LUMINOSITY MASKING MADE EASY

INTRODUCTION

For those unfamiliar, Luminosity Masking is one of the most powerful ways to edit an image with pinpoint accuracy and silky smooth blending. However, for many years this editing technique was considered black magic and only accessible to those PhotoShop wizards with highly advanced skills and required multiple steps using Alpha Channels to create. Now, thanks to ON1 Photo RAW 2020 (and also the earlier 2019 and 2018 versions) you can quickly and easily incorporate this tone- or color-based technique into your personal workflow.

As you probably know, working in the main Develop module makes "global" adjustments to the image (meaning the entire image is affected by the change). Brushing, and Local Adjustments offer a finer level of processing, but neither gives the same level of blending that a Luminosity Mask provides.

Interested in learning how to supercharge your adjustments? Good! This guide will provide an overview on how to create and modify a Luminosity Mask, and how it will change the control you have over editing your images (and quite possibly alter the course of your post-processing life!).

OK, SO SHOW ME HOW TO MAKE A LUMINOSITY MASK!

Now this might seem a little complex at first, but in the end it's really as simple as one click. You ready?
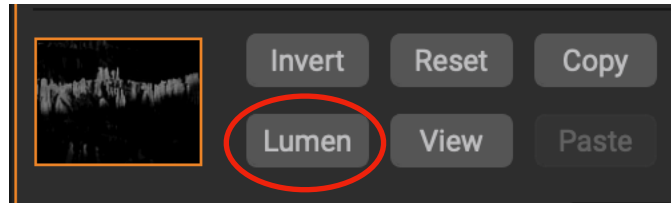
First, enter the "Edit" module, choosing from the icon in the menu bar on the right side with the three sliders (it looks like lines with dots). Remember that any changes made in the default "Develop" tab are global in nature, meaning the entire image is altered when you move any of the sliders.

But once you enter either the "Local" or "Effects" adjustment tabs you'll want to first click on the "Mask" icon (that's the black square next to the word "Adjustment" in Local Adjustments, or the grey square with the black circle in the Effects tab next to the name of the chosen effect).
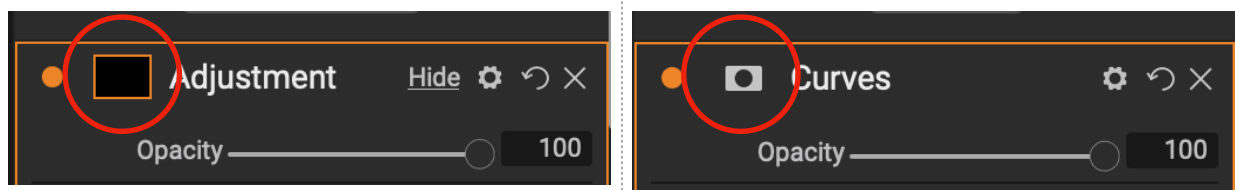
The mask icon in the Local Adjustment tab (left) and the Effects tab (right)

Once you click the relevant "Mask" icon, you'll see a number of options show up in two rows of grey boxes next to the thumbnail. One is labeled "Lumen" and that's the one you'll want. Click on that!

Did you do it? Did you click the "Lumen" icon? If you said, "yes," then congratulations… You just made a Luminosity Mask!

Note that you can also create a Luminosity Mask via the menu bar at the top if that's preferable. Simply hover over the "Mask" dropdown and select "Create Luminosity Mask."

WELL, THAT'S INTERESTING AND ALL… BUT WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? ALL I SEE IS A SMALL BLACK AND WHITE THUMBNAIL!

Right, well what you actually see there is a small thumbnail preview of the Luminosity Mask. ON1 Photo RAW analyzed the image and automatically determined the brightness values (or lumens, to put it in technical terms) across the entire image. Basically, what this means is the software sets values for every pixel in your photo from black at 255 (all RGB values full blast), white at 0 (no RGB color data), and all other levels in between.

So, using an image as an example, we will begin in the "Develop" panel which is where we always start the processing journey. You can see my settings and tell that I've actually done *very* little in terms of global modifications.
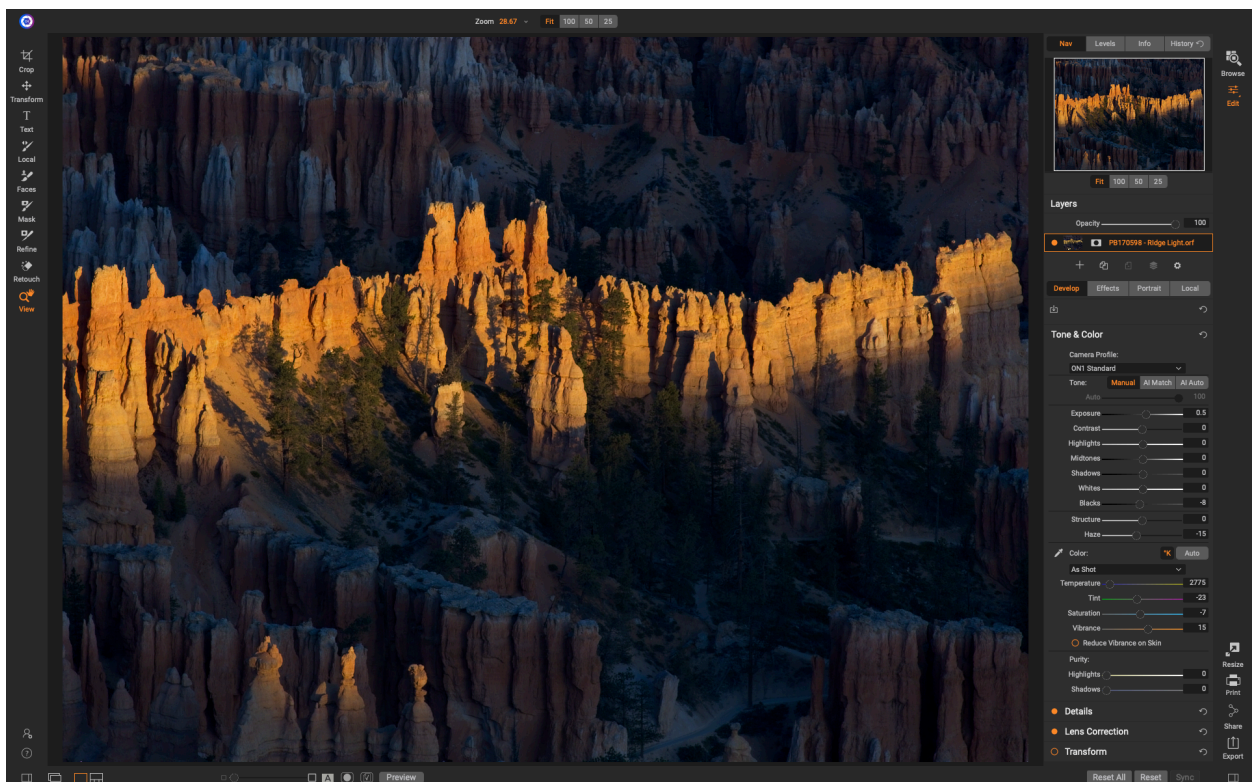
This image was photographed in Utah's Bryce Canyon National Park, looking from the top of the rim down into the Amphitheater right at sunrise. I liked how the first rays of the morning lit up that one ridge while leaving the surrounding area in dark shadows. The reason I didn't open this up more by bumping up the exposure or shadows was to maintain the mystery of those darker areas, while keeping the focus of the viewer on the beautiful ridgeline.

Now, it's time to put a Luminosity Mask to work! A nice "Glow" Effect along that warm ridgeline would be nice, and this is a perfect opportunity to let the computer do the hard work instead of a tedious job of manually painting it in with a Brush. Head to the Effects Panel and select the "Glow" option from the menu.

Remember, click on the "Lumen" button once inside the masking section and you should see… nothing happen to the image! What the Heck? Rest assured, a Luminosity Mask has been applied to your photo, but to see it you'll also need to click on the "View" button!

Now, you should see a black and white version of your photo, but don't worry… This is the Luminosity Mask itself! Your image is still in full, glorious color (unless you happened to convert into BW before making a Luminosity Mask, that is!).
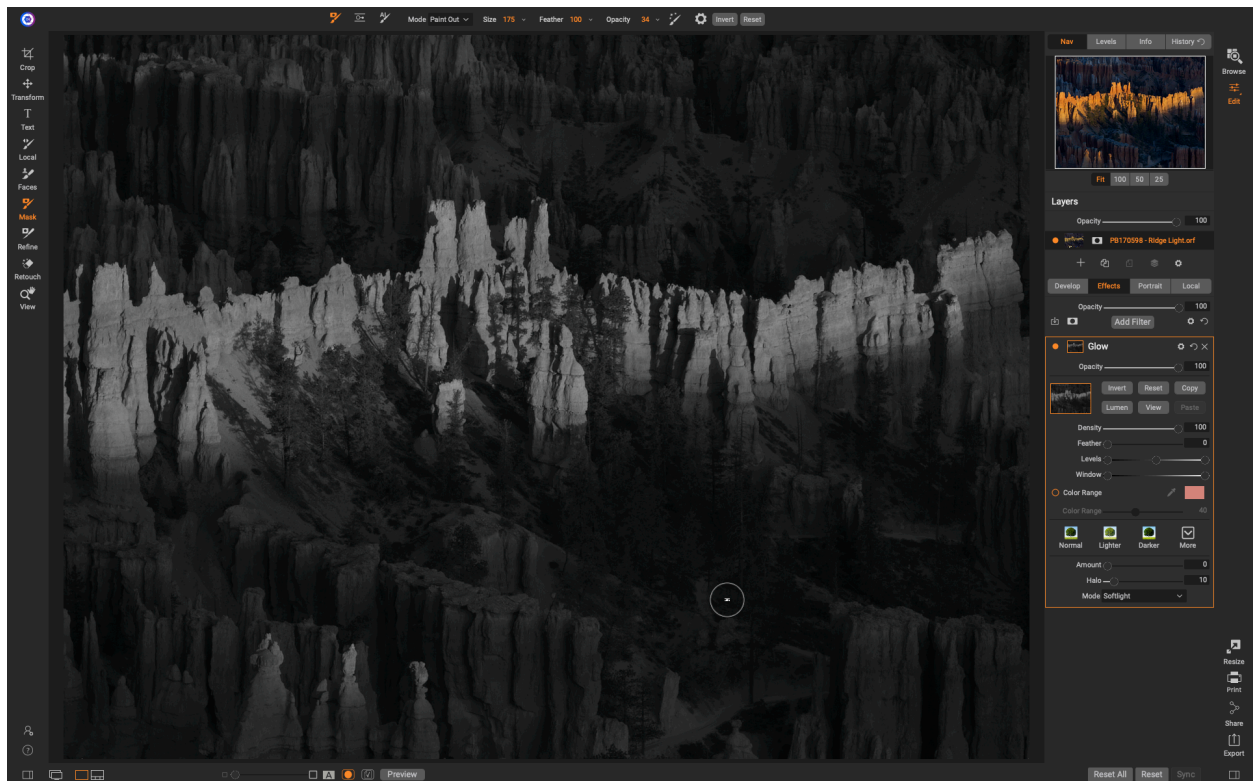
And, as with any mask, "White Reveals" and "Black Conceals." What this means is that the light grey(s) on screen will be the area(s) of the image that are adjusted, and the dark areas will not.

There are a lot of options in the Masking panel, so now would be a good idea to go over those that are most relevant to Luminosity Masking. For information on the others, visit the online User Guide for Photo RAW 2020.
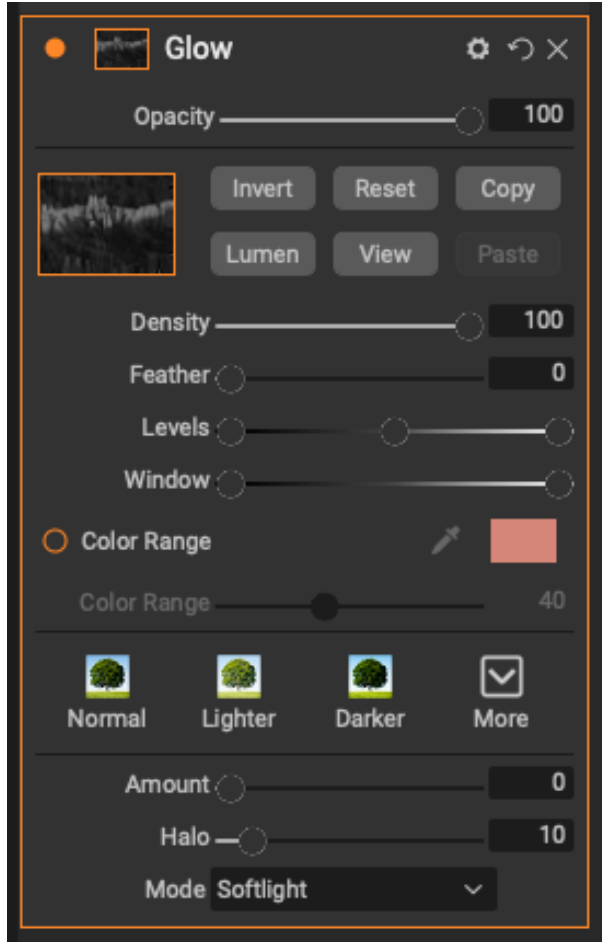
|	
	The **Opacity** Slider will adjust how much of the adjustment is applied via the mask, ranging from 100 (full application) to 0 (none applied, and I have no idea why anyone would set this to zero!)
	The **Lumen** Button is used to automatically create a Luminosity Mask. One click and you're done!
	The **View** Button used to toggle the visibility of the Luminosity Mask on and off.
	The **Invert** Button will "flip" the mask. Anything light will be turned to dark, and vice versa. Sometimes it can be easier to work on the opposite area of what you want to change and then simply Invert the mask.
	Clicking the **Reset** Button will revert the mask back to the initial state and reset all sliders and options.
	As you would expect, the **Copy** Button allows you to copy a mask from one Effect and paste it use on another. (Hint: Sometimes it can be handy to paste a mask on a second Effect, but Invert the mask so it impacts the opposite areas!)
	The **Paste** Button (greyed out on the screen shot) is only available when a mask has been copied and available to be pasted on an Effect.
	Using the **Density** slider will adjust or fade the overall mask.
	The **Feather** slider will blur the mask, globally adjusting just how sharp and precise it is on the image.
	The **Levels** slider has three touch points, one for the darks (left), one for the midtones (middle), and a highlights slider (right). You can see these represented as the color goes from black to white. Adjusting these will allow you to fine tune the selected areas of the Luminosity Mask.
	The **Window** slider works similar to using Levels and is another option for fine tuning the light and dark areas selected.
	Color Range is a powerful tool allowing selection based on a color. You can also adjust the color **Range** to select or limit those in a similar hue for complete control.

So, with that overview out of the way, let's take a look at modifying this Luminosity Mask so that we can add a Glow Effect to just the areas where the sun is highlighting the hoodoos!
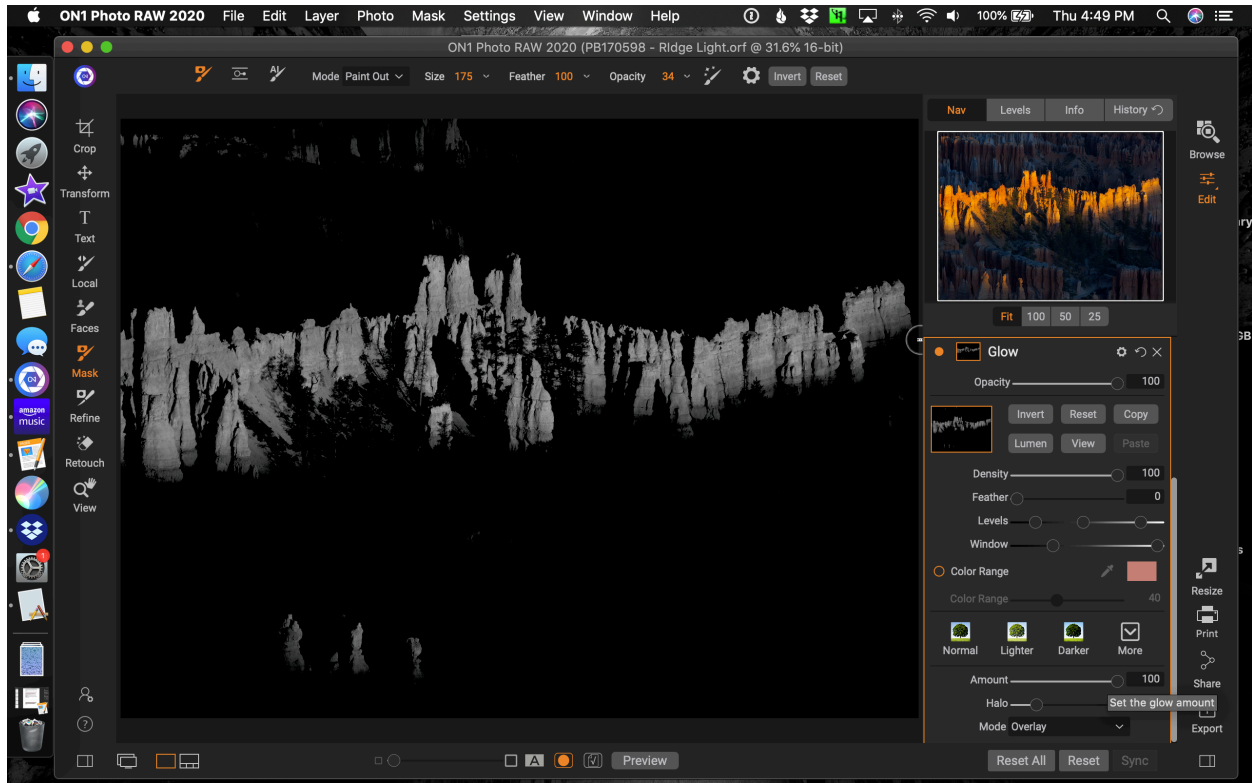
You'll see here that by adjusting the "Levels" black slider slightly to the right, and the highlights slider slightly left, I was able to really isolate the ridgeline. Moving the black point in the "Window" slider a bit more to the right also helped.
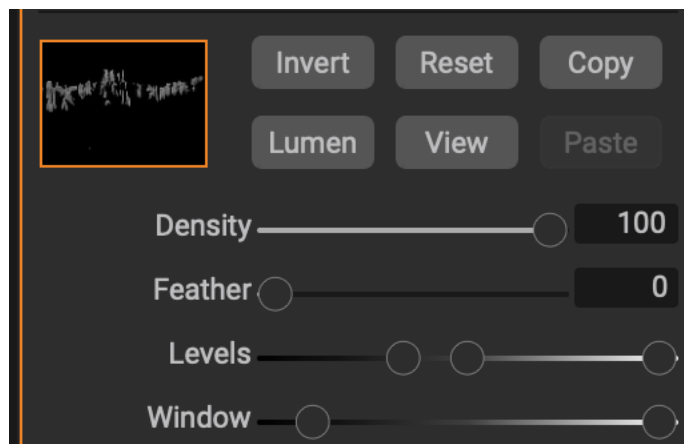

The adjustments to the "Levels" and "Window" sliders to isolate the sunshine areas on the ridgeline

Compare this to the image on page 3, where you could see more into the shadow areas. Now, I admit that this does not look like a big difference, but when the filter is applied it applies the glow just to the highlighted areas, and not in the shadows where the sun has not yet reached!

As a side note, you could also use the "Brush Tool" to mask out that hoodoo in the bottom left corner. In fact, pulling down the saturation as well will help to keep the eye focused on the center of the image, where it belongs, and not be drawn to that area.

Here's the final image, quickly edited thanks to Luminosity Masking! And, as a reminder, below is the original image before we started processing.
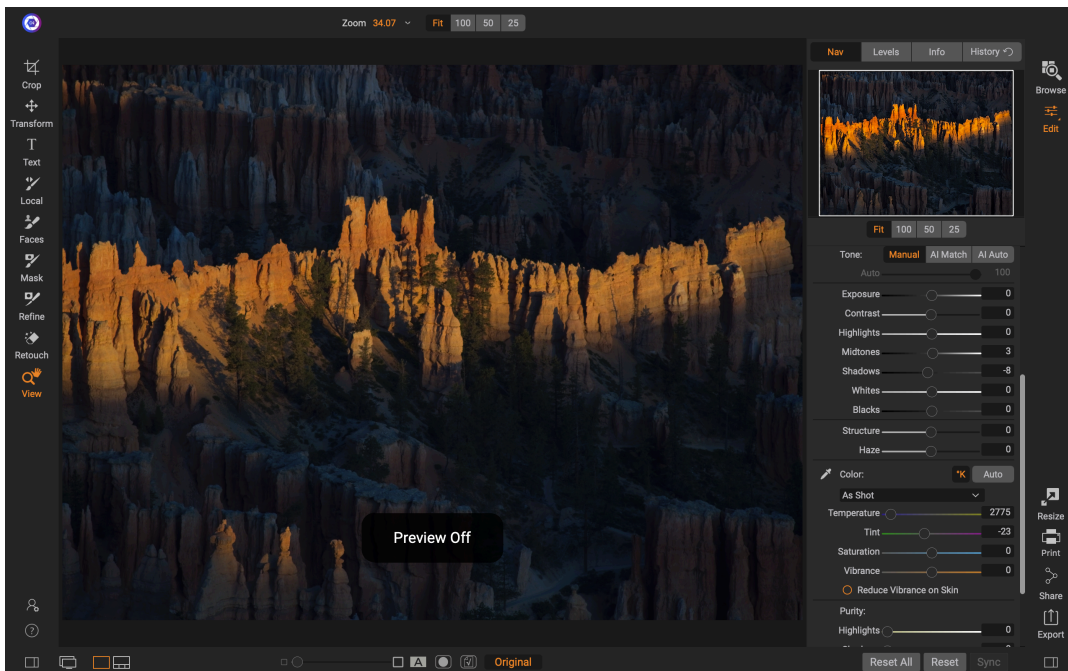
COOL, COOL… BUT WHAT IF I JUST WANT TO ADJUST A CERTAIN COLOR IN MY IMAGE

Well, Luminosity Masking has you covered there as well! And the process is almost as easy. You can quickly isolate colors to adjust saturation, vibrance, hue, brightness and more. In fact, you can even use a Luminosity Mask to change a color!
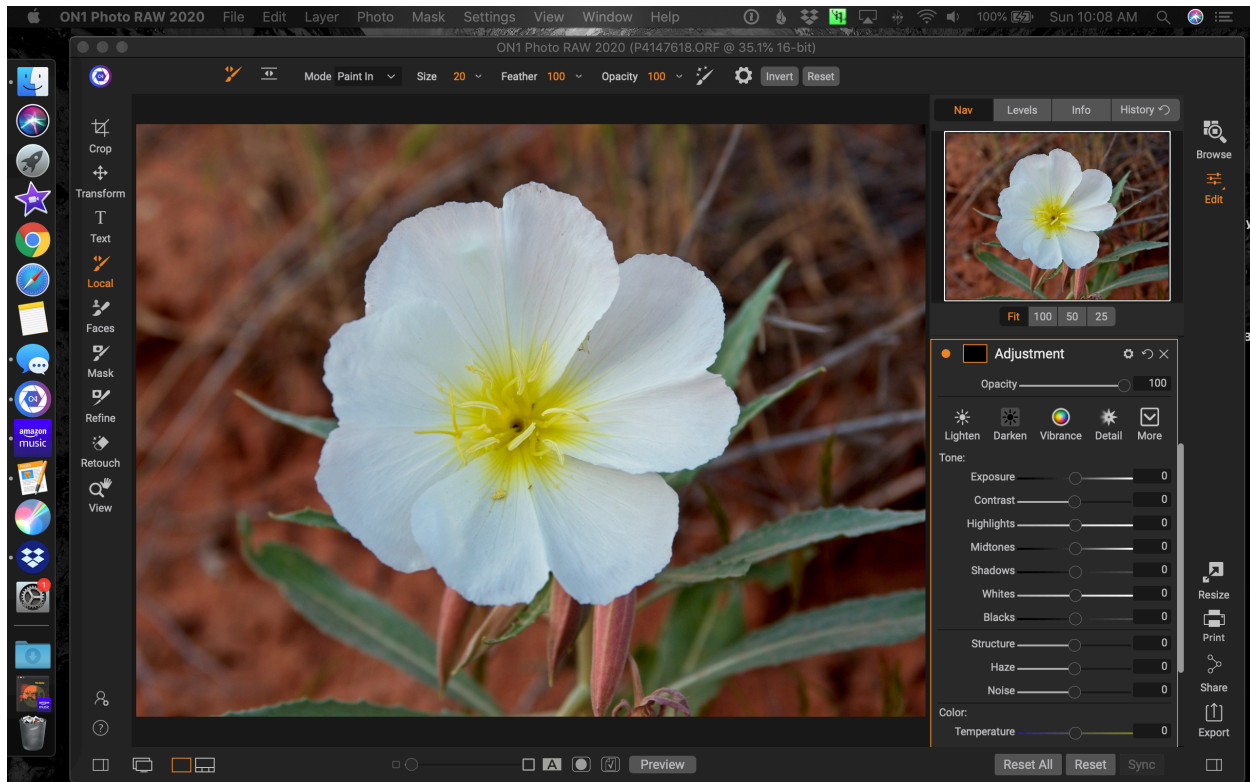
Take, for example, this image of Dune Primrose, a common wildflower in the Southwestern desert. For some reason, we want to change the color from white to purple, mostly because it's fun and we can!

First, let's add a "Local Adjustment" by clicking on that tab. Make sure that the "Exposure" slider is zero'd out as it defaults to -1, and we don't want to darken the area we will mask next.

Now, as before, click on the "Mask" icon (the black box next to the word "Adjustment"), then click on the "Lumen" button.

This time we will incorporate the "Color Range" by clicking on the small, open circle next to the name to activate it. The default color is a pinkish-peach, and in the case we want to turn the white petals to purple so grab the color selection "Eyedropper" tool by clicking on it.

The Eyedropper tool will become a small "+" sign on the image, so find and click on a white area on the flower to make that the selected color. Finally, click on the "View" button to see our mask.

Depending on what part of the color you selected, the mask should look something like this.
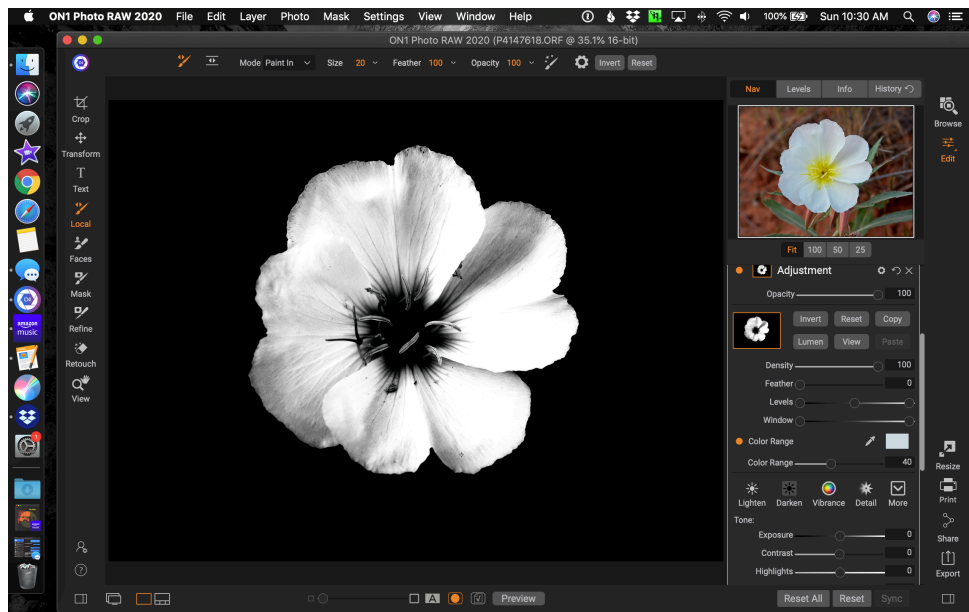
Pretty amazing what you can do with a couple of mouse clicks, huh! And if the mask isn't quite right, you can adjust it using the "Levels," "Window" and "Feather" sliders like we did with the prior example. And, when choosing your color, you can try as often as you need to get the best mask possible, and experiment with the "Color Range" slide to expand or contract as needed.
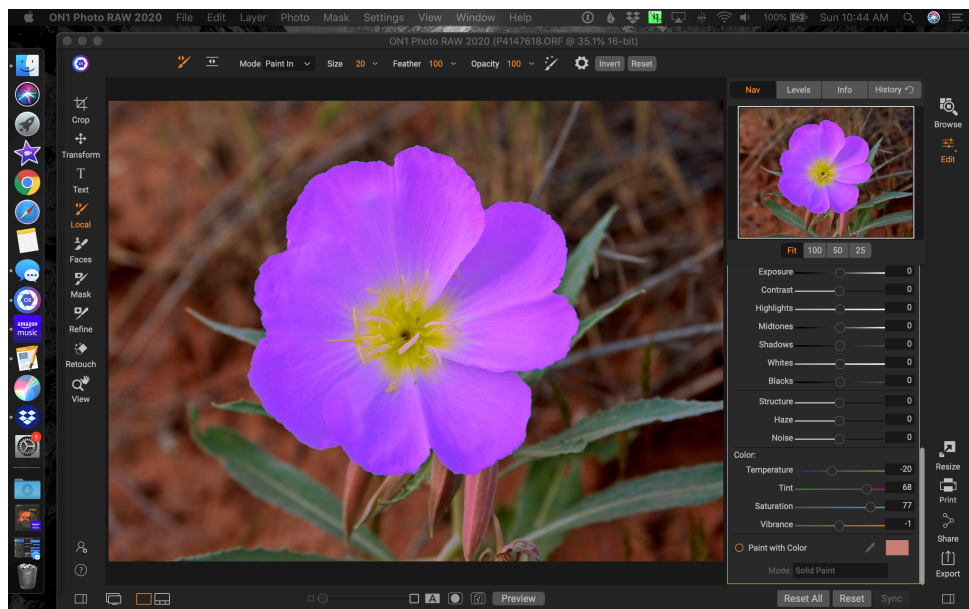
Now, to adjust the color to purple, click on the "View" button so you can see your image and then adjust the "Temperature," "Tint," "Saturation," and "Vibrance" sliders in the "Color" settings box until you find something that matches your vision!

Using a specific color selection through Luminosity Masking can be extremely powerful in bumping up the vibrance of the orange and yellow Fall colors, green leaves on trees or grasses, or any other type of situation where you want to isolate and enhance just a very specific color range! You can even use this technique to change the color of clothing if the need arises.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Here are some additional resources for learning about ON1 and Luminosity Masks:

- ON1 Video - A Quick Guide to Luminosity Masking
- ON1 Video - Easily Work with Luminosity Masks
- ON1 Video - Use Luminosity Masks to Enhance Color & Tone
- ON1 Video Library
- 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 appeared in more than a dozen magazines and was used in advertising and 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:
•URL: www.GetRealJC.com
•Instagram: @GetRealJC
•Twitter: @GetRealJC