Shadow-Highlight Tutorial

Before After

This image was correctly exposed to preserve highlights. The photographer knew that his RAW file contained enough shadow detail information that could be recovered/enhanced in post-processing.

Original Image

The standard way to brighten an image is to use the brightness control – a tool that every photo editor offers. LightZone's brightness control is included in the Hue/Saturation tool and is called Luminosity. However, a better way to control brightness is to use the powerful ZoneMapper tool, which provides additional tonality control if needed.

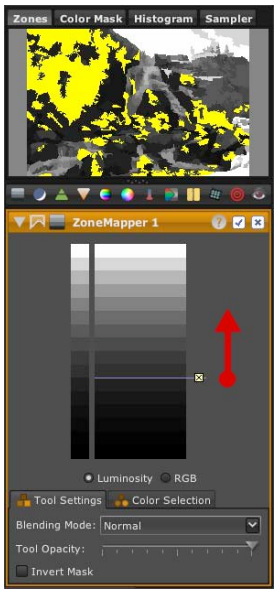
Given the clear region delineation between shadows and highlights in this image, we need to tackle the problem by processing those two areas separately, using LightZone's powerful and easy-to-use Regions.

We set a ZoneMapper tool and zoom out the image to have access to its outer frame and create a region (in this case with a loosely drawn polygon line) enclosing the darker part of image. Note that the border between shadow and light is drawn over the lighter area with a large feather (to smooth out the transition effect). All changes made with this ZoneMapper tool will be restricted to this region.

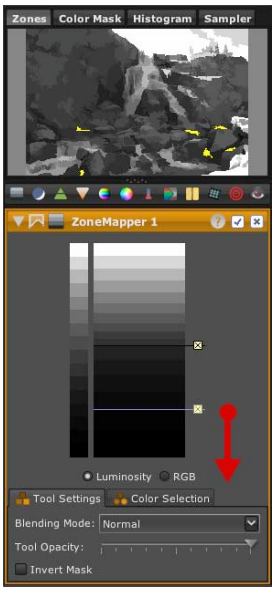
Region Around Dark Area

Hovering the mouse over the ZoneMapper we identify on the ZoneFinder (yellow patches) the shadow regions we want to control. Click down in the ZoneMapper and a purple zone-lock will appear. Slide this zone-lock upward and the shadows will brighten. Similarly, find the darkest parts of the shadows and slide this zone-lock downard. Next brighten the waterfall highlights and lastly, the mid-tones. See steps below:

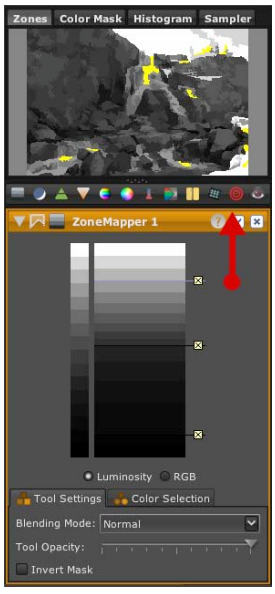
Brightening shadows



Shadows blackpoint

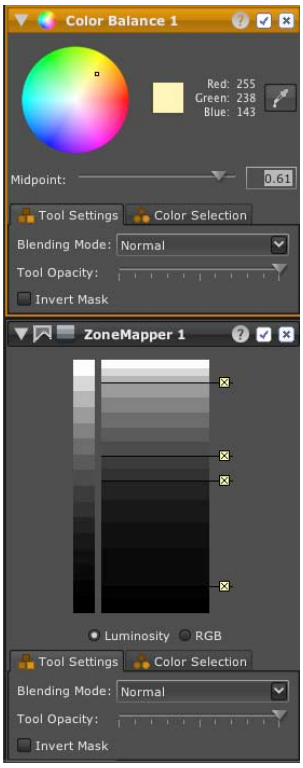


Waterfall highlights



Mid-tones punch

A color Balance tool is used to remove the shadowed area color cast, clicking the color picker on the white waterfall.



Final ZoneMapper tool showing dark shadows/ shadows/midtones/highlights control points.

Final Image

The final image accomplishes the tutorial's goal with a remarkable opening of the image shadows, maintaining local-contrast and image volume, akin to what a human eye would experience in the same locale.

Key Tools: ZoneMapper and Color Balance.