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[Tony Wu | Underwater Photography](#)

Tall tales, miscellaneous musings & occasional images from exotic excursions

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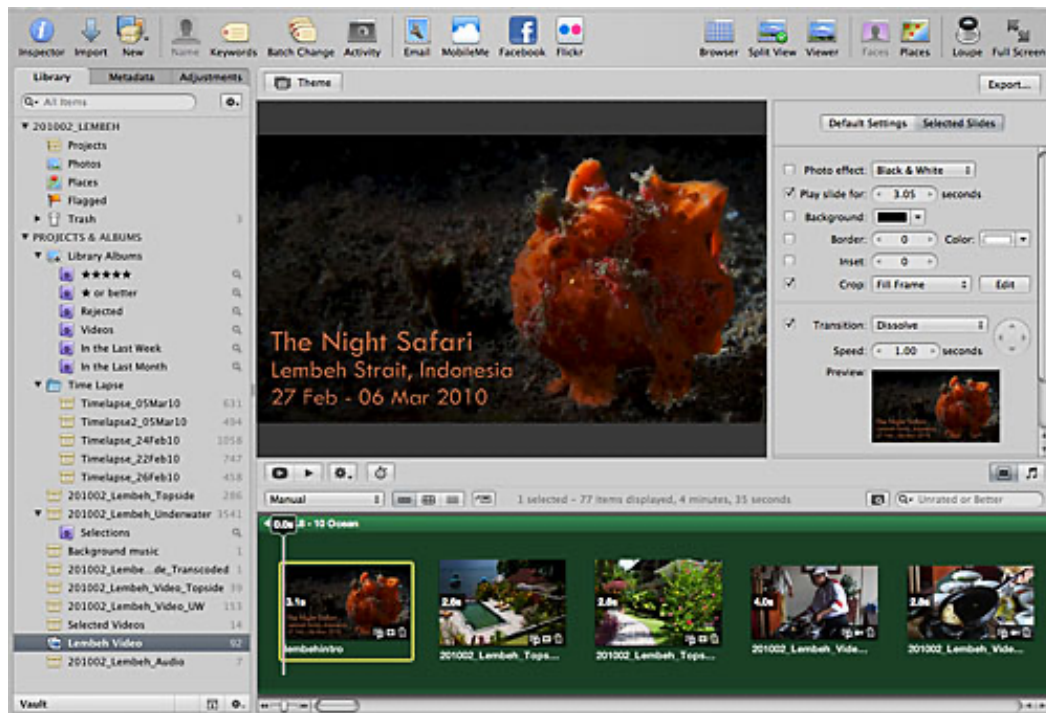


[Using Aperture 3: Part 1](#)

Tue, Mar 30th, 2010 | [Equipment](#), [Technique](#), [Featured](#) [4 Comments](#)

As I mentioned at the end of my previous post, I used [Aperture 3](#) to manage and edit the images, video and audio from my recent trip to Indonesia. I also put together my [Lembeh Night Safari trip video](#) using Aperture 3.

In this post and one to follow later, I'll do my best to set out the key points from my experience...both the good and the not so good. In case you have no idea what Aperture 3 is and are wondering why anyone would care... it's the most recent version of Apple's media-management software, released not too long ago.



Preface

Let me preface my discussion of Apple's latest version of Aperture by setting the context for my views.

1. First, I have used Aperture since version 1 of the software. In other words, I wasn't coming into version 3 of Aperture blind. I had somewhere around 75,000 Aperture-managed images under my belt before I departed to Indonesia. I've also used Apple computers since my first Apple II, so I'm not a Mac newbie.

2. I only use referenced files in Aperture, meaning that I don't import files directly into Aperture ("Managed" files in the Aperture lexicon). I use [Photomechanic](#) to import, sort and name files into a rational folder structure, and then reference those files in Aperture projects. (If this is gobbledygook to you, I apologise, but I can't really go into more explanation about this topic here.) The reason I use Photomechanic is that it's lightning-fast reading RAW image files. The reason I use referenced files is that I work only on a laptop, and I can't carry around GBs (actually TBs now) of image data everywhere I go.

3. I have not been trained or coached in any substantial way on the use of Aperture, nor have I spent any significant time in discussion forums or other support groups talking about Aperture. I learn best by jumping head-first into things and then asking questions when I hit a wall, not by talking about or listening to how to do

things.

4. I also don't read manuals, though I use the **Help** menu a lot. I consult Google whenever I encounter a roadblock, through which process I can quickly determine whether other people have hit a similar obstacle, and more importantly, if someone better informed/ more tenacious than I am has found a solution to the conundrum in question. In many, perhaps most, cases, there are existing discussion threads in the Apple support forums with people exchanging views (i.e., b*tching) about the very same problem I'm facing.

5. Though I am not an IT expert by any means, I am certainly at the software-proficient, IT-philic end of the normal user spectrum. In other words, I spend a heckuva lot of time with my computer, and I generally figure things out (however convoluted and tortured a path I take).

6. Software is a means to an ends for me. I know what my objectives are, and I only care about the ins and outs of software to the extent that I can achieve what I want to get done. I don't obsess or geek-out over minor details.

7. Before I installed Aperture 3, I got a brand-spanking new MacBook Pro, set up with the latest version of OS X, and with all software reinstalled. My OS and applications reside on an Intel 160GB SSD drive, and all my working data resides on a separate internal 500GB spinning drive. My machine was configured by my friend [Eric Cheng](#), who actually knows what he's doing...the point being that I started with a state-of-the-art, *tabula rasa* machine that was not plagued by any legacy software, unresolved conflicts, missing files, etc.

8. As of the beginning of this year, I started creating a separate **Library** in Aperture for every trip/ assignment. I amended my workflow in this manner because found that once I hit something on the order of 60,000 referenced images, Aperture got funky on me. The spinning beachball appeared with irritating regularity, and in some cases, Aperture (version 2) crashed over and over again like waves pounding a rocky coast.

I read and heard about other photographers experiencing similar issues, many of whom adopted this multiple-**Library** approach. Creating a separate **Library** for each trip reduces the workload for Aperture, and also minimises the risk associated with crashes. Database corruption can result in irrecoverable files...meaning that you'd have to recreate the relevant portions of your image **Library**...a pleasure most of us would prefer to live without. I don't know enough about the software to know if a serious database problem could wipe out all data, though I suspect it's a plausible scenario.

9. This is one of the reasons I was anxious to test Aperture 3. There was a long hiatus between the launches of version 2 and version 3 of the software, and I was hoping that the latest version would address many of the outstanding issues that the Aperture user community had identified. I was also looking forward to testing the new features, especially the ability to organise and edit video and audio files.

10. Finally, I don't proclaim to be an Aperture expert, or to be an authority in any sense of the word. If you read what I write and find that I've made a mistake, or that I've completely overlooked something (an entirely realistic possibility), please let me know, preferably in a constructive and adult manner.

I'm also only highlighting the functions I've used/ tested and find useful for my workflow and needs. I'm fully aware Aperture 3 has many more functions than the ones I outline below.

The Good Stuff

So with this background information, let me start with the stuff that I really liked...listed in no particular order, just typing as things pop into my mind.

1. RAW conversion

This is a qualitative observation. At the heart of Aperture (and competing software [Lightroom from Adobe](#)) is a RAW conversion engine, which lets you “develop” and tweak RAW files. (I guess I should mention that I only shoot in RAW, and you should too if you’re at all serious about your photography.)

Each iteration of Aperture has seen a marked improvement in the RAW conversion engine, with Aperture 3’s RAW conversion being the best so far.

For underwater macro shots like most of the images I took in Lembeh, Aperture 2 (the previous Aperture iteration) performed OK, but not great, in my opinion.

After this trip, I can confidently state that Aperture 3’s handling of colours with macro images is significantly better than previous versions of the software.

How do I know this? By looking at the images.

I’m not big on conducting extensive, involved objective tests. There are many other people who do things like that really well...people who are much more patient and methodical than I am.

My opinion is based on looking at tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of digital images, and processing a good portion of them in Aperture. You’ll just have to trust my opinion on this one (or, alternatively, ignore what I say and toss it out as a bunch of bovine-hockey).

One area I wasn’t able to test extensively was how Aperture 3 handles wide-angle reef shots with colourful foregrounds, blue backgrounds and wide range of blues. Aperture 2 wasn’t great with such images, often producing dull, drab, uninspiring blues (processing such images for print was when I most often turned to Canon’s Digital Photo Professional software).

I didn’t shoot enough of this type of image in Lembeh to offer an informed opinion at this juncture on how Aperture 3 performs with wide-angle scenery.

2. F-H-P-Z

Yes, I know this doesn’t make any sense to any normal human being, but if you have Aperture 3 installed, call up a file and press those shortcut keys. I found myself using this combination of keys a lot.

F calls up full-screen mode, which allows you to devote all your screen real estate to viewing and editing, eliminating distractions from other stuff. If you’re fortunate enough to have multiple large screens in a dedicated work area, this may be more of a “nice-to-have” rather than a crucial function. But if you work mostly or entirely on a 15-inch laptop screen like I do, it’s great to make full use of the screen.

H calls up the heads-up panel for access to all of Aperture’s editing functions.

P toggles you from preview mode to full-resolution mode, which you need to be in for editing your images.

Z gives you zoom functionality, so you can zip right in to get an up-close view of every part of your image. There is a navigation box that appears automatically, so you can use your cursor to move around the image.

The F-H-P-Z keystroke combination is my default finger behaviour whenever I want to view and edit an image. Try it. It works. Really well.

When you're done editing a particular image, press these keys again (in whatever order you want) to get back to a default window view with preview mode turned on, so you can scroll rapidly through images.

Here's an example:

3. Retouch

Going hand-in-hand with the improved RAW conversion capability and full-screen editing mode of Aperture 3 are significantly improved editing functions (all of which are available via the **Adjustments** panel in the **Inspector**).

In fact, as I alluded to earlier, the editing functionality in Aperture 3 is good enough now that I rarely had to resort to Photoshop (which, I'm sure was Apple's objective).

One of the functions I used often was **Retouch**...to hit backscatter and clean up minor blemishes like sensor dust. This editing function essentially encompasses the functions of clone-and-stamp (called **Clone**) and the healing brush (called **Repair**) in Photoshop (Tangent: You should take a look at the [content-aware editing function coming in the next version of Photoshop!](#)).

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