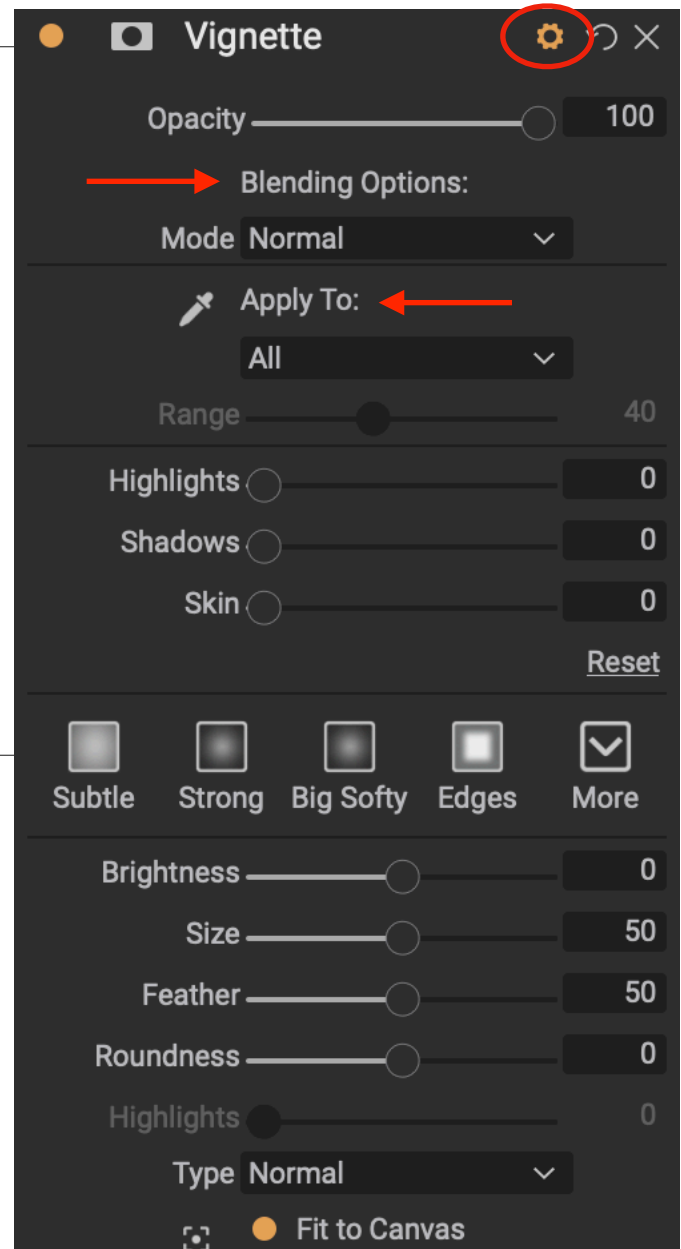
Typically, the default “Normal” blend mode works perfectly, but you can scroll through the list and see how the others affect the Vignette on your image. You might like one of these options. Probably not. But you might!

Note that there is also an “Apply To” dropdown menu hidden under that same “Gear” icon. This allows you to fine-tune the Vignette to only impact areas of your choosing rather than the entire image. You can “Apply To” just the dark, midtone or light areas, specific colors, or any of the 12 different choices.

DO: ADD A VIGNETTE TO YOUR PHOTO!

This guide started off with this exact “Do” and hopefully by this point you've reached the same conclusion that you Do need to add one to almost all your images.

Just remember, if you can easily spot the Vignette, it's probably a bit too heavy. Subtle is the key word, and a Vignette will subtly guide the viewers eye towards the main subject of your image!



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Here are some additional resources for learning about ON1 and Vignettes:

- [ON1 Video - The Power of Photo Effects & Filters: Part III](#) (skip to around 41:19 for the Vignette portion)
- [ON1 Photo RAW User Guides \(2017-2020, Multiple Languages\)](#)
- [ON1 Support Website](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



John Clark is a Nevada-based landscape and travel photographer. A former motorsports photographer, his work in that field was regularly published in more than a dozen magazines and used in advertising by several companies including Toyota and No Fear. More than 25,000 racing images of his have been archived into the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Mich.

You can see his work online:

- Web: www.GetRealJC.com
- Instagram: [@GetRealJC](https://www.instagram.com/GetRealJC)
- Twitter: [@GetRealJC](https://twitter.com/GetRealJC)