

Nik Software

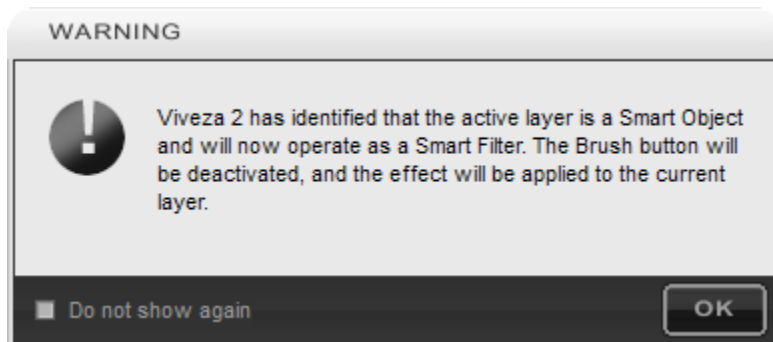
Viveza 2

By A. Cemal Ekin

Newer releases of Photoshop and Photoshop Lightroom have challenged the need for additional plugins. The core program features have grown significantly and their usage have become progressively easier. One would think that the add-on plugin market would start to shrink. To the contrary, we see new plugins or newer releases of the earlier ones that invite the users either with enhanced feature set or ease of use, even both. Nik Software Viveza 2 is one of the new releases that will appeal to users with ease of use and quality of results.

The Product

Viveza 2 comes in versions that will work with Photoshop or Photoshop Lightroom, in both 32-bit and 64-bit versions. It is one of the first 64-bit plugins in the Nik Software line up, perhaps in the whole plugin market. The installation is a straight forward process, no surprises. When launched, it opens in its own interface as if a separate application; indeed it is a separate application with its EXE file to be used from Lightroom. Although it can be started by simply double-clicking the exe file, there is no way of bringing an image into it as it lacks the typical menu bar. The natural workflow of



images being pushed to the software and brought back in a round-trip fashion is quite convenient and makes the process seamless and transparent to the user. There is one important difference that is worth mentioning between the Photoshop and Lightroom versions. When launched from Photoshop Viveza 2 can work as a smart filter (see image on left), allowing repeated tweaks on the image; and Nik Selective Tool interface is available to work in a layered environment.

The Interface

The Viveza 2 interface is separated into two panels with expanding option blocks on the right and a large image viewing area on the left. On the tool panel there are several blocks of controls beginning with the Nik U-Point controls that allow adding, grouping, and ungrouping control points. Below that are the sliders that allow global adjustments, which can be quite handy. Below the slider group is the control points group. Viveza 2 even has its own curves and levels panel that can be expanded on demand. At the bottom of the tool panel is the loupe which can show before-after views and be pinned to a particular point. It saves the user from constantly zooming in and out to evaluate some critical areas.

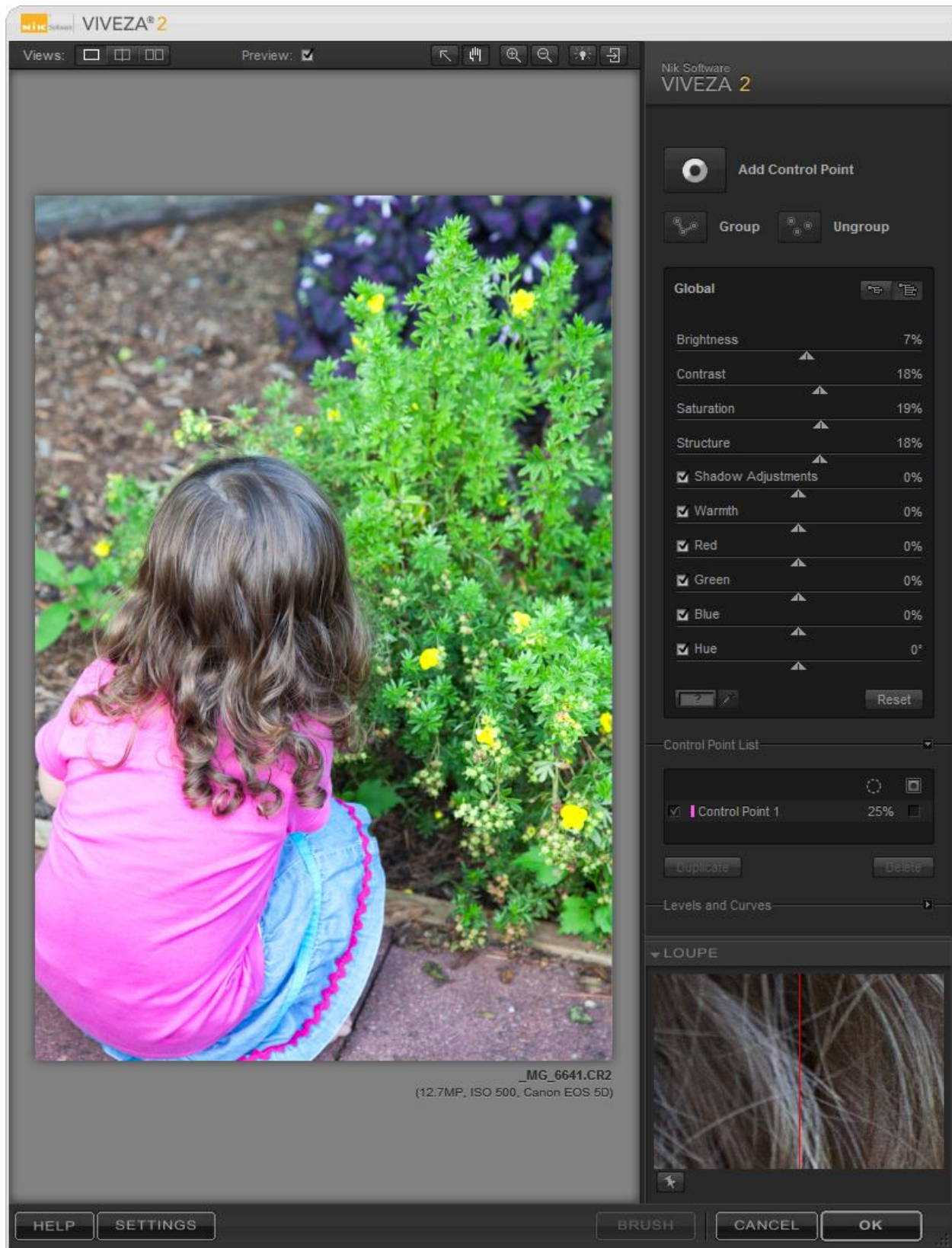
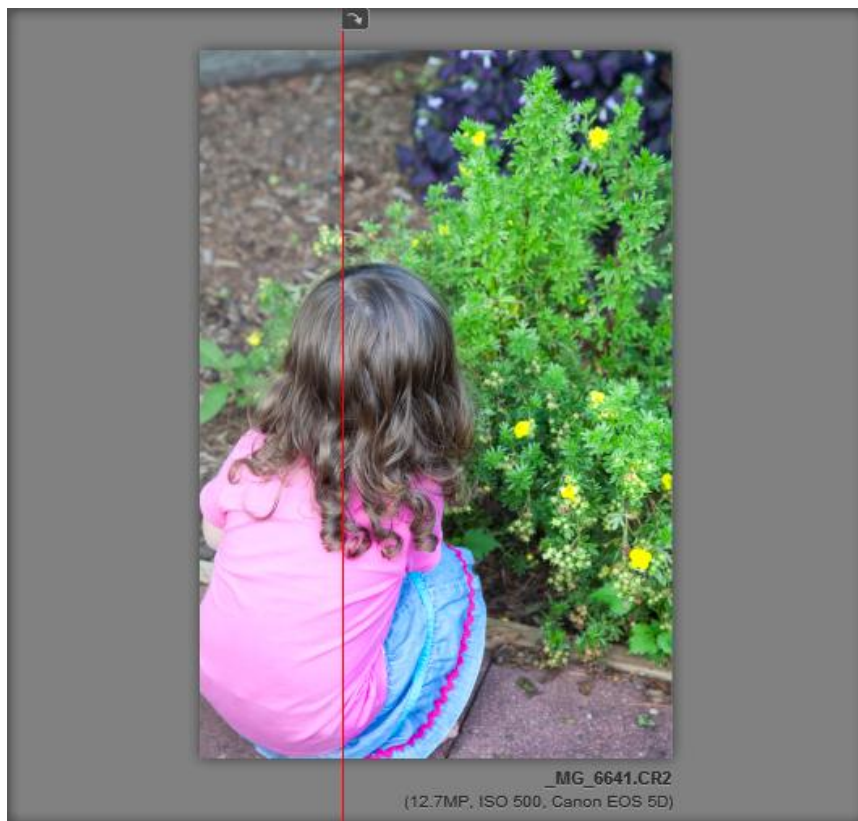


Figure 1 Viveza 2 interface is simple and easy to learn

The application interface can be sized to fit your display but there is no maximize button, nor will a double-click on the title bar do that for you. It will only resize from the lower right hand corner by dragging; a bit of a nuisance but a minor one (it seems to have become my “pet peeve.”)

The Preview Window

In the center is the large image preview area. The image can be zoomed in by picking up the zoom tool, a magnifying glass icon above the preview area. Each click, depending on the original image size in the viewer goes through 20%, 25%, 33%, 50%, 100%, and 300%. The Loupe window on the lower right becomes a navigator area when the image is zoomed in. I expected that holding the Alt key would change the zoom in to zoom out, sure enough the icon changed to a magnifying glass with a minus in the center instead of a plus. Each click moves the image out in reverse order to the above sequence. When the Select tool is picked up (an arrow next to the zoom tool), double clicking on the image will zoom in 100% and another double-click will zoom out to fit the image to the window. The hand tool does what one may expect, move the image in the view port area. It also serves as a toggle between the original and the edited version.



On top of the viewport is a thin toolbar that has several other tools besides the zoom functionality. Perhaps one of the best features is the various ways in which the user can preview before and after versions. A click in a checkbox turns preview on or off giving a full screen preview. To the left of this are three icons, full, split, and side by side which do what one may expect. In both the split and side by side views the split can be rotated 90 degrees providing vertical or horizontal comparison. Additionally, the split view dividing line can be moved

to position it at the best point for comparison and slid continuously for inspection of different parts. In the image above, the split view slider is moved to compare the color and saturation on the blouse. This is a very handy tool for comparison of “was” and “is” views.

The Adjustments Panel

This plugin is essentially a selection tool on steroids. Not only does it conveniently select parts of the image with ease, it also offers a set of adjustment tools right at the tip of the cursor. The entire process involves clicking on the “Add Control Point” icon on the toolbar and clicking on the part of the image that need adjustment. The selection is done fundamentally based on color and the area of inclusion is controlled by the top slider which increases the circle of coverage. Although this is quite convenient for images containing strongly differing colors, it requires some care and finesse for images like the one I chose. Keep in mind that the circle that controls the areas of the image to be included has an implied but uncontrollable “feather” to blend the effects. This is quite understandable, but not having control on the shape or the amount of the feather at times can be challenging and perhaps even frustrating. For images that have a large sky, clouds, foliage and colored flowers the process is much easier and smoother. Take a look at the three captures at different coverage circles from small to large, you will see the feathering. I am mentioning this not as a major criticism but as a fair warning to the user under similar conditions. I also realize that the adjustment I am making, drastically changing the hue, is not a very common one.



This issue out of the way, you can see how effective the selection and the hue shift is. However, on the large original there are still areas left in pink, especially under the curly hair and under the fanny. Adding a couple of additional control points may solve this issue, but I would have expected the entire blouse be controlled by this adjustment. As I said, this photograph seems to be particularly challenging to handle in Viveza 2, I will inquire about the reason and learn how to control these circumstances.

U Point Technology

This feature gives Viveza 2, like other similar Nik Software, a highly useful tool. It works like a blend of several tools. It is a selection tool based on color, it is a masking tool by the size of the radius, and it is a brightness and contrast adjustment tool. But wait, there's more! It is a mid-tone contrast and sharpening tool. In practice, it works very well. The initial selection point or other parameters are not critical as they all can be adjusted, and the control point be moved around while visually observing the results. Several control points can be dropped on the image and even be

grouped together. Any adjustment then, will affect all the control points in tandem. This is a very useful feature to make up for the lack of control in defining the selection beyond the radius of the selection circle. Instead of on large selection circle several smaller ones can be used to better define the selected area.

In Action

With its global and local adjustment options, a powerful selection tool with other sliders within reach, a curves and levels tool Viveza 2 is a well-crafted piece of software. As mentioned earlier, when used in Photoshop as the host, Nik Selective Tool allows using Viveza 2 as an adjustment layer with full masking capability. For even more control Viveza can be applied to a layer after converting it to a smart object, thus making Viveza 2 a smart filter. This will allow for repeated tweaks of the adjustment on the same image, this can be very useful for some images or for some workflows. With all these capabilities the quality of the end result is very satisfying and well worth the little effort to learn how to use Viveza 2, note the “little effort”.

Documentation and Learning Resources

The downloaded software does not come with documentation but a quick start guide in PDF format is available from the Nik Software Web site. This guide is easy to read and covers the material one has to learn. More importantly, Nik Software Web site offers other learning tools ranging from PDF documents and video tutorials to different kinds of Webinars. All in all, learning this software should be fairly easy; partly due to the generally well designed interface and in part to the availability of the learning support.

Viveza 2 retails for \$199.95. It is worth the expense if you want ease of use and speed. Members of the Photographic Society of Rhode Island receive a 15% discount. You can get the discount code after logging in to your account.

In many ways, Viveza 2 is simpler to use than achieving the same results in Photoshop. I feel very comfortable in Photoshop and Lightroom and can produce the same results that I get from Viveza relatively easily. But the product is worthy of recommendation to those who are not as adept in Photoshop or in Lightroom. The results will not disappoint, nor will the ease of use.

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